

Communication Probe

Completeness means that you tell your reader what he or she wants to know about your service or product. It involves laying out the benefits of what you are selling; it means imagining every reader to have a "show me" attitude. Readers must be convinced; they have to be shown results from simple reading. Therefore writers must be thorough. Informative selling will give the buyer confidence and increase later satisfaction with the purchased product or service. Such completeness will also reduce the number of goods returned to the firm.

On writing a sales letter. (ND). *Royal Bank of Canada*, 43, 3.

CONCISENESS

Conciseness is saying what you have to say in the fewest possible words without sacrificing the other C qualities. A concise message is complete without being wordy.

Conciseness is a prerequisite to effective business communication. A concise message saves time and expense for both sender and receiver. Conciseness contributes to emphasis; by eliminating unnecessary words, you let important ideas stand out. When combined with a "you-view," concise messages are inherently more interesting to recipients. Finally, concise messages show respect for recipients by not cluttering their professional lives with unnecessary information.

To achieve conciseness, observe the following suggestions:

- Eliminate wordy expressions.
- Include only relevant material.
- Avoid unnecessary repetition.

Eliminate Wordy Expressions

The following are some concrete suggestions you can use to reduce wordiness in your communication.

1. Use single word substitutes instead of phrases whenever possible without changing meanings.

Use single words in place of phrases. Even Winston Churchill made extensive use of simple, one syllable words.

Wordy: At this time
Concise: Now

Wordy: Due to the fact that
Concise: Because

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Wordy: Have need for

Concise: Need

Wordy: In due course

Concise: Soon

2. Omit trite, unnecessary expressions.

Wordy: Please be advised that your admission statement was received.

Concise: Your admission statement has been received.

Wordy: Allow me to say how helpful your response was.

Concise: Your last response was helpful.

3. Replace wordy conventional statements with concise versions.

Wordy: Please find attached the list you requested.

Concise: The list you requested is attached.

Wordy: Such refreshing comments are few and far between.

Concise: Such refreshing comments are scarce.

4. Avoid overusing empty phrases.

Wordy: It was known by Mr. Smith that we must reduce inventory.

Concise: Mr. Smith knew we must reduce inventory.

Wordy: There are four rules that should be observed.

Concise: Four rules should be observed.

5. Omit "which" and "that" clauses whenever possible.

Wordy: She bought desks that are of the executive type.

Concise: She bought executive-type desks.

Wordy: The receipt that is enclosed documents your purchase.

Concise: The enclosed receipt documents your purchase.

Use your computer grammar check or let someone else check whether you have overused certain words; dullness may result from the same word or idea being repeated too often.

6. Eliminate unnecessary prepositional phrases.

Wordy: The issue of most relevance is teamwork.
Concise: The most relevant issue is teamwork.

Wordy: In most cases the date of the policy is indicated in the upper right corner.
Concise: The policy date is in the upper right corner.

7. Limit use of the passive voice.

Wordy: The total balance due will be found on page 2 of this report.
Concise: The balance due is on page 2 of this report.

Wordy: The reports are to be submitted by employees prior to 5:00, at which time they will be received by Mr. Jones.
Concise: Please submit your reports to Mr. Jones by 5:00.

In all attempts to reduce wordiness, you must be careful to not distort meaning. Conciseness reflects the thoughtful elimination of unnecessary words.

Include Only Relevant Material

The effective, concise message should omit not only unnecessarily wordy expressions but also irrelevant statements. To be sure you include only relevant facts, observe the following suggestions.

1. Stick to the purpose of the message.
2. Delete irrelevant words and rambling sentences.

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Wordiness has been the bane of writers—and speakers—since humans began to communicate. The word used to describe such circumlocution is *tautology*, or using two or more words to express a simple and single thought. Often we have implied that business communication can be dull: it tends to lack modifiers, it avoids excessive use of superfluous—or should—words. Yet, writers of reports or other forms of communication should follow the maxim, “once is often enough.”

Alexander, D. & Rivett, A. (1995, Spring). Once is often enough. *Journal of Management Consulting*, 8, 32.

3. Omit information obvious to the receiver; do not repeat at length what you already told you. If you feel it is important to remind the audience of known information, subordinate the familiar information.
4. Avoid long introductions, unnecessary explanations, excessive adjectives and pompous words, gushy politeness.
5. Get to the important point tactfully and concisely.

Wordy: We hereby wish to let you know that our company is pleased with the confidence you have reposed in us.

Concise: We appreciate your confidence.

Wordy: At this time I am writing to you to enclose an interview card, which has been post-paid, for the purpose of arranging a convenient time when we might get together for a personal interview.

Concise: Please return the enclosed interview card to set up a convenient time for an interview.

Avoid Unnecessary Repetition

Unnecessary repetition leads to dullness.

Sometimes repetition is necessary for emphasis. But when the same thing is said two or three times without reason, the message becomes wordy and boring.

Here are three ways to eliminate unnecessary repetition:

1. Use a shorter name after you have mentioned the long one once. Instead of the “North Central Company,” use “North Central.”
2. Use pronouns or initials rather than repeat long names. Instead of citing “American Association of Technical Analysts” again and again, use “it” or “they” or AATA. When using well-known initials or acronyms, give the full reference first with the initials in parentheses: The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is being debated in Congress.
3. Cut out all needless repetition of phrases and sentences. Sometimes it is possible to combine two or even more sentences by using subordinate clauses or phrases.

The following letter from a business executive to a firm the company had dealt with for 5 years shows unnecessary repetition at its worst.

Wordy: Will you ship us sometime, anytime during the month of October would be fine, even November if you are rushed (November would suit us just as well in fact a little bit better) 300 of the regular 3- by 15-inch blue felt armbands with white sewn lettering in the center.

■ Checklist 2.2 Conciseness

1. Use one word in place of phrases; one sentence in place of two. Read out loud to "listen" for wordiness.
2. Omit outdated trite expressions.
3. Ask yourself: What material is really relevant?
4. Look for unnecessary repetition: Does the same word or idea appear too often?

Thank you in advance for sending these along to us by parcel post and not express as express, is too expensive.

