

Unit 1. Rules of good writing

MODERN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Business communications can be written in a much more relaxed style than they were decades ago. Old-fashioned, longwinded jargon is out. You should aim to put across your message naturally, in a friendly, informal style. The secret of good writing is to use plain language as if you are having a conversation. This unit looks at some simple rules you should follow in order to ensure all your communications are effective.

1. Come straight to the point:

Busy business people haven't got time to read long-winded documents. They welcome letters that are direct and to the point – but at the same time courteous. Save your reader's time by keeping your sentences short and simple.

2. Remember the KISS principle:

Keep it short and simple – that means short sentences and simple words. Don't try to impress your reader with big words – they will not be impressed – they will just have to reach for the dictionary. Choose short words instead of these, and choose one word instead of these phrases.

3. Use active not passive voice:

'Voice' refers to the relationship of a verb to its subject. Active voice means that the subject of the sentence does the action of the sentence. Passive voice means that the subject of the sentence receives the action.

4. Use the right tone:

You alter the tone of your voice to convey messages in a different way. Similarly written communications may be worded so that they sound polite, friendly, firm, bossy, sarcastic, condescending, even rude. If you use the wrong tone in a written communication you could cause real offence to your reader. Even if you feel angry or frustrated, try not to vent your emotions in writing. Your objectives will be achieved only with carefully considered and appropriate wording. Study the following expressions and choose an alternative way of saying the same things more tactfully.

5. Use modern language:

The main rule of writing today is to write as you speak. If you find yourself writing something that you would not say to the person if you were having a conversation, then you should not be writing it either.

JARGON AND GOBBLEDEGOOK

Jargon can seriously get in the way of business if no-one understands what people are talking about, or what they are writing about! I'm sure you have often come across messages that leave you feeling very confused, right? This problem happens when people use pompous or long-winded wording and phrasing to try to impress rather than to communicate. Yet really, the end result is that they do neither of these things!

Abbreviations are another thing. I read an article about someone who was making a speech and he mentioned HE (Higher Education). A member of the audience (a qualified engineer) asked 'Why are you talking about High Explosives?' Sure, the context often helps to explain the correct meaning of such abbreviations, but it shouldn't be relied on. So as a general rule, always explain abbreviations when you first use them. Using jargon can result in one of two things – the reader will get bored and stop reading, or will spend a great deal of time trying to figure out what you meant four sentences ago! Do you know any writers who sometimes concentrate so hard on what they want to say that they become absorbed in their impressive flow of wonderful words instead of talking in everyday language that the reader will understand? Take a look at these before and after examples found on the

Before: If there are any points on which you require explanation or further particulars we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone.

After: If you have any questions please call.

Before: High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process.

After: Children need good schools if they are to learn properly.

Before: It is important that you shall read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite then complete the form overleaf (all sections) prior to its immediate return to the Council by way of the envelope provided.

After: Please read the notes opposite before you fill in the form. Then send it back to us as soon as possible in the envelope provided.

Effective proofreading

Have you ever proofread a letter, leaflet or information sheet 20 times, then printed out 10,000 copies . . . only for someone to look at it and point out a glaring error? Yes, I guess we've all been there, done that! If you are responsible for proofreading important documents (and aren't all documents important?) then here are my tips for effective proofreading:

1. Avoid distractions. It's best to proofread in a quiet environment, with no disturbances such as phones, background conversation, etc.

- 2. Read the work out loud.** Using proper intonation will help you to spot faulty sentence construction and bad punctuation and grammar.
- 3. Concentrate on reading one word at a time.** This takes practice. It's fairly common to skim over the words when we read normally. Try to make a conscious effort to stare at each word in turn. This isn't as slow as it sounds – it's just a different reading technique.
- 4. Be methodical – read one line at a time.** Use a ruler to guide your eyes so that you don't miss the odd line.
- 5. Take a break occasionally.** Especially with longer documents, you need a break now and again. Everyone loses concentration after a while, so set a time limit and then take a break.
- 6. Remember to look also for inconsistencies in style and presentation, such as** headings that suddenly switch from capitals to lower case, or a change in font or spacing.
- 7. Leave a decent period of time between writing and proofreading the work.** Reading with a fresh approach will help you to spot more mistakes.
- 8. Print out a hard copy for the final proofreading.** Somehow we always manage to miss a few errors if we rely on proofreading on screen.
- 9. Keep your knowledge of punctuation and grammar up-to-date.** Unless you know what is correct, you cannot spot mistakes.
- 10. Ask someone else to do a final check of important documents** – we tend to be able to find other people's mistakes much more easily than our own!

Composing Letter: Key Points to Remember

- 1. Use short sentences**
Short sentences will keep your meaning clear and ensure easier understanding.
- 2. Choose simple words**
Simple words will convey your message more clearly. The use of unaffected language will help you to achieve the right tone.
- 3. Avoid wordiness**
Choose words with care and be economical while remembering the need for courtesy.
- 4. Use an appropriate tone**
Choose a tone to suit the reader and the subject matter. You can be firm or friendly, persuasive or conciliatory – it depends on the impression you wish to convey. Failure to adopt an appropriate tone will mean that the reader's attention is attracted more to how it is worded than to what is being said.
- 5. Be precise**
Your letter should be long enough to serve its purpose, but no longer.

6. Ensure accuracy

Double check all figures, dates, numbers and prices, as well as spellings, punctuation, tenses, wordendings, etc.

7. Check consistency

Ensure consistency of presentation (fully-blocked style with open punctuation) as well as consistency of expression (I, We, etc.).

8. Use your initiative

Ensure the reader knows everything. Instead of 'next week', state a day and date. If an overseas visit is planned give the time of arrival and flight number.

9. Use active not passive voice

Active voice makes your writing more alive and interesting, more specific and clear, and it also makes your sentences shorter.

