CHAPTER 2

DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

Introduction

1. Define language and describe its role in the communication process.
2. Describe how language shapes our experience of reality.
3. Give examples of how language can be a barrier to communication.
4. Give examples of message types and the parts of a message.
5. Explain the differences between clichés, jargon, and slang.
6. Demonstrate professional communication related to gender and race.
7. List six strategies for improving verbal communication.

Raised in Ethiopia, Abe's first language is Arabic. Although she speaks English fluently, and completed her MBA in Canada, she still has some difficulty understanding jargon and slang. She wants to participate in more collegial conversation in her new role. As you read this chapter consider some of the ways that Abe's colleagues might support her to practise engaging, informal conversation.

> **Reminder from Chapter One – Communication is the process of understanding and sharing meaning** (Pearson & Nelson, 2000).

How do you communicate? How do you think? We use language as a system to create and exchange meaning with one another, and the types of words we use influence both our perceptions and others interpretations of our meanings. What kinds of words would you use to describe your thoughts and feelings, your preferences in music, cars, food, or other things that matter to you?

Watch the following 10 minute video featuring psychologist Steven Pinker describing the intricacies of language.
RSA Video: *Language as a Window Into Human Nature*
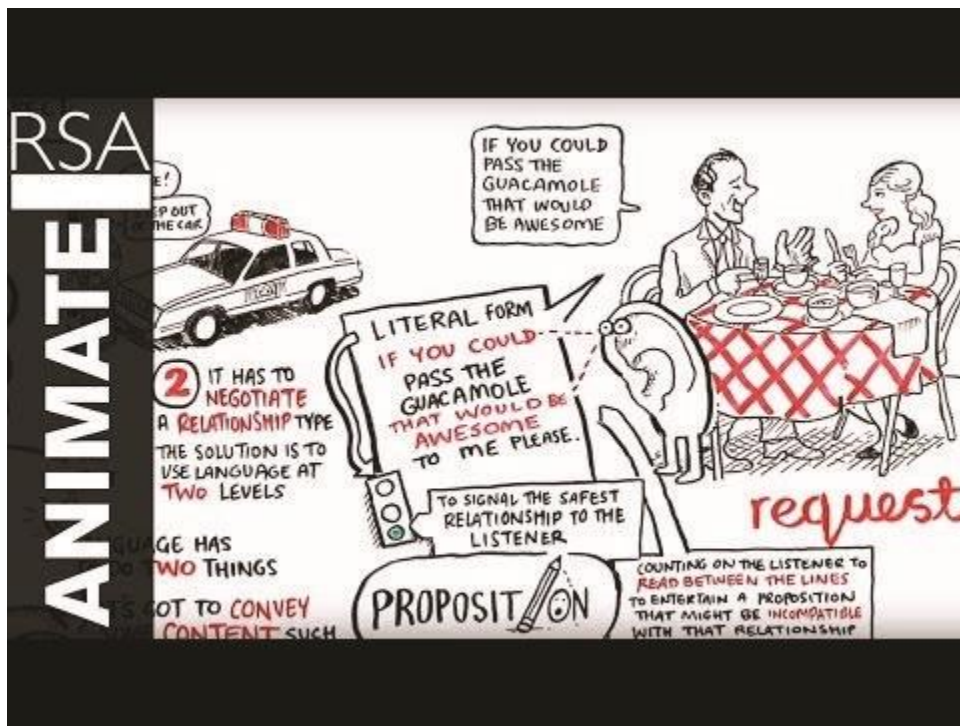
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In this chapter you will learn more about the importance of delivering your message in words. You will explore how the characteristics of language interact in ways that can both improve and diminish effective business communication. You will examine how language plays a significant role in how you perceive and interact with the world, and how culture, language, education, gender, race, and ethnicity all influence this dynamic process. You will look at ways to avoid miscommunication and focus on constructive ways to get your message delivered to your receiver with the meaning you intended.

- What Is Language?
- Messages
- Principles of Verbal Communication
- Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication
- Improving Verbal Communication

10. What is Language?

Language is a system of symbols, words, and/or gestures used to communicate meaning.