Concise: Please ship parcel post, before the end of November 300 regular 3-by 15-inch blue felt armbands with white sewn letters in the center.

CONSIDERATION

Consideration means preparing every message with the message receivers in mind; try to put yourself in their place: You are considerate, you do not lose your temper, you do not accuse, you do not charge them without facts. You are, foremost, aware of their desires, problems, circumstances, emotions, and probable reactions to your request. Then handle the matter from their point of view. This thoughtful consideration is also called "you-attitude," empathy, the human touch, and understanding of human nature.

In a broad but true sense, consideration underlies the other six C's of good business communication. You adapt your language and message content to your receiver's needs when you make your message complete. Three specific ways to indicate consideration are:

- Focus on "you" instead of "I" and "we."
- Show audience benefit or interest in the receiver.
- Emphasize positive, pleasant facts.

Focus on "You" Instead of "I" or "We"

Using "you" does help project a you-attitude. But overuse can lead to a negative reaction.

use a direct quotation in responding to the request of another individual. Creating a you-attitude may require avoiding telling others how they feel, assuming you know their needs.

To create considerate, audience-oriented messages, focus on how message receivers will benefit, what they will receive, and what they want or need to know. In some cases, this can be accomplished by emphasis; you might downplay your own feelings and emphasize a point, make an explicit reference, or

We-Attitude: I am delighted to announce that we will be extending our hours to make shopping more convenient.

You-Attitude: You will be able to shop evenings with the extended hours.

We-Attitude: We're sure you must be frustrated by the length of time it has taken to ship your order for Polish gargoyles.

You-Attitude: The Polish gargoyles you ordered will reach you within a week.

Showing consideration for the audience involves more than just using "you" instead of "I" or "we." Messages that use "we" can be receiver-oriented if "we" includes the recipient of the message. Messages that use "you" can be insensitive in negative situations. In fact, sometimes avoiding "you" can reduce potential defensiveness or allow the recipient to save face. An extreme example of a negative situation is the collection letter with "you" or "your" in almost every sentence; if those sentences are insulting, sarcastic, tactless, or untrue accusations and threats against the debtor, the letter surely lacks a you-attitude. The use of "you" in negative situations can be avoided by employing the passive voice, making the receiver part of a group, or depersonalizing the situation.

Insensitive: You failed to enclose your check in the envelope.

Considerate: The check was not enclosed. [passive voice]

Considerate: The envelope we received did not have a check in it. [depersonalized]

Insensitive: Your contract tells you plainly that...

Considerate: I'm always happy to discuss the contract terms with new employees.

[receiver as part of group]

Insensitive: You are completely off base in your proposal.

Considerate: We have differing interpretations of the utility of the proposal.

[sender-oriented with acceptance of responsibility]

Considerate: The proposed plan has three aspects that need clarification.

[depersonalized]

Show Audience Benefit or Interest in the Receiver

Readers may react positively when benefits are shown them.

Whenever possible and true, show how your receivers will benefit from whatever the message asks or announces. Benefits must meet recipients' needs, address their concerns, or offer them rewards. Most important, they must be perceived as benefits by the receivers. This means that you must identify the legitimate benefits of your position, policy, or product and then put yourself in the place of the receivers to assess their perspectives.

Receivers will be more likely to react favorably and do what you suggest if you show that benefits are worth the effort and cost you ask of them. In situations where actual direct benefit is impossible or irrelevant to the subject matter, the message should at least show interest in and concern for the recipients needs or viewpoints.

Merely inserting the word "you" does not ensure you-attitude, as shown in this sentence: "You will be glad to know that we now have a walk-up window open 7-9 A.M. and 3-8 P.M. every weekday." Some readers wonder, "So what?" The following revised sentence includes reader benefit: "You can now take care of your banking needs at our new Walk-Up Window. It is open with a capable teller to serve you 7-9 A.M. and 3-8 P.M. Monday through Friday."

Reader-benefit appeals help collect payments on bills, soften the blow in a turndown, and sell products. Such appeals are desirable also in job applications, favor requests, and announcements to your customers, prospective buyers, stockholders, and employees. Whether you are writing to one person or to large numbers, try to personalize the reader benefits instead of stating them in a general way. Benefits that are realistic, inherent, and tailored to individuals help communicators achieve goals in effective, ethical ways.

Emphasize Positive, Pleasant Facts

A third way to show consideration for your receivers is to accent the positive. This means stressing what can be done instead of what cannot be done, and focusing on words your recipient can consider favorably.

Negative—Unpleasant

It is impossible to open an account for you today.

We don't refund if the returned item is soiled and unsalable.

When you travel on company expense, you will not receive approval for first-class fare.

Because of past connections with words, readers will react positively or negatively to certain words.

in the following opening of a letter the negative words (underlined) focus on ideas you'd rather not have the reader think about.

Positive—Pleasant

As soon as your signature card reaches us, we will gladly open an ... We refund when the returned item is clean and resalable.

When you travel on company expense, your approved fare is for tourist class.

Among the *positive* words to which people react *favorably* are *benefit, cordial, happy, help, generous, loyal, pleasure, thanks, thoughtful*. Words with *negative* connotations that often arouse *unfavorable* reactions include *blame, complaint, failed, fault, negligence, regret, reject, trouble, unfair*, and many others. For example,

Checklist 2.3 Consideration

1. See your material from your reader's point of view.
2. "You" is more desirable than "I" or "we" in most instances.
3. Readers like to see benefits. Be sure benefits are a prominent part of the message.
4. Consciously use positive words; readers will react more favorably.

We regret that since you closed your account your name will be missing from our long list of satisfied customers. We sincerely hope that despite the best efforts of our fine staff there were no occasions on which you felt we failed to serve you properly.

As a final note, true consideration is a result of integrity and ethics in communication. Because the topic of ethics and communication is so important, we treat it in a separate chapter.

CONCRETENESS

Misunderstandings of words have produced tragedies in both war and peace, in business and nonbusiness situations.