10. Write as you would speak

Use everyday language as if you were having a conversation.

Unit: 2**FAX****FAX MESSAGES**

A fax machine is a relatively inexpensive – and most would agree essential – item of equipment for any business. Fax transmits and receives any kind of message – handwritten, printed, word-processed; maps, messages, diagrams, photographs. It takes only seconds to transmit a fax message, depending on the length of the document.

Sending messages by fax is a popular choice today due to its versatility and speed. Fax is often used between divisions or branches of the same company instead of telephone or memos. Business letters are frequently either sent by fax or replaced by fax messages.

Most companies use a special fax letterhead for fax messages. This fax headed paper is often used with just a brief covering note explaining an accompanying document. The salutation and complimentary close are normally omitted but the message will generally be signed.

Dealing with the Fax Messages: Key Points to Remember

1. Use fax to send a printed copy of any document, especially diagrams and illustrations.
2. Prepare the message on the company's standard fax template where one exists.
3. Make up a fax letterhead if necessary, including headings like To/From/Date/ Fax Number/No. of pages/Copy to/Date.
4. Do not use a salutation or complimentary close on fax messages.
5. Use the same techniques when writing a fax message as you would a business letter.
6. Remember numbers or bullets if this would help your display.

7. Sign the fax in the usual way.
8. Send a cover fax with an enclosed document, and remember to indicate the number of pages being sent in total.
9. Key in the fax number correctly.
10. Keep a copy of important documents.

GOBBLEDEGOOK

GOBBLEDEGOOK is writing that is bombastic, pretentious, stuffy and long-winded. It is writing that attempts to sound official or formal. Take a look at this letter from an accountant – it is full of gobbledegook. All the long-winded words and phrases are highlighted in red:

Dear Mr. Johnson

We have received your e-mail of even date. For the audit of Turner Communications Pte Ltd, kindly furnish us with a copy of the company's balance sheet, expenses statements and all the invoices/bills paid by the holding company at your earliest convenience.

We will revert to you on the treatment of the intangible assets and the financials of Turner Communications Inc. as soon as possible.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards Bernard Williams

Unit 3. Electronic Mail THE EVOLUTION OF E-MAIL

Businesses today operate in a highly competitive market in which high-speed communication and information transfer is essential. Most of the activities in today's offices are electronic, using computer based technology. Electronic mail, or e-mail as it is commonly known, has evolved as an effective, low cost and instant method of communication with friends and colleagues all over the world.

With e-mail, messages are keyed into a computer workstation and then transmitted to the recipient. A single message may be sent simultaneously to many recipients.

Advantages of E-mail

E-mail saves a lot of time and effort in producing formal, printed memos, faxes and letters. Many e-mail messages are short and may be deleted after a few days or weeks. With longer or more important messages, they may be retained on the electronic file or printed out as a hard copy. Some advantages of e-mail are:

- high speed send/receive cycle;
- direct input and retrieval from keyboard;
- virtually instant dispatch/retrieval;
- simultaneous circulation to pre-selected groups;
- other files can be attached to e-mails.

The way people use e-mail reveals quite a lot about us. People who are open-minded and who welcome new ideas embrace the e-mail culture willingly. They send crisp, clear messages, they reply promptly and they are a pleasure to liaise with. People who are uncreative and full of their own importance tend to sound quite long-winded and pretentious in e-mail messages. They find it hard to adopt the casual, friendly, conversational style that suits e-mail.

TOP TEN COMPLAINTS ABOUT E-MAIL PRACTICE

1. Vague subject line

Readers with lots of email everyday will not open mail headed 'urgent' or 'hello'. You must compose a

SMART subject line that is:

Specific

Meaningful

Appropriate

Relevant

Thoughtful

2. No greeting

It's just plain courtesy to include a greeting at the beginning of an e-mail. We don't need Dear Mary or Dear Mr. Tan, as in letters. In e-mails we can be slightly more informal, with Hi Sally, Hello John. Another reason why I like to see 'Hi Shirley' at the beginning of a message is that this is confirmation to me that the message is to me and not a cc or bcc.

3. No sign-off

Similarly, it's another sign for me when I see your name at the end of a message – it's a sign that your message is finished. A sign-off should not need to include 'Regards' or 'Kind regards'. Why do we need these boring, useless closes? Just put your name at the end and be done with it!

4. Poor formatting

I hate to receive a message that goes on and on without any blank lines to show new paragraphs. Other people agree that such messages are confusing and boring. Try to think and format in paragraphs when you are composing e-mail messages. Blank lines between paragraphs are a great idea. They not only help you but they help your reader too.

5. Vague messages

Do you receive vague messages? These are messages where you read and read but you cannot see what the writer is trying to say, and you have no idea what the writer expects of you. Many people complain about this. Do yourself and your reader a favor by thinking in paragraphs, remembering appropriate structure, and being clear in your writing.

6. Tell me what to do

This is connected with number 5, in that the writer doesn't tell you what action he or she wants you to take after reading the message. Remember the three Rs. – you must guide the reader towards the response that is required – only then will you get the right results.

7. Unfriendly tone

Emotions are hard to convey in e-mails, and some people type out exactly what they would say without thinking of the tone of voice that would be used to signal their emotions. With e-mail you only have words, so without the right tone, misunderstandings could easily happen. You could easily offend or perhaps lose an important business contact. Good writers learn to choose their words carefully, and get the tone just right!

8. CC to the whole world

A friend of mine once said 'Don't send a cc to everyone you know. Just send a cc to people who need to know!' I agree. It's too easy to send ccs nowadays (courtesy copies, not carbon copies!). Please don't contribute to the increasing problem of overflowing inboxes. Send a cc only when it is essential.