People are raised in different cultures, with different values, beliefs, customs, and different languages to express those cultural attributes. Even people who speak the same language, like speakers of English in London, New Delhi, or Calgary, speak and interact using their own words that are community-defined, self-defined, and have room for interpretation. This variation in our use of language is a creative way to form relationships and communities, but can also lead to miscommunication.

Words themselves, then, actually hold no meaning. It takes at least two people to use them, to give them life and purpose. Words change meaning over time. The dictionary entry for the meaning of a word changes because we change, and multiple meanings can lead to miscommunication.
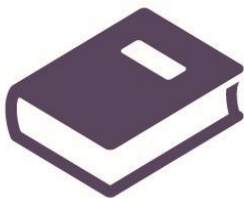
Read the following web page about 20 Words that Once Meant Something Very Different.

Languages are living exchange systems of meaning and are bound by context. If you are assigned to a team that coordinates with suppliers from Shanghai, China and a sales staff in London, Ontario you may encounter terms from both groups that influence your team.

Triangle of Meaning
The triangle of meaning is a model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and referent and highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and referent (Ogden & Richards, 1932). As represented in Figure 2.1 below, the **thought** is the concept or idea a person references. The **symbol** is the word that represents the thought, and the **referen**t is the object or idea to which the symbol refers. This model is useful for you as a communicator because when you are aware of the indirect relationship between symbols and referents, you are aware of how common misunderstandings occur, as the following example illustrates:

Example
Jasper and Abby have been thinking about getting a new dog. So each of them is having a similar thought. They are each using the same symbol, the word dog, to communicate about their thought. Their referents, however, are different. Jasper is thinking about a small dog like a dachshund, and Abby is thinking about an Australian shepherd. Since the word dog

doesn't refer to one specific object in our reality, it is possible for them to have the same thought, and use the same symbol, but end up in an awkward moment when they get to the shelter and fall in love with their respective referents only to find out the other person didn't have the same thing in mind. Abby could ask questions for clarification, like "Sounds like you're saying that a smaller dog might be better. Is that

What is Language?

right?" Getting to a place of shared understanding can be difficult, even when we define our symbols and describe our referents.
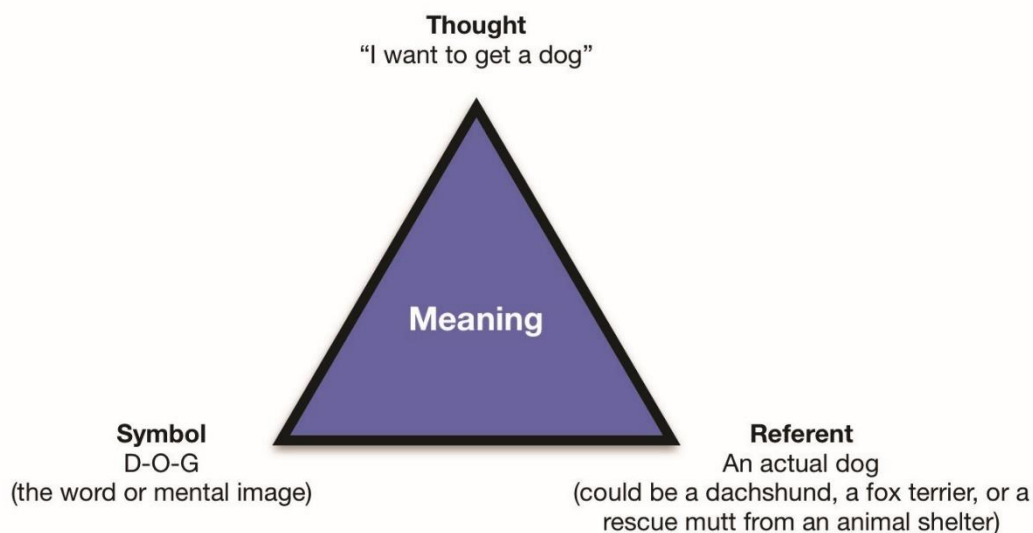

Figure 2.1. The triangle of meaning. This figure illustrates a symbol and referent in relation to a thought (Adapted from Ogden & Richards, 1932).