Communicating *concretely* means being specific, definite, and vivid rather than vague and general. Often it means using denotative (direct, explicit, often dictionary-based) rather than connotative words (ideas or notions suggested by or associated with a word or phrase). Thus the term *female* may appear in a personnel folder as a part of a job description, yet widely different connotations may occur when using terms as *wife, mother, spinster, widow, maiden, matron, or dowager*. Each of these latter terms also refers to *female* but with wide-ranging associations.

Communication Probe

Some letter writers are completely absorbed in the things about which they are writing, about quantities and qualities, about dollars and delivery. To become intelligible and effective, they need to enrich their thoughts by spreading them out to include people. At the core of good writing is audience analysis, audience adaptation.

Some persons will say that business is objective, mechanical, dealing with commodities and services rather than with people. How absurd it is to say so when every businessperson knows that every sale, every purchase, every contact, every financial deal, depends upon the word "yes" or "no" from some human being.

On Writing Clearly. (ND). *Royal Bank of Canada Letter*, 38, 7.

The benefits to business professionals of using concrete facts and figures are obvious: your receivers know exactly what is required or desired. Using concrete language has some additional, less obvious advantages. When you supply specifics for the reader or listener, you increase the likelihood that your message will be interpreted the way you intended. Moreover, concrete messages are more richly textured than general or vague messages; thus, they tend to be more vivid, dynamic, and interesting. The following guidelines should help you compose concrete, convincing messages.

- Use specific facts and figures.
- Put action in your verbs.
- Choose vivid, image-building words.

Use Specific Facts and Figures

It is desirable to be precise and oral business communication.

Whenever possible, use an exact, precise statement or a figure in place of a general word to make your message more concrete.

Vague, General, Indefinite
Student GMAT scores are higher.

Eastern Europe is making progress in obtaining investments.

She's a brain.

Concrete, Precise
In 1996 the GMAT scores averaged 600; by 1997 they had risen to 610.

In 1990 investments in Eastern Europe were about US \$30 million today that figure has increased by 12%.

Her grade-point average in 1996 was 3.9 on a four-point scale.

Note in the above examples that some of the vague words are opinion words. What is *higher*? What do we mean by *progress*? What does being a *brain* mean? For example, the following words can also lead to uncertainty, confusion:

slightly	small	soon	early	high	about
most	a few	slow	very	almost	several

Of course it is permissible—even desirable—to use general expressions. But note some exceptions to the “facts and figures” rule:

1. When it is not possible to be specific: “You may not have the precise figures or facts.”
2. When you wish to be diplomatic (considerate): “You have missed three invitations to my office” is harsh; you may be more tactful by saying I’ve sent you several reminders to see me in my office.”
3. When exact figures are unimportant, as in “more than half the committee was present.”

Put Action in Your Verbs

Verbs can activate other words and help make your sentences alive, more vigorous. That is, to have dynamic sentences (1) use active rather than passive verbs and (2) put action in your verbs rather than in nouns and infinitives.

Use the Active Voice

When the subject performs the action described by the verb, the verb is said to be in the active voice. Usually the active voice puts the verb up front. “The financial officer *reported* to the Board.” Here the subject (the financial officer) reported; the verb “reported” is active, is up front in the sentence.

Conversely, when the subject receives the action of the verb, the verb is in the passive voice: (“The report by the financial officer was heard by the Board.”) A passive verb has three characteristics:

- The subject does not do the acting in a sentence.
- The verb consists of two or more words, one of which is in some form of “to be” (is, is being, am, are, was, were, will be, has, or have been, had been, or will have been).
- The word “by” is expressed or implied (by whom or what).

Passive (Subject Receives the Action)

The tests were administered by the professors.

Grades of students will be sent to you by the school.

Active (Subject Performs the Action)

Professors administered the tests.

The school will send students their grades

When the subject acts there is more life, vividness.

Active verbs help make your sentences more
1. *Specific.* “The dean decided” is more explicit than “A decision has been made.”

2. *Personal.* “You will note” is both personal and specific; “It will be noted” is impersonal.
3. *Couise.* The passive requires more words and thus slows both writing and reading. Compare “Figures show” with “It is shown by figures.”
4. *Emphatic.* Passive verbs dull action. Compare “The students held a contest” with “A contest was held by the students.”

Sometimes, however, you may prefer the passive voice instead of the active as in the following situations:

1. *When you want to avoid personal, blunt accusations or comments.* “The October check was not included” is more tactful than “You failed to include...” “Attendance at the meeting is required” is less harsh than “You must attend...”

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2. When you want to stress the object of the action. In "Your savings account is insured up to \$100,000," you have intentionally stressed "your account"—not the firm that does the insuring. Also, "You are invited" is better than "We invite you."
3. When the doer isn't important in the sentence. In "Three announcements were made before the meeting started," the emphasis is on the announcements, not on who gave them.

Put Action in Verbs, Not in Nouns

Verbs propel thought; they move ideas in place of slower-moving nouns.

underlined) can be changed to an action verb that shortens the sentence.

Seven verbs—*be, give, have, hold, make, put, and take*—(in any tense) might be designated as "deadly" when the action they introduce is hidden in a "quiet noun." The examples below show how each deadly verb with the noun and preposition (all

Action Hiding in a "Quiet" Noun

The function of this office is the collection of payments and the compilation of statements.

Professor H. will give consideration to the report.

The proposal has a requirement for....

Students held the meeting in the office.

Action in the Verb

This office collects payments and compiles statements.

Professor H. will consider the report.

The proposal requires that....

Students met in the office.

Put Action in Verbs, Not in Infinitives

Action Hiding in Infinitive

The duty of a secretary is to check all incoming mail and to record it. In addition it is his or her responsibility to keep the assignment book up to date.

Action in the Verb

A secretary checks and records all incoming mail mail and keeps the assignment book up to date.

Choose Vivid, Image-Building Words

Business writing uses less figurative language than does the world of fiction.

and adverbs. But use these devices with caution: business writing uses fewer descriptors than does a magazine article or fictional writing.