9. Bad grammar, bad spelling and bad punctuation

As more people use e-mail, sloppy work is becoming a major annoyance. People are receiving poorly formatted messages in one continuous paragraph, poorly structured messages that don't state what response is needed, and poorly written messages with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Remember, your e-mail says something about you and your organization. Make sure it gives a good impression.

10. Just plain sloppy

Many people comment about the need to reply to e-mails quickly simply because of the urgency of emails. In view of this urgency, many people don't take as much care with their writing. Rushed messages are often garbled, unclear, unfocused, with poor structure, poor tone and poor spelling. Readers do not understand such messages, they may be offended by them, and they don't know what they have to do in response.

HOW TO CREATE ELECTRONIC RAPPORT

1. Don't just dive into your message

Try to ease the reader into your message by giving some basic background information. Be warm and friendly in your opening where possible. For example:

- It was good to speak to you this morning. I'm glad we were able to clarify this issue.
- Thanks for calling me today. It was so good to speak to you after all this time.
- Thanks for a great lunch yesterday. Your new project certainly sounds very interesting.
- I'm so sorry to hear about the problem you've experienced with your new LCD projector.

2. Show some feelings

It's too easy just to state the mere facts without showing any concern or feelings. Remember that you can add texture to your message by using emotive and sensory words. Showing some empathy in your message will help you to form a better bond with your readers. For example:

- I appreciate your understanding.
- I certainly see what you mean, and hope we can resolve this problem.
- I am happy to offer you an extra discount of 10%.
- I am pleased to know you will be visiting Mumbai next month.

3. Keep your message positive and focused

Two essential ingredients of e-mail messages are keeping a positive attitude towards your reader and maintaining a focus on their needs. Try to be diplomatic, and never be afraid to apologise if something has gone wrong.

4. Tailor the tone of your message

The speed of e-mail can lead to inappropriate informality. Be careful to tailor the tone of your message accordingly. Distinguish personal from business e-mails, and avoid using abbreviations, exclamation marks and slang when writing to clients.

5. Be precise and clear

All readers deserve a clear and professional message. Pay attention to what is being asked and respond clearly. If you are not precise this will make more work because a further e-mail will be necessary.

Netiquette

In personal relationships the conventions of behavior are called etiquette. In e-mail we have netiquette – a set of rules for e-mail that have evolved from experience. All your emotions and subtleties have to be incorporated into what you write, so misunderstandings are easy to create. Here are my tips for better netiquette:

N: Never leave a response too long.

It's common courtesy to respond to a message as quickly as you can – even if you have to say that a detailed response will be sent later.

E: E-mail addresses must be correct.

Correctly addressed e-mail messages are received within seconds, but it can take a while to receive an error message letting you know that an incorrectly addressed message wasn't delivered. Get your e-mail addresses right first time.

T: Take off the caps lock. **DON'T SHOUT!**

Even though you want to get noticed, please do not use capitals in e-mail messages – this is like shouting – it is rude and will usually be counter-productive. And also ... **NEVER RESORT TO EXCESSIVE PUNCTUATION* @!!**?!!!!**

I: Informality is OK in e-mails.

Replace formal salutations like 'Dear Leslie' with 'Hi Leslie' or even just 'Leslie'. Similarly, replace 'Yours sincerely' with 'Best wishes' or some other informal closing. (Try to avoid the overused 'Regards' and horribly abbreviated things like Tx and Tnks&Rgs!)

Q: Question your subject heading.

People are most likely to read important looking e-mails first. Give your messages a clear and specific subject heading that will get noticed.

U: Use short sentences and short paragraphs. The shorter your messages, the more likely they will be read and understood. Remember to paragraph just the same as in other business documents.

E: Enumerate with numbers or bullets.

Present your messages attractively. Use numbers, bullets or sub-headings if possible – this will add to the clarity of your message.

T: Tidy up long sentences to eliminate waffle.

Tapping away at the keyboard as you think, it is easy to allow sentences to become too long. Read through your message carefully and improve clarity and understanding.

T: Take a pride in your finished message. Make sure your message is accurate, brief and clear as well as attractively presented. In this way it will be understood and will achieve the desired results.

E: Ensure everything is right before you hit 'send'. You cannot call an e-mail back for second thoughts, so get it right first time!

THE INTERNET

It was in the late 1980s when the phenomenon known as the World Wide Web took the world by storm. It comprises millions of pages of words, pictures, sounds and graphics stored on computers connected to the Internet. A collection of web pages created by a single organization is called a website. Every website has its own address, called a URL (Uniform Resource Locator):

SURFING THE NET

A website is a set of interactive pages containing related information. Every website has a home page that lists all the contents of the site, just like the contents page of a book. You can then click on any of the hyperlinks to access the vast amount of information available throughout the site.

THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET ON BUSINESS

Digital traffic more than doubles in volume every year. Hundreds of companies are going online every week. Never before has any one development had such an impact on the way business is conducted. Businesses are increasingly looking towards the Internet as a means of advertising, selling and distributing their services. You can book hotel rooms, flights, hire a car, arrange for flowers to be delivered, order new shoes or clothes, all without leaving your desk and even without picking up a phone. People are regularly shopping online for certain goods, especially books and CDs, even groceries. You can often track the progress of parcels or other deliveries online. There seems no limit to the capabilities of the Internet. It is a host to a wealth of information and services – so whatever you need to find out or order, it is probably on the Internet somewhere.

INTERANETS AND EXTRANETS

Intranets are internal Internets. An intranet is like a company's own internal version of the Internet. A company's intranet can contain a wealth of information about the company, with each department having its own site and information being made available to everyone within the company – but not other people outside the company.