11. Messages

It will be helpful to stop for a moment and examine some characteristics of the messages you send when you communicate. Messages carry far more than the literal meaning of each word and in this section you are invited to explore that complexity.

Primary Message Is Not the Whole Message

When considering how to effectively use verbal communication, keep in mind there are three distinct types of messages you will be communicating: primary, secondary, and auxiliary (Hasling, 1998).

Primary Message – refers to the intentional content, both verbal and nonverbal.

Secondary Message – refers to the unintentional content, both verbal and nonverbal.

Auxiliary Message – refers to the intentional and unintentional ways a primary message is communicated. Includes: vocal inflection, gestures and posture, or rate of speech that influence the interpretation or perception of your message.

For example, a coworker stops by your desk to ask a question and…

- You say, "Have a seat". (Primary Message)
- A messy workspace makes an impression on your visitor that you are disorganized. (Secondary Message)
- You smile and wave your hand to indicate the empty chair on the other side of your desk to invite the person to sit. (Auxiliary Message)

Parts of a Message

When you create a message, it is often helpful to think of it as having five parts:

- Attention Statement – captures the attention of your audience.
- Introduction – a clear statement about your topic; this is also the time to establish a relationship with your audience.
- Body – present your message in detail, using any of a variety of organizational structures.
- Conclusion – provide the audience with a sense of closure by summarizing your main points and relating them to the overall topics.
- Residual Message – a message or thought that stays with your audience well after the communication is finished. This can be an important part of your message.

When planning communication, ask yourself of the following:

- **What do I want my listeners or readers to remember?**
- **What information do I want to have the audience retain or act upon?**
- **What do I want the audience to do?**

Watch the following 6-minute video: *How to Begin Your Presentation with Simon Sinek*

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To summarize, messages are primary, secondary, and auxiliary. A message can be divided into a five-part structure composed of an attention statement, introduction, body, conclusion, and residual

12. Principles of Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is based on several basic principles. In this section, you'll examine each principle and explore how it influences everyday communication. Whether it's a simple conversation with a coworker or a formal sales presentation to a board of directors, these principles apply to all contexts of communication.

Language Has Rules

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, **language is a system of symbols, words, and/or gestures used to communicate meaning.**

The words themselves have meaning within their specific context or language community. Words only carry meaning if you know the understood meaning and have a grasp of their context to interpret them correctly.

There are three types of rules that govern or control your use of words.

Syntactic Rules – govern the order of words in a sentence.
Semantic Rules – govern the meaning of words and how to interpret them (Martinich, 1996).
Contextual Rules – govern meaning and word choice according to context and social custom.
Consider the example of a traffic light as follows:

Semantics – Green means Go, and Red means Stop
Syntax – Green is on the bottom, yellow in the middle, and red on top.

Even when you follow these linguistic rules, miscommunication is possible. Your cultural context or community may hold different meanings for the words used – different from meanings that the source communicator intended. Words attempt to represent the ideas you want to communicate, but they are sometimes limited by factors beyond your control. Words often require you to negotiate meaning, or to explain what you mean in more than one way, in order to create a common vocabulary. You may need to state a word, define it, and provide an example in order to come to an understanding with your audience about the meaning of your message.

As discussed previously, words, by themselves, do not have any inherent meaning. Humans give meaning to them, and their meanings change across time. The arbitrary symbols, including letters, numbers, and punctuation marks, stand for concepts in your experience. You have to negotiate the meaning of the word "home," and define it, through visual images or dialogue, in order to communicate with your audience.

Words have two types of meanings: denotative and connotative.

**Denotative** – The common meaning, often found in the dictionary.

Connotative – Meaning that is not found in the dictionary but in the community of users itself. It can involve an emotional association with a word, positive or negative, and can be individual or collective, but is not universal.