Among the devices you can use to make your messages forceful, vivid, and specific are sensory appeals, comparisons, figurative language, concrete nouns, and well-chosen adjectives

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PART ONE BACKGROUND
Communication Probe
In the ancient world, rhetoricians in language was a significant part of their craft. Those who argued in the public square were core to effective communication. Such heavy con-

Checklist 2.4 Concreteness

1. Were you precise in using facts and figures wherever possible?
2. Did you use the active voice more than the passive?
3. Is there action in verbs rather than in nouns or infinitives?
4. Did you try to occasionally use vivid, image-building words? But in business writing, use them sparingly.

Sensory Appeal

Concrete language often evokes a sensory response in people; it appeals to one or more of the five senses. Such language tends to be more descriptive than conventional business language. For example, instead of saying "It was hot in the factory," you might appeal to both sight and touch by saying "Sweat trickled down the arms of the line workers"; or "The secretary's face was wrinkled after squinting into the computer the entire day." Although sensory appeals are used primarily in marketing products, they also have a limited place in providing color and specificity in other forms of business communication.

Comparisons

Analogy (either figurative or literal) or comparisons can make an unclear idea clear or make an idea more vivid. Compare the bland images in the left column with those in the right column:

Bland Image

Proposals submitted this quarter were uninteresting.

This is a long letter.

More Vivid Image

Too many simple sentences, too many simplistic ideas gave the impression of the writing of a first-year student.

This letter is three times as long as you said it would be.

Figurative Language

Use figures of speech with caution. When used sparingly they do make an idea more vivid. Consider the following three examples:

Literal (and Dull)

Her work in groups was exemplary.

Some women were stopped in their promotions.

More Vivid, Figurative

She could be called "the spark plug of the group."

Many women faced the "glass ceiling" in their company.

2. When you want to stress the object of the action. In "Your savings account is insured up to \$100,000," you have intentionally stressed "your account"—not the firm that does the insuring. Also, "You are invited" is better than "We invite you."
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Communication Probe

In the ancient world, rhetoricians (teachers of oral communication) suggested that orateness in language was a significant part of communication. Indeed, there were communication practitioners and theorists who argued that orateness in words and their use within a sentence were core to effective communication.

Such heavy emphasis on ornate communication slowly disappeared in communication texts in the Renaissance and later. Organization of ideas, support for those ideas replaced the micro divisions and subdivisions of how to be more ornate in communication. Today orateness in communication is more characteristic of honorary degree citations or keynote speeches at political conventions. Metaphors (implied comparisons between two things) are modern day uses of figures of speech thoroughly discussed in ancient communication texts. Business communication today uses few forms of orateness.

Hildebrandt, H. W. (1988). Some influences of Greek and Roman rhetoric on early letter writing. *The Journal of Business Communication*, 25(3), 7–26.

Literal (and Dull)

Our budget analysis will begin soon.

More Vivid, Figurative

This is the first shot across your bow as we begin to review your budget for next year.

CLARITY

Getting the meaning from your head into the head of your reader—*accurately*—is the purpose of clarity. Of course, you know this is not simple. We all carry around our own unique interpretations, ideas, experiences associated with words.

- Choose precise, concrete and familiar words.
- Construct effective sentences and paragraphs.

Choose Precise, Concrete, and Familiar Words

Clarity is achieved in part through a balance between precise language and familiar language. When you use precise or concrete language, you select exactly the right word to convey your meaning. Precise words need not be pretentious. When you use familiar language, you select a word that is part of your personal repertoire, familiar to the audience, and appropriate for the situation. Familiar words, as between two good friends, for example, are often conversational, and occasionally may be part of a speech or written communication.

When you have a choice between a long word and a short one, use the short, familiar word that your reader or listener will quickly understand. Also, use synonyms instead of Latin terms (L) if they, though short, may be unfamiliar to your audience.

When in doubt, use more familiar words; audiences will understand them better.

Familiar
about
after
home
for example
pay
invoice

Pretentious
circa (L)
subsequent
domicile
e.g. (L)
remuneration
statement for payment

Notice how the following statement with unfamiliar words is expressed clearly in the revision using familiar words.

Unfamiliar: After our perusal of pertinent data, the conclusion is that a lucrative market exists for the subject property.

Familiar: The data we studied show that your property is profitable and in high demand.

Although it is appropriate to use technical terms and business jargon in some professional situations, avoid it when you communicate with a person who is not acquainted with the terminology. If you must use such terms, define them briefly and clearly. If you don't, you'll confuse, embarrass, or irritate the reader. You may even be forced to explain later, as in the following classic story:

A plumber wrote the National Bureau of Standards to tell them hydrochloric acid is good for cleaning out clogged drains. (Before you go any further into the story, visualize the plumber. Assume you don't know him and have never exchanged correspondence. It is a pretty good guess he isn't a college graduate—maybe he didn't finish high school. But he probably is a good plumber—at least conscientious—because he's writing to the bureau to tell them something he thinks will help other people.)

In reply to the plumber's message, a technical specialist of the bureau wrote:

The efficacy of hydrochloric acid is indisputable, but the corrosive residue is incompatible with metallic permanence.

The plumber then wrote to thank the bureau for agreeing with him—when, of course, the bureau was actually disagreeing with him. Sensing the plumber didn't understand, another member tried to set the man straight by writing:

We cannot assume responsibility for the production of toxic and noxious residue with hydrochloric acid and suggest you use an alternative procedure.

Again the plumber thanked the bureau. Then, in desperation, the department manager wrote:

Don't use hydrochloric acid. It eats hell out of the pipes.

As we have said and will say throughout the book, understanding the audience helps writers choose familiar words: those known by the speaker and the listener. Here are just a few examples.

Possibly Unfamiliar

assessed valuation
charge to your principal
easement for ingress and egress
buyouts
scribbler's compacts

Familiar to the Layperson

property value for tax purposes
increase the balance of your loan
allows passage in and out
purchased by another company
letters passed along to which readers
added comments

With the increased use of E-mail there is the tendency to be concise. The danger is that you must know the meaning of the E-mail acronyms which aid conciseness. For instance how many of the following abbreviations do you know? IMO, FAQ, LOL, MOTOS. Respectively: in my opinion, frequently asked question, laughing out loud, member of the opposite sex.

