

PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION (7 C's)

(Characteristics of Communication)

The principles of effective communication are very important for us to become good communicators. We must apply these principles to compose effective messages. They provide guidelines for choice of content and style of our messages. These principles are also called 7 C's, as each begins with a "C". Following are the principles of good communication.

1. Completeness

A message should be complete in all respects. It is complete when it contains all facts the receiver needs for the desired reaction. While writing his message, the writer should assess his message through the eyes of the receivers. He needs to be sure that he has included all relevant information. There are some benefits of completeness. First, complete messages bring the desired results. Second, they can do a better job of building goodwill. Third, complete messages can avert costly lawsuits.

Guidelines for Completeness

1. Provide all necessary information.
2. Answer all the questions asked by the inquirer.
3. Give extra information, if necessary.

2. Conciseness

Conciseness means to say in the fewest possible words what you want to say. The message should be precise and brief. It does not mean merely brief. It means brief but complete. A concise message saves time and expense for both sender and receiver. Conciseness also contributes to emphasis; important ideas stand out when unnecessary words are eliminated. Concise messages combined with "you attitude" are appreciated by the recipients.

Guidelines for Conciseness

1. Avoid wordy expressions. Use one word in place of phrases.
2. Include only relevant material.
3. Avoid unnecessary repetition.

3. Consideration

Consideration means thoughtful attention to the wishes and feelings of others. In business communication, consideration means preparing every message with the receiver in mind. It means putting yourself in his place. It shows you are foremost aware of his desires, problems, circumstances and emotions. Then you should handle the matter from their point of view. This thoughtful consideration is also called "you attitude". The "you-attitude" means writing from the point of view of the reader, rather than your own point of view.

Guidelines for Consideration

1. Focus on "you" instead of "I" and "we".
2. Show how your message receiver will benefit from your offer.
3. Emphasize positive, pleasant facts. It means emphasizing what can be done instead of what cannot be done.

4. Concreteness

Concreteness means using specific, definite and vivid words in messages. Sometimes, a message fails to convey the exact sense. This happens when the message is not concrete enough to evoke a clear picture of its contents in the mind of the reader. Concrete messages are more coherent, vivid and interesting. You should be specific, definite and vivid rather than vague and general in your messages. For example, "please send your cheque in full as soon as possible" is a vague statement. It may be made concrete as, "please send your cheque for Rs.12000 before March 10."

Guidelines for Concreteness

1. Use an exact, precise statement or a figure in place of a general word.
2. Put action in your verbs; use active voice instead of passive voice.
3. Use vivid, image building words.

5. Clarity

Clarity is a very important quality of an effective message. The substance of a message should be stated clearly. Simple and clear language should be used so that there should be no ambiguity in it. A clear message is that which the reader can understand readily. There should be no doubt in his mind about the message.

Guidelines for Clarity

1. Such words should be used as are familiar to the message receiver.
2. Lengthy sentences should be avoided.
3. Use coherent sentences.

6. Courtesy

Courtesy in a business letter is the most important quality to create goodwill and friendliness. The message must be courteous in tone. Courtesy means to show respect and politeness to those who treat us with consideration. Courtesy is politeness that grows out of respect and concern for others. Courtesy in a message is created by the use of words like "thank you", "please", "we appreciate", etc.

Guidelines for Courtesy

1. Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful and appreciative.
2. Use expressions that show respect.
3. Use non-discriminatory language that reflects equal treatment of all people.

7. Correctness

Correctness means correctness in grammar, punctuation and spelling. There should be no errors and mistakes in the message. Mistakes or errors in the message irritate the reader, and he loses faith in the efficiency of the company. All mistakes in a business message cause a good deal of harm too.

Guidelines for Correctness

1. Use right level of language. (The level of language suitable for business communication is less formal rather than formal or sub-standard.)
2. Check accuracy of figures, facts and words.
3. Maintain acceptable writing mechanics. (It means correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.)

BASIC ORGANISATIONAL PLAN

The choice of organisational plan depends on a number of factors:

- How is the reader expected to react to the message?
- How much does the reader know about the topic or situation?
- What are the reader's cultural conventions?

There are four basic organisational plans for writing a letter: (a) the direct-request (b) good-news (c) bad-news (d) persuasive-request plans. The writer can choose one of these to suit his message or situation.