THE IMPACT OF E-MAIL IN BUSINESS

(Reproduced with permission from Guide to Effective E-mail by Shirley Taylor, ISBN 981043879-6)

E-mail is the most popular facility available through the Internet. It has made a lot of changes to the way businesses operate:

- Traditionally secretaries opened their employer's mail and could keep up-to-date on everything. Now that many executives read their own e-mail, a secretary's role could be quite frustrating unless a good understanding has been reached with employers.
- Since many executives read their own mail it is often possible to contact powerful people directly. But remember, not all CEOs are keen to receive information directly from anyone. Just because you know his or her e-mail address, it doesn't always mean that your CEO wants to hear directly from you. Your own line manager may also not be too happy with you if you go over his or her head in such a way.
- Some people get so used to doing everything through e-mail that they forget or don't give as much importance to proper mail. Make sure you check your snail mail at least once a day.
- Some people receive dozens of messages every day, some that are important, others are being sent to them simply for the sake of it when really they don't need to see them. As a result many people find they are spending more than half their time dealing with e-mail. We can all do our part to ease this problem by learning to respect other people's time, and only send mail to people who really need to see it.
- Some people send the same message several times because of errors they spotted after they sent it the first (or second) time. Please correct your mistakes before you hit 'send'. You will give a much better impression to your readers if you get it right first time.

- Very often working with e-mail means you have to develop a good memory. We tend not to print out as many messages as perhaps we should do. Also, many companies implement a system whereby old messages (say 30 days old) may be deleted automatically from your workstation so that the hard disk is not clogged up unnecessarily. Protect yourself by saving paper copies of important messages.

Internal consequences

Traditionally internal communications in business were hierarchical, with messages being passed up and down the chain, often with secretaries acting as a filter between managers and staff. Flatter company structures have changed the whole spectrum of internal communications. A network has now replaced the hierarchical model. With e-mail, every member of staff is able to communicate directly with everyone else – up, down and across the organization. This flatter organization structure, and the new power of employees to communicate company-wide, means that information can be distributed more efficiently around the organization. However, because of the relative ease of sending e-mail, messages may sometimes be sent without due thought and consideration.

External consequences

E-mail has undoubtedly helped us to establish and maintain business relationships with branches, clients, suppliers, etc. Relationships with customers and co-workers can be improved and productivity can be enhanced considerably through effective use of e-mail. It used to be said that the business letter was an ambassador for your company, so it should therefore give a very good impression. I believe the same can now be said of e-mail messages. You should take care with all your e-mail messages so that they give a good impression of you and your company.

E-mail your way to the top

E-mail viruses make front-page newspaper headlines. They cost decent computer users a lot of money, they waste our time and energy, and they cause unimaginable distress to people all over the world. Could anything be worse? What about the damage that people are causing to themselves every day by taking e-mail for granted? The familiarity and convenience of e-mail is resulting in sloppy, careless habits that could ruin your business and your reputation just as surely as any e-mail virus.

Electronic mail is having a phenomenal effect on the way we communicate. E-mail is not just a quick, easy and relatively cheap way to keep in touch with family and friends. It has also become an essential tool in business, a

fundamental part of the way in which we work. However, the explosive growth of e-mail has created some problems, mainly because there have never been any guidelines on how to compose e-mail messages, no definitive guide to common standards and expectations among writers of e-mail. Consequently systems are being overloaded, communication is rampant, reputations are being damaged, feelings are being hurt and time is being wasted.

One of the main advantages of e-mail is speed, but the pressure of coping with an ever-increasing mailbox is adding to the pressures people already face. This is resulting in messages being sent without much thought or planning, with important details missing, with spelling and punctuation errors, and with abbreviations that some people don't like and others simply don't understand. Some messages look like they are written in code! And people are even neglecting the common courtesies of a greeting and sign-off just for the sake of speed!

High on the list of annoyances when I did some research for my book, *Guide to Effective E-mail*, was unfriendly tone. Emotions are hard to convey in e-mails, and some people type out exactly what they would say without thinking of the tone of voice that would be used to signal their emotions. With e-mail all we have are words.

Without the right tone misunderstandings could easily happen, or you could offend and perhaps lose an important business contact – or even friend! Good writers learn to choose their words very carefully and get the tone just right.

E-mail and information overload is another serious problem, with some managers receiving hundreds of messages every day. But if we are suffering from overflowing inboxes, how much of it is self-inflicted? Has it become too easy to send messages to lots of people just because you can? We must learn to use e-mail more thoughtfully by recognizing when we should and should not send messages. Do you really need to send all those CC, BCC and FWD copies? If you receive lots of messages that you don't really need to see, tell the authors so that it doesn't happen again. And tell your friends not to send those jokes and personal messages to your work e-mail address. Then there's that prolonged e-mail exchange that lasts for days – wouldn't it be better to pick up the phone? E-mail overload is contributing to a decline in oral communication skills – people send e-mails to the person in the next office rather than walk a few steps! So please remember that it's good to talk and don't let e-mail result in the death of conversation.

As more people use e-mail sloppy work is becoming a major annoyance. People are receiving poorly formatted messages in one continuous paragraph, poorly structured messages that are not specific in the response required,

messages written all in capitals (equivalent to SHOUTING) or all in lower case, and, of course, messages with poor grammar, spelling and punctuation.

A friend of mine once said to me:

“When I receive a message that has lots of mistakes – spelling errors, punctuation, grammar – I think the reader has no respect for me because he/she couldn’t take just one minute to check it through before hitting ‘send’.”

(Ricky Lien, www.mindsetmedia.com.sg)

I completely agree! The Internet has made it possible for us to communicate with people from all over the world.

The only way those people can form an opinion of us is by looking at the way we write! Your credibility could be ruined with one swift click of the ‘send’ button.