Construct Effective Sentences and Paragraphs

At the core of clarity is the sentence. This grammatical statement, when clearly expressed, moves thoughts within a paragraph. Important characteristics to consider are length, unity, coherence, and emphasis.

Length

Try for an average sentence length of between 17 and 20 words.

Generally, short sentences are preferred. The suggested average sentence length should be about 17 to 20 words. Because variety in sentence length adds interest to writing, adopt a range of from 5 to 30 or more words. But when a sentence exceeds 40 words, try to rewrite it into more than one sentence. Also, if all sentences are short (under 10 words), the result is primerlike language—choppy and overly simple.

Unity

In a sentence—whether simple, compound, or complex—unity means that you have one main idea, and any other ideas in the sentence must be closely related to it. "I like Jim, and the Eiffel Tower is in Paris" obviously is not a unified sentence.

Coherence

In a coherent sentence the words are correctly arranged so that the ideas clearly express the intended meaning. Place the correct modifier as close as possible to the word it is supposed to modify. In the following examples notice why each "unclear" sentence conveys a wrong meaning, and how it is corrected in the "clear" sentence.

Communication Probe

A former assistant managing editor of the *New York Times*, Theodore Bernstein, summarized a series of studies in his classic book—*Watch Your Language*—concerned with one question: Why were some newspaper writers considered more understandable than their colleagues? On review of the newspaper stories, one fact stood out: The more understandable writer used more short sentences. One study compared a journal article with few sentences with the same story with many sentences.

Longer Sentence Version	Shorter Sentence Version
Number of words	271
Total sentences	5
Average words per sentence	54
	265
	21
	12

After two groups of students took comprehension tests on what they had read, the shorter sentence version resulted in a comprehension level of 64 percent as against 9 percent in the longer sentence version.

Bernstein, T. (1958). *Watch your language* (p. 112). New York: Channel Press.

Unclear: Being an excellent lawyer, I am sure you can help us.

Clear: Being an excellent lawyer, you can surely help us.

Clear: As you are an excellent lawyer, I am sure you . . .

Unclear: His report was about managers, broken down by age and gender.

Clear: His report focused on age and gender of managers.

Clear: His report about managers focused on . . .

Unclear: After planting 10,000 berry plants, the deer came into our botanist's farm and crushed them.

Clear: After our botanist had planted 10,000 berry plants the deer came into his farm and crushed them.

Emphasis

Most often, put main ideas up front within a sentence.

The quality that gives force to important parts of sentences and paragraphs is emphasis. Writers must decide what needs emphasis, and then choose correct sentence structure. In a complex sentence the main idea should be placed in the main clause; the less important points are in subordinate (dependent) clauses or phrases.

Checklist 2.5 Clarity

1. Choose as precise or as concrete a word as possible.
2. Select words that have a high sense of appropriateness for the reader.
3. Opt for the familiar word, the one that is not pretentious.
4. Limit average sentence length to 17 to 20 words.
5. Insert no more than one main idea into a sentence.
6. Arrange words so that the main idea occurs early in a sentence.

For instance, in the first sentence below, the two ideas appear to be of equal value. In contrast, if the important idea is that the "airplane was difficult to control," the second sentence would be more meaningful and emphatic; its main idea is in the main clause.

Little emphasis: The airplane finally approached the speed of sound, and it became very difficult to control.

Better emphasis: As it finally approached the speed of sound, the airplane became very difficult to control.

Little emphasis: Candidates should be motivated and have interest in static and dynamic testing of material and have those prerequisites and others.

Better emphasis: Prerequisites in candidates should include expertise in static and dynamic testing of material.

In addition to using the above methods for emphasis, the PCs of today—and related software—allow innumerable ways to visually add emphasis to words. Though it is impossible to list all of them, some visual procedures include: headings, tabulations, itemizations, graphs, line charts, pie charts, underlinings, italics, indentations, colored capitals or italics, or even wide or short margins. The visual innovations are endless.

COURTESY

Knowing your audience allows you to use statements of courtesy; be aware of your message receiver.

True *courtesy* involves being aware not only of the perspective of others, but also their feelings. Courtesy stems from a sincere you-attitude. It is not merely politeness with mechanical insertions of "please" and "thank you," although applying socially accepted manners is a form of courtesy. Rather, it is politeness that grows out of respect and concern for others.

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In addition to following the guidelines discussed under "Consideration," courteous communicators generate a special tone in their writing and speaking. The following are suggestions for generating a courteous tone:

- Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful, and appreciative.
- Use expressions that show respect.
- Choose nondiscriminatory expressions.

Be Sincerely Tactful, Thoughtful, and Appreciative

Tact

Though few people are intentionally abrupt or blunt, these negative traits are a common cause of courtesy. Sometimes they stem from a mistaken idea of conciseness, sometimes from negative personal attitudes, sometimes from not knowing the culture of a country or even groups of people. Avoid expressions like those in the left-hand column below; rephrase them as shown in the right-hand column.

Tactless, Blunt

Stupid letter; I can't understand any of it.

Clearly, you did not read my latest fax.

I rewrote that letter three times; the point was clear.

More Tactful

It's my understanding

Sometimes my wording is not precise; let me try again.

I'm sorry the point was not clear; here is another version.

E-mail messages are short and often informal.

Writing a letter to a customer outside the company requires more "niceties" than writing an E-mail within your company. A one-sentence internal E-mail to a colleague could be this short:

Phil, give me a call at #41279 and give me the number of the report you're sending along to the VP.

A fax or letter to a foreign company would not be as short, or blunt; instead, add a few more tactful words:

It was kind of you to write and extend holiday greetings. Here in the States the Christmas season is a high point of the year. Thank you for your regards.

Because our company receives many reports from China and your company, we need the number of the report you sent us in October. We need this in order that our electronic files can easily find it in the system. We then wish to send the report along to our Vice President of Marketing.

Thoughtfulness and Appreciation

Writers who send cordial, courteous messages of deserved congratulations and appreciation (to persons both inside and outside the firm) help build goodwill. The value of goodwill or public esteem for the firm may be worth thousands (or millions) of dollars. Be especially thoughtful and courteous when communicating with Asian cultures: they like the soft, more polite approach in both oral and written communication.