The first two plans—the direct request and good-news plans—use the Direct or Deductive Approach which begins with the main idea and then gives the explanation. The last two plans—bad-news and persuasive-request plans—use the Indirect or Inductive Approach which begins with explanation or buffer statement and states the main idea later. All these plans are not rigid rules; they are flexible. The writer's judgment decides which one suits his message and the receivers of his message.

Direct (Deductive) Approach

As we have said that messages consisting of direct-request and good-news use direct or deductive approach. When the writer thinks that his readers will show favourable or neutral reaction to the message, he can use the direct approach. In this approach, he begins with the main idea or best news. Then he gives all necessary explanation in the remaining paragraphs and ends the letter with an appropriate friendly closing.

The writer should use the direct request plan when the main purpose of the message is to make a request that requires less persuasion. He should use the good-news plan to grant requests, announce favourable or neutral information. The following table shows how direct (deductive) approach works in direct-request and good-news plans.

Direct (Deductive) Organisational Plans

| | Direct-Request Plan | Good-News Plan |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Main idea, request or main statement and reasons. | Best news or main idea. |
| 2 | Explanation of the main idea with all necessary details. | Explanation with all necessary details and dates. |
| 3 | Courteous close with motivation to action. | Positive friendly close. |

Indirect (Inductive) Approach

If the writer thinks that his readers might react negatively to the message, he should not present the main idea in the first paragraph. He should begin with a relevant, pleasant, neutral or receiver-benefit statement. Then he should give an explanation before he introduces his main idea. This approach of writing messages is called indirect (inductive) approach.

Indirect or inductive approach is very suitable in bad-news and persuasive-request plans. The bad-news message is one of the most difficult to prepare because the reader may react negatively. Similarly, in the messages consisting of persuasive request, the writer may face resistance. Even in good-news and neutral message, the conventions of some cultures demand an indirect approach. Let us see how indirect (inductive) approach works in bad-news and persuasive-request plans.

Indirect (Inductive) Organisational Plans

| | Bad-News Plan | Persuasive-Request Plan |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Buffer (pleasant or neutral statements, reader-oriented) | Attracting attention by stating reader's benefit and reader-interest theme. |
| 2 | Explanation with | Arousing interest |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | necessary data, pertinent favourable, then unfavourable acts | through descriptive details and data, psychological appeals and by stating reader's benefits. |
| 3 | Decision (implied or expressed) along with offer of additional help or suggestions. | Arousing desire through statement of request and supporting data. |
| 4 | Positive friendly close through appreciation, invitation to future action desired, reader benefit and goodwill. | Stimulating action through clear statement of action; easy action, dated when desirable; special inducement; reader benefit. |

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

Both the opening and closing paragraphs are of great importance to a business letter. The writer should place the main favourable ideas at the beginning and ending of the message.

Opening Paragraphs

It is the opening paragraph which decides whether the reader continues reading the message or discards it. In order to arrest the attention and interest of the reader, the writer should make the opening paragraph attractive. The following steps should be taken to attract the reader's attention.

1. The writer should choose an opening appropriate for the message purpose and for the reader. It includes:
 - a. Main idea or good news first for direct-requests, neutral and good-news messages.
 - b. Buffer first for bad-news messages.
 - c. Attention-getting statements first for persuasive requests.
2. The writer should make the opening considerate, courteous, concise and clear. This includes:
 - a. The writer should get the reader into opening means adopting 'you-attitude'; talking about '

and avoiding 'I' and 'we' as much as possible. The reader is pleased when the writer talks about him, his interests and the benefits he will get from the message.

- b. The writer should keep the first paragraph relatively short. A lengthy opening paragraph makes the reader lose interest.
- c. The writer should focus on the positive. He should avoid negative openings. Negative openings arouse hostility in the reader. Here are some **examples of negative openings:**

We received your complaint today.

You haven't replied to our letter....

It is not our practice to distribute free samples now.

These negative openings can be **revised as,**

Thank you for writing us about.....

Did you receive our letters of July 12 and 19....

In the past, we were glad to distribute free samples of our products, but recently it was thought best to discontinue this practice.

- d. The writer should use courteous, conventional language. The letter should begin with courteous and polite words like "we are pleased to receive....", "thank you for your letter...." etc.
 - e. The writer should avoid unnecessary repetition. Unnecessary repetition annoys the reader and makes him lose interest in the message.
3. The writer should check for completeness regarding:
- i. sentence structure
 - ii. date of letter you are answering

The writer should avoid opening the letter with an incomplete sentence like

As per your recent letter, we have dispatched your order today by truck.

It is an incomplete sentence, and does not convey complete information. It can be made better as,