With a common vocabulary in both denotative and connotative terms, effective communication becomes a more distinct possibility. But what if you have to transfer meaning from one vocabulary to another? That is essentially what you are doing when you translate a message. For example, HSBC Bank was forced to rebrand its entire global private banking operations after bringing a U.S. campaign overseas. In 2009, the worldwide bank spent millions of dollars to scrap its 5-year-old "Assume Nothing" campaign. Problems arose when the message was brought overseas, where it was translated in many countries as "Do Nothing." In the end, the bank spent $10 million to change its tagline to "The world's private bank," which has a much friendlier translation.

Read the following article for a few more examples of organizational messaging challenges: International Marketing Fails

Language is Abstract
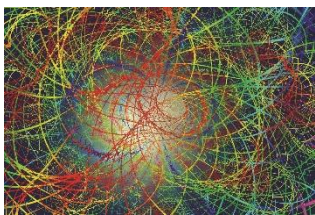
Words represent aspects of our human environment, and can play an important role in that environment. They may describe an important idea or concept, but the very act of labeling and invoking a word simplifies and distorts your concept of the thing itself. This ability to simplify concepts makes it easier to communicate, but it sometimes makes you lose track of the specific meaning you are trying to convey through abstraction.

The ladder of abstraction is a model used to illustrate how language can range from concrete to abstract. If you follow a concept up the ladder of abstraction, more and more of the "essence" of the original object is lost or left out, which leaves more room for interpretation, which can lead to misunderstanding. This process of abstracting, of leaving things out, allows you to communicate more effectively because it serves as a shorthand that keeps you from having a completely unmanageable language filled with millions of words—each referring to one specific thing (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). But it requires you to use context and often other words to generate shared meaning.

Some words are more directly related to a concept or idea than others. If you were asked to go and take a picture of a book, it might seem like a simple task. If you were asked to go and take a picture of "work," you'd be puzzled because work is an abstract word that was developed to refer to any number of possibilities from the act of writing a book, to repairing an air conditioner, to fertilizing an organic garden. You could take a picture of any of those things, but you would be challenged to take a picture of "work."

Consider the example of a cow.

If you were in a barn with this cow, you would actually be experiencing stimuli that would be coming in through your senses. You would hear the cow, likely smell the cow, and be able to touch the cow. You would perceive the actual 'thing,' which is the 'cow' in front of you. This would be considered concrete, it would be unmediated, meaning it was actually the moment of experience. As represented in Figure 2.2 below, the ladder of abstraction begins to move away from experience to

language and description.

Ladder of Abstraction

More Abstract

Wealth - symbol that refers to prosperity, fortune, and success in relation to material goods or other life conditions

Asset - symbol that recognizes the monetary value of a possession

Livestock - symbol that recognizes animals kept on farms or ranches

Cow - symbol that recognizes bovine creatures

Bessie - symbol assigned to a "thing" that allows us to communicate about it, even when it is not present