Today’s way of conducting business is informal so that’s what we should aim for in our business writing too – natural, relaxed, friendly, conversational. The only place for standard boring overused clichés like ‘Please find attached herewith’, ‘I am writing to inform you’, ‘Please be advised’, ‘I should be grateful if you would kindly’, is the recycle bin! Busy businessmen and women haven’t got time to plough through loads of old-fashioned, long-winded jargon.

Nor should they be subjected to abbreviated, coded, sloppy messages that are full of errors. We should take just as much care in composing e-mail messages as we should with formal letters, memos or faxes. We should use short words and simple expressions, short sentences and short paragraphs that are clear and concise but still courteous.

We should take pride in composing effective messages that are structured logically. Most of all we should identify with our readers, appreciate their feelings, and use words they will understand, written in an appropriate tone.

USING E-MAIL: KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Compose a SMART subject heading. This will give the recipient a good idea of the contents of the message, and it makes for easier handling.
2. Keep caps lock off. Capitals indicate SHOUTING and can appear threatening. They should never be used in e-mails.
3. Use an appropriate greeting and sign-off. Formality does not read well in e-mails. Replace formal salutations like ‘Dear David’ with ‘Hi David’, or even just ‘David’. Similarly, ‘Yours sincerely’ is not appropriate in e-mails. Please don’t overuse ‘Regards’ too. Why not just put your name?

4. Check your syntax. It's easy to allow sentences to become very long and verbose. Keep your sentences short and simple, and check your sentence construction. The more pride you take in composing your message, the more successful you will be in being understood and achieving the desired results.
5. Be sure you hit the right reply button. The message may be addressed just to you or to lots of others, or it may be CC'd or BCC'd to lots of other recipients. Make sure you hit the correct reply key so that the right readers receive your message.
6. Use 'reply to all' wisely. Some writers choose to send an e-mail to lots of people, but it's not always wise or appropriate for every individual reply to be seen by all the same people. Let me know what you want to do.
7. Slow down. Every word counts, and one mistake is too many. Because of the speed of e-mail, it's tempting to try to respond quickly. However, speed often creates mistakes. So slow down, take care, focus and get it right.
8. Keep copies. Just as you would keep copies of important letters, it's good practice to print out important e-mails too.
9. Use the right tone. With e-mail all you have are your words. Careful writers learn to choose their words carefully and get the tone just right.
10. Check your message. Re-read your message before you hit 'send'. Proofread means a lot more than spellchecking! Check for accuracy, brevity, clarity, as well as organization and tone. Also make sure you have attached whatever you have said you will attach.

Choose the correct word from those shown in brackets.

- 1 My mother always does the on Saturday mornings.
(marketing/shopping)
- 2 The new shop will be for business next Monday. (open/opened)
- 3 If you are going to increase your shorthand speed, you need to
.....very hard. (practice/practise)
- 4 Due to the poor economy, it's really not to employ any
more new staff. (practical/practicable)
- 5 Michael wants to me to the cinema tomorrow night. (take/bring)
- 6 Please let me know when you have free to discuss this
project. (some time/sometime)

7 We have employees this year than we had last year.
(less/fewer)

8 If we take on the new business, it would our present activities. (compliment/complement)

9 The person chosen as best dressed will win a prize.
(whose/who's)

10 I hope going to be at the party on Friday night. (your/you're)

Unit 4. Memos

Why is memo?

The memorandum (plural memoranda), affectionately called a 'memo', is a written communication from one person to another (or a group of people) within the same organization. Memos serve a variety of purposes:

- to inform of decisions,
- to request decisions, actions, etc.
- to provide information
- to remind someone of any kind action required

Just as letter-headed paper is used for letters, many organizations use pre-printed stationery for memos.

It is important that the memo headings show details of sender and recipient as well as reference and date.

Courtesy titles (Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.) are usually not included. If pre-printed memo forms are not used in your organization, the following headings are suggested.

After these memo headings, continue in the usual fully-blocked style. When more than one topic is dealt with it is good practice to use numbered points and

subheadings. A memo will not include a salutation and complimentary close, but it will usually be signed or initialed depending on the procedure adopted within individual organizations.

Structure

Tone

As you most likely know your recipients fairly well, memos are usually written in an informal style. You should aim to put over your message as concisely as possible while still being courteous, clear, concise and correct. The major consideration in composing memos should be the status of the sender and recipient in the organization, and of course the topic of the memo. Try to adopt a tone that reflects these factors.

USING LISTS AND BULLETS

Lists can be used in letters, e-mails, fax messages, memos, virtually any document. They are useful to set off important ideas. Your list could be a series of words, names, notes, whatever.

Items could be listed using numbers, letters or bullets. If there are rather a lot of points, numbers are better – then it's easy to refer to item number 3 or whatever. For a simple list of names or words, bullets are better.

Why use lists?

- They help you to organize your thoughts and your points.
- They help focus your reader's attention on important points.
- They help readers find your key points.
- They help to simplify detailed or complicated topics.
- They simplify the skimming process for busy readers.
- They enhance visual impact.

Displaying lists

Make sure you introduce your list appropriately so that your reader knows what to expect. Here are some examples.

Example 1

Piyush Koirala
BCA, MMAMC, Biratnagar
BCA Students Nepal

Be sure that all your list items are parallel in structure. In this example, every point in the list needs to follow the word 'by'.

You can improve your business writing by:

- 1 adopting a friendly, conversational writing style
- 2 reading your message out loud to check the tone
- 3 keeping to the point and staying focused
- 4 organizing your points carefully with my four-point plan
- 5 using language that the reader will understand.

Example 2

Here is a simple list of bullet points. Here all points begin with a verb, to follow the word 'to'. When writing a letter of complaint about something you have bought, remember to:

- describe the item that you bought
- say where and when you bought the item
- explain what is wrong and any action you have already taken
- mention names of anyone you have spoken to and what was discussed
- state what you expect to be done to rectify the situation.