Use Expressions That Show Respect

No reader wants to receive messages that offend. Such expressions are discussed in two groups: irritating expressions and questionable humor.

Omit Irritating Expressions

Following is a consensus list; that is, it includes a list of expressions many people find irritating. Avoid these expressions, particularly used with "you" or "your":

contrary to your inference	you are delinquent
delinquency (delinquent)	you are probably ignorant of
I do not agree with you	the fact that
if you care	you claim that
I'm sure you must realize	you did not tell us
inexcusable	you failed to
irresponsible	you forgot to
obnoxious	you have to
obviously you overlooked	you leave us no choice
owing to your questionable	you neglected to (overlooked)
credit we are unable to	you say
simply nonsense	you should know
surely you don't expect	you surely don't expect
we are amazed you can't	your apparent disregard of our
we don't believe	previous request leaves us
we expect you to	no alternative
we find it difficult to believe	your complaint
that	your failure to
we must insist	your insinuation
we take issue	your neglect
why have you ignored	your stubborn silence

Omit Questionable Humor

When In doubt as to the relevance of humor, leave it out.

Laughter to one person is disgust for another; each of us has a different sense of humor. A flippant attitude can be in poor taste, as seen in the following note. When in doubt be more formal. The second note is also informal, but courteous.

NOTE 1 Offensive

Hey man, what's this I hear about the good news? You sure pulled a fast one this past weekend—and then didn't tell any of us about it.

Give my regards to the little lady. And wish her the best; she'll need it.

NOTE 2 More courteous

Warm congratulations on your wedding!

Well, you certainly took us by surprise. In fact, just a few of us even suspected you were taking off to get married. But even though we didn't hear about it until later, we—my wife and I—wish you the best.

Give our warm regards to your new partner.

Choose Nondiscriminatory Expressions

Another requirement for courtesy is the use of nondiscriminatory language that reflects equal treatment of people regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, and physical features. The suggestions selected here can be particularly useful for your written and oral business communication.

Sexist Terms: "Man" Words

In western culture there is more concern than in other cultures about using the term man as part of a compound noun.

For a long period of time *man* was accepted to denote not only a male person but, generically humanity at large. Today many people in the United States connect *man* with a "male human being." Thus the English language—more so than other languages—uses alternative expressions for *man* that are neuter in form. Some examples are:

Questionable

freshman
manpower
man-made
the best man for the position

More Desirable

entering students; first-year students
workers; employees; work force; personnel
manufactured; constructed; built
the best person; the best
candidate for the position

Singular Pronouns

English lacks a neuter singular pronoun signifying "he" or "she." Previously we accepted—and some persons still do—masculine pronouns in expressions as "anyone . . . he" or "each customer . . . his bill." The trend today is to avoid using *he*, *him*, and *his* when referring to the hypothetical person or humanity in general.

BACKGRO
nable
e who comes to class
will get his grade
judged.
Each customer will have
the new changes noted on
his bill.
Our co

Undesirable
 one who comes to class
 will get his grade
 reduced.

Each customer will have
 the new changes noted on
 his bill.

"Our criteria are firm:
 he is to be a scholar;
 he is to be a good
 teacher."

"You guys should all be
 concerned about the
 issue."

The executives may
 benefit from the stock
 options. He will . . .

Each manager has an
 assigned parking place.
 He should park his car

**Recognize that the emphasis
 on gender neutrality is more
 common in the United States
 than in other countries.**

Names

When using names, treat each gender with respect: use names in parallel form.

Undesirable

Ted April and Ruth
 Mrs. April and Ted

More Desirable

Ted and Ruth April
 Ms. April [she desires this] and Mr. April

More Desirable
 Students who come late to
 class will have their
 grade reduced.

[Reworded to omit unnecessary pronouns.]
 Customers will have the
 new changes noted on
 their bills.

[Reworded into the plural.]
 Our criteria suggest he
 or she is to be a good
 scholar and a good
 teacher.

[Reworded to include both genders.]
 Both men and women, all
 of you should be con-
 cerned about the issue.

[Reworded to include both genders.]
 The executives may bene-
 fit from the stock
 options. Each executive
 may . . .

[Reworded to repeat the noun or a
 similar noun if a few words intervene.]
 Every manager has been
 assigned a parking place.
 Each car should be parked
 in . . .

[Reworded into the passive.]

In sum, use good judgment. Some companies use the masculine quite freely; know the culture of the company before making a final decision when writing.

■ Checklist 2.6 Courtesy

1. Ask yourself: Does the communication have a sincere you-attitude?
2. Have someone else look at your statement if you have doubts about whether it is tactful. Another opinion may cause you to reconsider making a statement.
3. Be cautious in using humor in communication. Here too it pays to have someone else review your words.
4. Be careful in using discriminatory language; this means being aware of gender, race, age, color, creed, sexual preferences, or ethnic origins.

CORRECTNESS

At the core of *correctness* is proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Major principles relating to each of these qualities are in Appendix A.

However, a message may be perfect grammatically and mechanically but still insult or lose a customer. The term *correctness*, as applied to business messages, also means the following three characteristics:

- Use the right level of language.
- Check accuracy of figures, facts, and words.
- Maintain acceptable writing mechanics.

Use the Right Level of Language

We suggest that there are three levels of language: formal, informal, and substandard. Take a quick guess: What kind of writing is associated with each level? What is the style of each?

Formal writing is often associated with scholarly writing: doctoral dissertations, scholarly articles, legal documents, top-level government agreements, and other materials where formality in style is demanded. The style is unconversational, usually impersonal, and often contains long and involved sentences.

- *Informal* writing is more characteristic of business writing. Here you use words that are short, well-known, and conversational, as in this comparison list:

**Informal writing is more
 characteristic of business
 writing—even more so if that
 writing occurs in an E-mail
 message.**

More Formal	Less Formal
participate	join
procure	get
endeavor	try
ascertain	find out
deem	think (believe)
edifice	building
utilize	use
interrogate	question

In the following poem, Enid C. Stickel offers a humorous example of how people try to formalize their language.