Direct experience with sensory information about a "thing" that we will later call "Bessie"
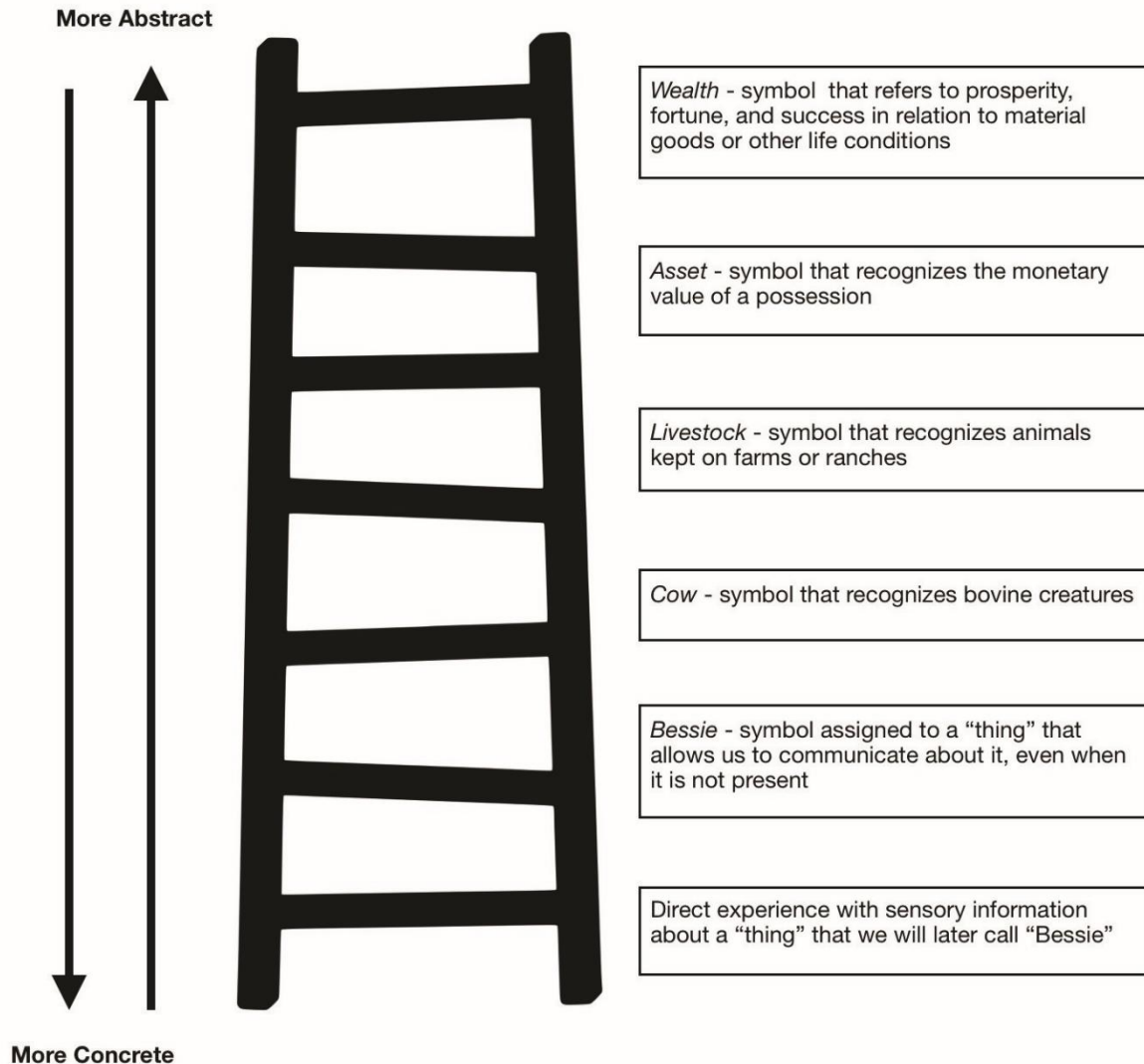
More Concrete

Figure 2.2. The Ladder of Abstraction. A ladder depicting increasing abstraction of observation and language (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990).

As you move up a level on the ladder of abstraction, you might give your experience a name — you are looking at 'Bessie.' So now, instead of the direct experience with the 'thing' in front of you, you have given the thing a name, which takes you one step away from the direct experience toward the use of a more abstract symbol. Now you can talk and think about Bessie even when you aren't directly experiencing her.

Principles of Verbal Communication

At the next level, the word cow now lumps Bessie in with other bovine creatures that share similar characteristics. As you go up the ladder, cow becomes livestock, livestock becomes an asset, and then an asset becomes wealth.

Note that it becomes increasingly difficult to define the meaning of the symbol as you go up the ladder and how with each step you lose more of the characteristics of the original concrete experience.

Language Organizes and Classifies Reality

Humans use language to create and express some sense of order in their world. You often group words that represent concepts by their physical proximity or their similarity to one another. For example, in biology, animals with similar traits are classified together. An ostrich may be said to be related to an emu and a nandu, but you wouldn't group an ostrich with an elephant or a salamander. Your ability to organize is useful, but artificial. The systems of organization you use are not part of the natural world but an expression of your views about the natural world.