Example 3

Use sub-headings as a brief cue for readers about what follows. Headings and subheadings help the reader by fulfilling several functions:

- Connection Headings are a visual indication of shifts from one topic to the next. They help readers focus and see the relationship between each section.
- Attention Informative headings grab the reader's attention. They also make it easier for readers to find the parts they need to refer to (or indeed skip).
- Organization Headings show the reader at a glance how the information is organized. They sort related information together, and they arrange all the facts into short sections.

MEMOS- KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1 Make a plan first before writing memos. Group your points together in a logical order.

- 2 Remember my four-point plan so that you draft your message in a logical structure.
- 3 Use simple, clear language that the reader will understand.
- 4 Give your memo an appropriate subject heading.
- 5 Adopt a tone that reflects the status of the sender and the reader as well as the topic of the memo.
- 6 Use a variety of presentation methods to enhance the display of your message.
- 7 Use lists and bullets where appropriate.
- 8 Avoid unnecessary expressions like 'Thank you' and 'Regards'.
- 9 Do not include a salutation or complimentary close on memos.
- 10 Sign your memo in the usual way.

Unit 5. Report

Types of report

Many reports are written in business. They are a very important method of gaining and giving information.

Although many reports are presented orally, for example at a meeting, reports are usually presented in writing.

Examples of some reports submitted in business follow.

Routine reports

- representatives' reports on sales visits
- managers' reports on the work of their departments
- equipment and maintenance report
- progress report
- safety report
- accident report.

Special reports

- reports written in response to requests for specific information
- reports made on a special topic after research and investigation
- report regarding a change of policy
- market research report.

The ultimate purpose of any report is to provide the foundation for decisions to be made and action taken.

Some reports consist of no more than a simple statement recording an event, a visit or some circumstances with a note of action taken. Other reports include detailed explanations of facts, conclusions, and perhaps recommendations for future action.

More detailed reports demand research which may involve interviews, visits questionnaires, investigations. The information may be presented in tabular or graphic form and the writer would need to produce clear conclusions and recommendations.

Whatever their purpose and length, all reports require the following special writing skills:

- the ability to record facts clearly and objectively
- the ability to interpret information and make conclusions
- the ability to present suggestions on ways in which a situation may be improved.

Formal Reports

Formal reports are usually written by a committee or group of people after fairly detailed investigation or research. They are often presented under the following prescribed series of headings:

Headings

There should be two headings to a report: the name of the company; the report heading (Report on ...).

Terms of reference

This section should state exactly why the report is being written. Why are you writing the report? What was requested? Who requested it? When were you asked to do it? A useful pattern for this section is:

To report on ... (subject) ... as requested by ... (name and title) on ... (date) ...

Procedure

Give a brief description of the methods used to collect the information. Perhaps interviews were held, visits made, questionnaires issued? Use numbered points if appropriate.

Findings

This will be the longest section of the report. Go through the procedure point by point and use numbers and sub-headings for this section. Under each heading state what information was gathered at each stage.

Conclusions

No new facts must be introduced in this section. You must look at the findings and state the logical implications of them. What can you infer or conclude from the findings?

Recommendations (if requested)

Again no new facts must be introduced here. On the basis of information presented in Findings and Conclusions, make some suggestions for action. Remember that the writer of a report cannot make decisions – he or she can only suggest what action should be taken.

Closing section

A report should be signed and there should be a name and title shown at the foot, plus the date the report was written.

Example of a short formal report follows

LANGLAND MANUFACTURING plc

REPORT ON POSSIBLE SUPPORT FOR STAFF FOOTBALL TEAM

TERMS OF REFERENCE

To report on the possibility of the company supporting the staff football team to play in a local league, as requested by Mr. Rashid Hassan, Office Manager, on 8 August 200–

PROCEDURE

25 members of staff and 10 keen football players were interviewed to ask for their opinion

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

- 1 There is a lot of general staff support for the football team
- 2 The players would like the company to supply the football strips for the team. This would not be expensive as it was felt that a good rate could be obtained from a supplier. The company name and logo would appear on the shirts. This would be good advertising.
- 3 The team would not expect the company to be involved in running the football team. A committee would be appointed to select the team and organize the football games. This could achieve good publicity if successful.

PROBLEMS

- 4 Problems could be encountered if other sports fans asked for similar support.
- 5 Some female staff felt that supporting a men-only team is unfair to women.
- 6 The company must consider the consequences of footballers being injured and unable to work.

CONCLUSIONS

Although supporting the football team could cause some problems, the company would receive good publicity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that support be given to a company-sponsored football team for one year, at the end of which it should be reviewed.

SHARON TAN (Miss)

Administration Officer

RH/ST

25 August 200—

Other formats for formal reports

It is sometimes felt that the format discussed above is suitable only for lengthy reports which stretch to many pages. Many writers are often uncomfortable with writing reports using this five-part structured format. The decision on how to present a report very often depends on the purpose of the report and the nature of the information it contains, also the preference of the writer. Look at these examples:

1 You are asked to discuss the arguments for and against a certain matter and make some recommendations:

- Introduction
- Advantages
- Disadvantages
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

2 You are asked to analyze some comment forms received from clients at a large hotel and make some recommendations

- Introduction
- Standard of service
- Facilities
- Eating places
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

The system of using a different structure and composing your own headings specific to the subject matter is illustrated here.

Format

Company's name

Report title

Introduction (who? what? why?)

List steps taken to gather information

Findings

use sub-headings to classify the information logically use enumeration
consistently remember to use reported/impersonal speech

Conclusions

state the logical implication of the findings

Recommendations if requested, recommend action

name/title/reference/date

COVERING MEMO

Whenever a free-standing report is issued, don't just issue the report on its own or leave it on someone's desk. It is courteous to attach a brief covering memo which explains it. Here is an example of a short covering memo.