Readability Gap

Colleges aren't schools,
They are learning institutions;
Problems don't have answers,
They have viable solutions.
People don't spend money,
They re-allocate resources.
Newsmen don't use tipsters,
They rely on informed sources.

Speakers don't make speeches,
They give oral presentations.
Bosses don't set quotas,
They just indicate objectives.
Workers don't take orders,
Though they implement directives.

Machinery can't break down, But
components can malfunction. A
court does not command It just
issues an injunction. Programs
don't have failures, They have
qualified successes. And jargon
doesn't hurt you—It just con-
stantly distresses!

Avoid *substandard* language. Using incorrect words, incorrect grammar, faulty pronunciation all suggest an inability to use good English. Some examples follow:

Substandard

ain't
can't hardly
aim at proving
desirous to
irregardless
stoled
brung
should of

More Acceptable

isn't, aren't
can hardly
aim to prove
desirous of
regardless
stolen
brought
should have

Check Accuracy of Figures, Facts, and Words

It is impossible to convey meaning precisely, through words, from the head of the sender to a receiver. Our goal is to be as precise as possible, which means checking and double-checking to ensure that the figures, facts, and words you use are correct.

A good check of your data is to have another person read and comment on the validity of the material.

Figures and Facts

- Verify your statistical data.
- Double-check your totals.

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- Avoid guessing at laws that have an impact on you, the sender, and your message receiver.
- Have someone else read your message if the topic involves data.
- Determine whether a "fact" has changed over time.

In other words, there are accepted measures for statistical analysis just as there are rules for good grammar. At the bottom of all our suggestions, however, is this prescription: Be alert to accuracy because of changing rates, regulations, laws, and conditions locally and even internationally.

Words That Confuse

Our English language is constantly changing. In fact, even dictionaries cannot keep up with the rapid change in our language. But the dictionary is still a major source for locating correct words and their intended meanings. The following list includes only a sample of the many words often confused in usage:

a, an

Use *a* before consonants and consonant sounds or a long "u" sound. Use *an* before vowels or a silent "h."

accept, except

Accept is a verb and means to receive. *Except* is a verb or a preposition and relates to omitting or leaving out.

anxious, eager

Anxious implies worry; *eager* conveys keen desire.

between, among

Between involves two people or two groups; *among*, three or more.

biannually, biennially

Biannually means "two times a year" or "every 2 years"; *biennially*, "every 2 years."

continual, continuous

Continual means "recurring regularly" (like lapping ocean waves). *Continuous* means "without stopping."

counsel, council

Counsel means (as a verb) "to advise" and (as a noun) "lawyer," "advice." *Council* (noun) is an advisory or governing group.

effect, affect

In business usage only, *effect* is a noun; it means "result," "condition," or "influence." Both words are verbs—to *effect* is "to bring about", to *affect* is "to influence."

eminent, imminent

Eminent means "high in station, merit, esteem," "prominent." *Imminent* means "about to happen," "threatening" (said especially of a danger or catastrophe).

farther, further

Farther is more used to express distance in space; *further* for distance in time, quality, or degree.

Checklist 2.7 Correctness

1. Select the right level of language for your communication: either formal or informal.
2. Realize that informal language is most often used in business communication.
3. Check—often by letting another person read your material—for correct figures, facts, and words.
4. Apply the principles of accepted mechanics to your writing.

imply, infer

Imply means "to insinuate" or "suggest"; *infer* means "to conclude." A writer *implies*; the reader *infers*.

lay, laid, laid
lie, lay, lain

A person or a sheet *lies* (rests) on the bed, but a person *lays* the book on the table or *lays* himself or herself on the bed. If you can substitute *place(s)* and answer *what?* use the proper tense of *lay*.

principal, principle

Principal, as an adjective, means "chief," "main"; as a noun, it means "sum of money" or "head of a school." *Principle* means "rule" or "basic truth."

which, that, who

That refers to persons or things; *who*, to people; *which*, only to things.

who, whom

Use *who* as the subject of a verb—"Who will win?" Use *whom* as the object of a verb or a preposition—"Whom can you trust?" (You can trust *him* or *her*, not *he* or *she*.) "For whom will you vote?"

Maintain Acceptable Writing Mechanics

All the material discussed in Appendix A relating to mechanics, word processing, and appearance of business messages is relevant here. With the various packages available for computers, both grammar-checks and spell-checks have made your editing tasks easier. Yet we recommend careful attention to the mechanical part of every well-written document.

SUMMARY

Knowing the seven C's, and using them, will help you become a better communicator; the principles for these seven criteria for good communication are core to this book, and we hope will be your criteria for good communication in the future.

Be *complete* in giving your message receiver all necessary information. One way to remember this suggestion is to think of the five W's: *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why*.

Apply the second C, *conciseness*, through eliminating wordy expressions, including only relevant material, and avoiding unnecessary repetition. Consistently ask this question: Which word, sentence, or paragraph may be eliminated without omitting relevant material?

Prepare your messages with the audience in mind. *Consideration* means putting yourself in their place. Focus on "you" in place of "I" or "we." Stress the positive in your messages.

Insert specific, definite, and vivid words to make your messages *concrete*, the fourth C principle. Use specific facts and figures; put action in your verbs; and choose vivid, image-building words.

Think of *clarity* as using words that are familiar to the message receiver. Additionally, use sentences that average 17 to 20 words, contain one main idea, are coherent, and give emphasis to ideas more often in the beginning of a sentence.

Respect your message receiver. The sixth C principle, *courtesy*, means being tactful, thoughtful, and appreciative. Such writing also implies using expressions that show respect and use nondiscriminatory language.

Review all your communication for *correctness*. This last of the seven C's focuses on correctness in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Additionally, give thought to the right level of language and the checking of figures, facts, and words.