What is a doctor? A nurse? A teacher? If a male came to mind in the case of the word 'doctor' and a female came to mind in reference to 'nurse' or 'teacher', then your habits of mind include a gender bias. In many cultures, there was a time where gender stereotypes were more than just a stereotypes, they were the general rule, the social custom, the norm. But now, in many places in the world, this is no longer true. More and more men are training to serve as nurses. In 2017, for example, data from the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) indicated that 41% of practising physicians in Canada were women (Canadian Medical Association, 2017).

You use systems of classification to help you navigate the world. Imagine how confusing life would be if you had no categories such as male/female, young/old, tall/short, doctor/nurse/teacher. While these categories are mentally useful, they can become problematic when you use them to uphold biases and ingrained assumptions that are no longer valid. You may assume, through your biases, that elements are related when they have no relationship at all. As a result, your thinking may become limited and your grasp of reality impaired. It is often easier to spot these biases in others, but it is important as an effective communicator to become aware of them in yourself. Holding biases unconsciously will limit your thinking, your grasp of reality, and your ability to communicate successfully.

13. Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication

In the past when you have used language to make sense of your experiences, and to take part in discussions, you no doubt came to see that language and verbal communication could work for you and sometimes against you. Language allowed you to communicate, but it also allowed you to miscommunicate and misunderstand.

In an article titled "The Miscommunication Gap," Susan Washburn lists several undesirable results of poor communication in business:

- Damaged relationships
- Loss of productivity

- Inefficiency and rework
- Conflict
- Missed opportunities
- Schedule slippage (delays, missed deadlines)
- Scope creep…or leap (gradual or sudden changes in an assignment that make it more complex and difficult than it was originally understood to be)
- Wasted resources
- Unclear or unmet requirements

Watch the following 4 minute video on miscommunication:

How miscommunication happens (and how to avoid it) – Katherine Hampsten

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In the following section you will explore how words can serve either as a bridge, or a barrier, to understanding and communication of meaning. Your goals of effective and efficient business communication mean an inherent value of words and terms that keeps the bridge clear and free of obstacles. Review the six barriers to communication in Figure 2.3 as follows:

Figure 2.3. Barriers to communication.

Cliché – cultural references that often make no sense in other cultures. For example, "A cliché is something to avoid like the plague, for it is nothing but a tired old war horse, and if the shoe were on the other foot you too would have an axe to grind."

Jargon – An occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Jargon does not necessarily imply formal education, but instead focuses on the language people in a profession use to communicate with each other.

Slang – The use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect. It differs from jargon in that it is used in informal contexts, among friends or members of a certain age group, rather than by professionals in a certain industry.

Euphemism – Involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning.

Doublespeak – The deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning.

Offensive Language – Some language is offensive and has no place in the workplace. It may even be a violation of company policy.

Each of these six barriers to communication contributes to misunderstanding and miscommunication, intentionally or unintentionally. If you recognize one of them, you can address it right away.

You can redirect a question and get to essential meaning, rather than leaving with a misunderstanding that might impact a business relationship. In business communication, your goal of clear and concise communication should remain constant. Never forget that trust is the foundation for effective communication.

Part of your effort must include reinforcing the relationship inherent between source and receiver. One effective step toward that goal is to reduce obstacles to effective communication. The more you can learn about your audience, the better you can tailor your chosen words. If you lack information or want your document to be understood by a variety of readers, it pays to use common words and avoid jargon. This is known as actively bridging communication to help ensure your audience clearly understands your intended message.

Read the following 5 minute article from the UK Telegraph titled:
Revealed: The 10 most scream-inducing business jargon phrases

Review the following 3 minute video on YouTube titled: *Office Jargon by Nina Millns*

Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication

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To summarize, in order to defuse common obstacles to communication, avoid clichés, jargon, slang, sexist and racist language, euphemisms, and doublespeak.

14. Improving Verbal Communication

In this chapter you have reviewed examples and stories that highlight the importance of verbal and written communication. To end the chapter, consider how language can be used to enlighten or deceive; encourage or discourage; empower or destroy. By defining the terms you use and choosing precise words, you will maximize your audience's understanding of your message. In addition, it is important to consider the audience, control your tone, check for understanding, and focus on results. Recognizing the power of verbal communication is the first step to understanding its role and impact on the communication process.

