

Unit 401: Effective communication in business

Handout 8: Styles and tones of written communication

In order to determine the most appropriate communication style, a number of factors should be considered:

- Who is/are my audience?
- What do I already know about them?
- What do I want to communicate?
- Why do I want to communicate it?

| Communication style | Analysis |
|---------------------|---|
| Formal | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follows rules and guidelines, depending on circumstances (different settings may have required protocols, phrases, and layout formats)• House style• Embodies a series of expectations on the part of the recipient as to how the content of the written communication will be formed• May render the message ineffective if the required conventions are not followed• Emotion has no place in a formal writing style• Contractions (gonna, wanna, ain't, won't, can't etc.) should not be used <p>Some advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More precise and so less likely to be misunderstood• Avoids the embarrassment of face-to-face when the subject of communication is sensitive• Traceable and usually preserved <p>Some disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceived as bureaucratic• Official language may obscure the real meaning of a communication• Often fails to identify the reasons behind the message which can be very frustrating to the recipient• Can fail to motivate employees, due to impersonal nature |
| Informal | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free and unrestrained communication between people who share casual rapport• No rigid rules and guidelines – merely that the audience should be able to understand the communication and the contained message• Sometimes uses its own form of language, i.e. “txt speak” <p>Some advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less official and less intimidating.• Personal and enthusiastic rather than dry and bureaucratic• Can provide basis for shared experience <p>Some disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• May result in the spread of inaccurate information and half-truths• Can result in second- and third-hand information being presented as original, factual, and trustworthy |

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|--------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May lead to the indiscriminate disclosure of classified information • Frequently emotional, which may distort meaning |
| Assertive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Means communicating clearly, fairly and forthrightly with no hidden message • Considered most effective form of communication • How we express ourselves when our self-esteem is high, having confidence to communicate without manipulating • Striving for a win-win situation |
| Passive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on compliance and avoiding confrontation at all costs ('not rocking the boat') • Passive written communication dilutes the message in order not to be seen as the bearer of unpleasant news • A communication style that is trying not to be noticed at all! |
| Passive-aggressive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A combination of styles that avoids direct confrontation (passive), but attempts to 'get even' through manipulation (aggressive) • Common when office politics are being played out • The manipulation within the communication is apt to dilute the message |
| Aggressive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly always involves attempted manipulation • Often causes the message to be ignored, as the recipient spends time trying to decide how to respond to the communication style • Marks out the originator of the communication as a bully, thereby damaging the business or organisation they are representing |

Common errors in written communications:

1. Using commas incorrectly.
2. Using colons incorrectly.
3. Using semi-colons incorrectly.
4. Using possessive forms rather than plural forms of nouns.
5. Using incomplete sentences.
6. Using pronouns that do not agree with their nouns.
7. Using verbs that do not agree with their nouns.
8. Using nonparallel structures especially when listing bullets in papers or on presentation slides.
9. Misusing common words like its and it's.
10. Failing to use 'spell-check' and not proofreading assignments, or relying solely on 'spell-check' and missing correctly spelled but wrong words (form instead of from, for example).