EXERCISES AND PROBLEMS

Exercises Involving International Issues

1. *Understanding a Foreign Country Through Viewing Its Newspapers.* One of the better ways of understanding a foreign country is to spend time viewing one of their newspapers, written in English of course. Foreign students in class may wish to read a paper in their native language. Your task is this: Set up a list of criteria for good English writing and then apply those criteria to the foreign paper. Some criteria you may wish to consider are these:
 - a. Use of headings to the stories
 - b. Tendency to overuse certain words, such as the article *the*
 - c. Control over prepositions
 - d. Difficulty with using tenses
2. *Analysis of Foreign Form of Written Communication.* Here is an interesting assignment for the foreign students in class: Have each of them analyze a form of writing (letter, memorandum, report, E-mail, or other) as completed in their native language. Their task is to write an analysis of differences between their native format and those practiced in their native country. Each student should feel free to select his or her own criteria for the comparative statement.

Exercises of a General Nature

3. *Comparative Report on a Current Periodical.* Apply two or three of the Seven C's discussed in this chapter as criteria for evaluating several different kinds of publications. (1) Do your analysis of one of the following documents. (2) Have another member of the class analyze the same document. (3) Compare results before reporting to the class on where you agree and where you disagree. You may select your analysis document from the following list or select one on your own:
- The *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or a local newspaper in your area
 - An annual report
 - Periodicals such as the *Economist*, *Business Week*, *Readers Digest*, *Fortune*, or a journal of your choice
 - A story from a popular magazine
 - The letter from the chairperson in a company's annual report
 - This textbook, or another textbook selected from your major
4. *Restatement of Long Thoughts into Shorter Thoughts.* Translate the following gobbleygook into the original proverbs. Then compare sentence length (total words) in each concise proverb with the total words in the gob bledygook counterpart.
- All's well that is finalized effectively.
 - Be it a minimal dwelling in a depressed socioeconomic area, there is no place like home.
 - All programmed activity and nonutilization of recreational outlets make Jack a less than fully realized personality.
 - Do not attempt statistical estimates of your chickens before it is feasible to correlate volume variances with projected expectations.
 - The utilization of a superfluity of culinary personnel maximizes disorganization and has a deleterious effect on the broth.
5. *Assignment to Move a Thought from Formal to Informal Writing.*
Rewrite the following example of formal writing into a more informal business style:

On behalf of the committee investigating the issue of sex discrimination in the hallowed halls of academia, we respectfully request, indeed implore that we earnestly seek your recommendation for criteria to remove such discrimination. Furthermore, it is the intent of the committee that you use all means available to you, including

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- via our approval additional measures! to submit no later than the 8th of October 20xx those criteria to us. Finally, be it known that your information be made available to the committee in both hard-copy form and computer disk, the latter compatible with MS-DOS machines.
6. *Exercises on Choice of Words.* Choose the correct word or words that should be used in each sentence listed below.
- This act will not (effect, affect) my confidence in you.
 - I am (anxious, eager) to (tell, advise) you that you are right.
 - (Continuous, continual) rains are drenching the fields.
 - We assure you (its, it's) a pleasure to do as you suggest.
 - Enclosed (please find, is) my check for (\$100.00, \$100).
 - RXZ College employs 10 (imminent, eminent) scholars.
 - The dissension (between, among) the five departments has been settled by a (well known, well-known) authority.
 - The man (who, which, that) was crossing the street was struck by a car (who, which, that) Mr. Smith was driving.
 - (A, An) university regent held (a, an) one-hour meeting with (a, an) honor society (council, counsel).
 - We sold (fewer, less) fans last month.
 - We had (already, all ready) received the suit when your letter arrived. I am (already, all ready) to write this customer.
 - Your rug should (lie, lay) (smooth, smoothly) on the floor.
 - The (principal, principle) of honesty should be evident here.
 - Be courteous to (whomever, whoever) comes to your desk.
 - A large number of bills (is, are) outstanding.
 - Do you know (who, whom) the manager promoted yesterday?
 - The decision is a secret between Ron and (I, me).
 - We have a large (quantity, amount, number) of suits here.
 - Either Ellen or (myself; I, me) will call you Monday.

7. *Substitution of Simple Words in Order to Improve Average Citizen Who Has a Modus Operandi*

average citizen who has a modus operandi
accelerate aggregating recind
modus operandi

PART ONE BACKGROUND FOR EFFECTIVE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

7. *Substitution of Simpler for More Complex Word.* Assume that you are writing to the average citizen who has contacted your company. Offer appropriate synonyms for the following words in order to improve understanding:

accelerate	allegation	default
aggregating	contingent	discrepancy
rescind	accord	cunning
validity	censure	hoi polloi
modus operandi	de facto	de jure
circumvent	paucity	archaic

8. *Suggestions for Gender-Neutral Terms.* Suggest some gender-neutral alternatives for the following terms:

freshman	man-hours	workmanship
repairman	layman	showmanship
manmade	chairlady	checkroom girl
girl	womankind	man the desk

9. *Rewriting a Document into Nongender Terms.* For the following interdepartmental memo, (a) number the paragraphs (1 to 4), (b) under every paragraph number, list all nongender, neutral statements—each on a separate line—and (c) opposite each statement write an appropriate nonsexist version.

TO: Mrs. Erica Cosmos , DATE: May 10, 20xx
FROM: Tom Grant
SUBJECT: CPC Staffing Requirements

I would like your support along with that of Charles to serve as cochairman of our Staffing Requirements Committee for the Communications Planning Centers. As you know the CPCs are a most important sales tool, and we need highly qualified manpower with top salesmen.

The other committeemen I have appointed to work with you are Scott Durke, Fred Picker, Miss Helen Jaynes, and Mrs. Thoms.

One of the important jobs at the centers is that of professional sales demonstrator, which requires many man-hours of work. This man will be an entry-level group manager responsible for all equipment sales demonstrations. He must of course be extremely knowledgeable about all our products and services. Currently this assignment is being handled by Miss Carolyn Flayer at our II Center and by Kermit Smith at ABC Center. Both are doing a superior job.

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We would like this task to be a one-year rotational assignment and be filled with the best available candidate—man or lady. This job experience can greatly benefit the assigned individual and make him more valuable to our company on future reassessments. Please get your committee together this week to begin an extensive search for good people who are available for these assignments. If you need help typing announcements or other materials, I've asked the gals in the typing pool to be available