Define Your Terms	Be aware of any words you are using that may be unfamiliar to your audience. When you identify an unfamiliar word, your first decision is whether to use it or to substitute a more common, easily understood word.
Choose Precise Words	To increase understanding, choose precise words that provide the most accurate picture for your audience.
Consider Your Audience	Contextual clues are important to guide your audience as they read.
Control Tone	What kind of tone is best for your intended audience?
Check for Understanding	In oral communication, feedback is a core component of the communication model as we can often see it, hear it, and it takes less effort to assess it.
Be Results Oriented	It can be a challenge to balance the need for attention to detail with the need to arrive at the end product

Even when you are careful to craft your message clearly and concisely, not everyone will understand every word you say or write. As an effective business communicator, you know it is your responsibility to give your audience every advantage in understanding your meaning. Precise words, clear definitions, and contextual clues are important to guide your audience as they read. If you are speaking to a general audience and choose to use a word in professional jargon that may be understood by many—but not all—of the people in your audience, follow it by a common reference that clearly relates its essential meaning. With this positive strategy you will be able to forge relationships with audience members from diverse backgrounds.

Getting a handle on how to influence tone and to make your voice match your intentions takes time and skill. Make time for feedback and plan for it. Ask clarifying questions. Share your presentation with more than one person, and choose people that have similar characteristics to your anticipated audience. Lastly, finding balance while engaging in an activity that requires a high level of attention to detail can be challenge for any business communicator, but it is helpful to keep the end in mind. The following two examples will provide you with ideas for increasing the precision of communication.

Example 1

Original – Bob left work.

Revised – Bob left work to go home at 5 pm.

Example 2

Original – Colleen presented a proposal.

Revised – Colleen, the marketing manager, presented a proposal on the marketing budget for next year.

To summarize, in order to improve communication, define your terms, choose precise words, consider your, and aim for results.

15. Conclusion

Returning to Abe's desire to learn more about informal conversation with colleagues in a Canadian context, what have you learned about language and communication that might help you be a good support for Abe's learning?

Check Your Knowledge

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Conclusion

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Glossary

Auxiliary – Auxiliary messages refer to the intentional and unintentional ways a primary message is communicated. This may include vocal inflection, gestures and posture, or rate of speech that influences the interpretation or perception of your message.

Connotative – The connotative meaning is often not found in the dictionary but in the community of users itself.

Context – Contextual rules govern meaning and word choice according to context and social custom.

Denotative – The denotative meaning is the common meaning, often found in the dictionary.

Doublespeak – Doublespeak is the deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning. **Euphemism** – A euphemism involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning.

Jargon – Jargon is an occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession.

Language – A system of symbols, words, and/or gestures used to communicate meaning.

Offensive Language – Some language is offensive and has no place in the workplace.

Primary – Primary messages refer to the intentional content, both verbal and nonverbal. These are the words or ways you choose to express yourself and communicate your message.

Secondary – Primary messages refer to the intentional content, both verbal and nonverbal. These are the words or ways you choose to express yourself and communicate your message. **Semantics** – Semantic rules govern the meaning of words and how to interpret them (Martinich, 1996)

Slang – The use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect.

Syntax – Syntactic rules govern the order of words in a sentence.

Triangle of Meaning – A model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and

referent and highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and referent. Conclusion

Additional Resources

Toastmasters International – Public speaking tips: https://www.toastmasters.org/resources/public-speaking-tips

Harvard psychology professor Steven Pinker is one of today's most innovative authorities on language. Explore reviews of books about language Pinker has published. http://stevenpinker.com/taxonomy/term/4265

The "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the most famous speeches of all time. View it on video and read the text. http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm

Visit Goodreads and learn about one of the most widely used style manuals, The Chicago Manual of Style.

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/103362.The_Chicago_Manual_of_Style

Chapter References

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PART III CHAPTER 3: YOU AND YOUR AUDIENCE