Checklists for Complaining Report

1. State the facts

Reports set forward a series of facts obtained through study or investigation. Someone may be required to make a decision based on the information provided. Reports should be complete with nothing of relevance omitted and nothing irrelevant included.

2. Be objective

Keep your own opinions and preferences out of the report, unless they have been requested. Instead, you must act like a camera, impartially recording only what it sees.

3. Be logical

Classify the findings under headings and sub-headings, using numbered points. How you classify the material will depend on your brief and the subject matter.

4. Be consistent

Make sure all sentences in a series consistently follow the same grammatical pattern. Similarly, make sure that you use the same spacing throughout the report and that the headings and sub-headings are presented consistently. Attention to these points will make your report clear and will give a good impression.

5. Be concise

Avoid long explanations and keep to the point. Check that all the information is accurate and all the reasoning valid.

6. Be clear

Use a simple, easy to read style and presentation which will help the reader to understand the content easily.

Proposals

A proposal is a special type of report that is designed to present ideas and persuade the reader to accept them. A proposal will analyze a problem, present a solution and suggest an approach to solve the problem.

Piyush Koirala
BCA, MMAMC, Biratnagar
BCA Students Nepal

FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS

An initial study

Objective

To identify the factors involved in introducing flexible working hours, to examine their benefits and disadvantages and to recommend the best approach to take.

Summary

At present, almost all employees of ABC Ltd work from 9.00 to 5.00. A handful work from 9.30 to 5.30.

Many, though not all, staff are unhappy with this and would prefer a more flexible arrangement. Some are working mothers and would like to be able to take their children to and from school. Some, particularly the older employees, have sick or elderly relatives who make demands on their time which do not fit comfortably with their working hours.

For the company itself, this dissatisfaction among staff leads to low morale and reduced productivity. It also makes it harder to attract and retain good staff.

There are three basic options for the future:

1 Leave things as they are. This is obviously less demanding on resources than implementing a new system. At least we know it works even if it isn't perfect.

2 Highly flexible system. Employees would clock on and clock off anytime within a 12 1/2 hour working day until they have 'clocked up' 35 hours a week. This would be the hardest system to implement.

3 Limited flexibility. Staff could start work any time between 8.00 am to 10.00 am and work through for eight hours. This would not solve all employees' problems but it would solve most of them.

Proposal

Introduce a system of limited flexibility for now, retaining the option of increasing flexibility later if this seems appropriate.

Position

The current working hours at ABC Ltd are 9.00 to 5.00 for most employees, with a few working from 9.30 to 5.30.

Problem

Although this works up to a point, it does have certain disadvantages, both for the organization and for some of the employees.

The organization: The chief disadvantage of the current system is that many of the staff are dissatisfied with it.

This has become such a serious problem that it is becoming harder to attract and retain good staff. Those staff who do join the company and stay with it feel less motivated: this, as research has shown, means they are less productive than they could be.

The employees: Some employees are satisfied with their current working hours, but many of them find the present system restrictive. There are several reasons for this but the employees most strongly in favor of greater flexibility are, in particular:

- parents, especially mothers, who would prefer to be able to take their children to and from school, and to work around this commitment
- employees, many of them in the older age range, who have elderly or sick relatives who they would like to be more available for.

A more flexible approach would make it easier for many staff to fulfil these kinds of demands on their time.

An initial study questioned nearly 140 employees in a cross-section of ages. A large majority were in favor of a more flexible approach, in particular the women and the younger members of the company. It is worth noting that a minority of staff were against the introduction of flexible working hours. Appendix 1 gives the full results of this study.

Possibilities

Since this report is looking at the principle and not the detail of a more flexible approach, the options available fall broadly into three categories: retaining the present system, introducing limited flexibility of working hours, and implementing a highly flexible system.

Retaining the present system. I have already outlined above the problem with leaving things as they are. On the plus side however there are one or two points to make.

Although the system is not perfect, at least we know it works. The staff all signed their contracts on the understanding that the company worked to standard hours of business, and while it may not be ideal for them it is at least manageable. Better the devil you know.

Implementing any new system is bound to incur problems and expense, consequently retaining the present working hours is the least expensive option in terms of direct cost.

Highly flexible system. A highly flexible system would mean keeping the site open from, say, 7.30 am to 8.00 pm.

All staff are contracted to work a certain number of hours a week and time clocks are installed. Employees simply clock on and off whenever they enter or leave the building, until they have reached their full number of hours each week.

This system has the obvious benefit that it can accommodate a huge degree of flexibility which should suit the various demands of all employees. They could even elect to work 35 hours a week spread over only three days. A further benefit to the company would be that doctors' appointments and so on would no longer happen 'on company time' as they do at present. This system does have several disadvantages, however:

- Many staff regard occasional time off for such things as doctors' appointments or serious family crises as a natural 'perk' of the job. With this system they would have to make up the hours elsewhere. Not only would they lose the time off, but many would also feel that the company did not trust them. This would obviously be bad for company morale.
- It would be difficult to implement this system fairly. The sales office, for example, must be staffed at least from 9.00 to 5.30 every day. What if all the sales staff want to take Friday off? How do you decide who can and who can't? What if the computer goes down at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and there are no computer staff in until 7.30 the following morning?

Limited flexibility: This would mean asking employees to continue to work an eight hour day but give them a range of, say, ten hours to fit it into. They could start any time between 8.00 and 10.00 in the morning, so they would finish eight hours later – between 4.00 and 6.00.

On the plus side, this would give the employees the co-operation and recognition of their problems that many of them look for, and would therefore increase staff motivation. For some it would provide a way around their other commitments.

On the other hand, this approach still does not allow enough flexibility for some of the working mothers, in particular, who want to be available for their children at both ends of the day.

Proposal

Given the number of staff in favor of more flexible working hours, and the importance of staff motivation, it seems sensible to adopt some kind of flexible approach. But it is probably advisable to find a system that allows the significant minority who prefer to stay as they are to do so.

So which is the best system to choose? It is harder to go backwards than forwards in developing new systems: if the highly flexible approach failed it would be difficult to pull back to a less flexible system (in terms of keeping the staff happy). On the other hand, a limited degree of flexibility could easily be extended later if this seemed appropriate.

So at this stage it seems that the most workable system, which contains most of the benefits required by the employees, is the limited flexibility of working hours.

Appendix I

Table of employee responses to the proposal for flexible working hours

AGE MEN MENMEN WOMEN WOMENWOMEN

GROUP Total Positive Negative Total Positive Negative

number response response number response response

consultedconsulted

18-30 20 19 1 18 18 0

30-40 23 19 4 29 27 2

40-50 15 8 7 12 8 4

50-60 12 2 10 8 7 1

70 48 22 67 60 7

REPORT WRITING- KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1 Business reports help companies to make decisions and solve problems.
- 2 Proposals present ideas and persuade the reader to accept them.
- 3 Write reports in third person and reported speech.
- 4 Keep all the facts and information impartial and impersonal.
- 5 Use sub-headings to classify the information logically, breaking it down into logical sub-sections.

6 State the steps that were taken to collect the information at the beginning of your report.

7 Present conclusions based on the facts in the findings.

8 Suggest recommendations when they are requested.

9 Compose a covering memo when sending a free-standing report.

10 Remember that a report should be understandable by someone who has no prior knowledge of the subject.

Unit 6. Meetings

Meetings in Business

Many meetings take place in business and an effective meeting is an efficient tool in the communication process. Meetings enable face-to-face contact of a number of people at the same time. They provide a useful opportunity for sharing information, making suggestions and proposals, taking decision and obtaining instant feedback.

Active participation of all members of the meeting is usually encouraged. Meetings are used for a variety of purposes:

- to co-ordinate or arrange
- to give information activities
- to a group of people
- to report on some
- to obtain assistance activity or experience
- to put forward ideas or
- to create involvement grievances for discussion and interest

Types of Meetings

Formal Meeting

The rules of conduct of formal meetings are laid down in a company's Articles of Association and/or Constitution or Standing Orders. With such meetings a quorum must be present, i.e. the minimum number of people who should be present in order to validate the meeting. A formal record of these meetings must be kept, usually by the company secretary.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

AGMs are held once a year to assess the trading of the organization over the year. All shareholders are invited to attend the AGM but they must be given 21 days' notice.

Statutory meetings

Statutory meetings are called so that the directors and shareholders can communicate and consider special reports. Companies are required by law to hold these statutory meetings.

Board meetings

Board meetings are held as often as individual organizations require. They are attended by all directors and chaired by the chairman of the board.

Informal meetings

Informal meetings are not restricted by the same rules and regulations as formal meetings. Such meetings may take the form of brainstorming or discussion sessions where strict agendas may not be necessary and minutes may not be kept. However, it is usually considered good business practice for an agenda to be issued to all members prior to the meeting so that they can prepare adequately in order to make a valuable contribution.

Management meetings

These meetings are attended by a group of managers who may need to discuss a specific matter, report on progress or receive progress reports. For example, the marketing manager, sales manager, production manager and research and development manager may meet to discuss the launch of a new product being launched soon.

Departmental meetings

These meetings are called by the head of department or manager of a certain section. All staff will be invited to attend so that information can be passed on or reports received from some members of staff regarding a specific project.

Working parties

Working parties may be set up to work together on a specific project or problem. At meetings, progress reports will be given and decisions for further action taken.

Attending Meetings

Meetings probably account for 50–60 per cent of a manager's time in business. When they are conducted efficiently, meetings are a very effective way of helping the decision-making process, briefing teams, exchanging information and problem-solving. However, it is a sad fact that many meetings in business are unproductive because of poor management or because of being unsure of each individual's role in meetings.

As a member of any meeting, even if you are not the chairman, there is a lot you can do to help make meetings effective:

- 1 Understand the purpose of the meeting, as well as your role and what is expected of you.
- 2 Read all the papers in advance. Make some notes about any input you would like to make. Do your homework, talk to people who you may be representing at the meeting, get other people's views on important topics so that you have fuel for any discussions in the meeting.
- 3 Don't sit there silently. You are a member of the meeting for a reason, so be sure to give your opinions and take an active part in the meeting wherever possible.
- 4 Do not interrupt anyone who is speaking. Give everyone a chance to voice their own opinions. At an appropriate moment, give some praise if possible first and then give your own views. If you disagree with something, try to be as constructive as possible.
- 5 Watch the other members of the meeting and listen to them carefully. Watch body language, gestures, eye contact, movements, nuances and all the unique subtleties happening around the table.

Notice and Agenda

The success of a meeting depends on a variety of essential preparations. An important one is to ensure that all the documentation is dealt with efficiently. The notice and agenda are usually combined in one document. The portion at the top is known as the notice. This gives details of the type, place, day, date and time of the meeting.

The agenda is the middle portion of the document. This is the list of topics to be discussed at the meeting. On the example shown here note that the first three and final two items are known as ordinary business. These are items which will be included on every meeting agenda. After the opening items of ordinary, business there will be a list of special business – these are special matters to be discussed at this meeting only.

Chairperson's Agenda

The Chairman has an important responsibility to manage the meeting once it is in progress. He or she must allow everyone equal opportunity to participate in discussions and control the discussion in an orderly way. In order for the Chairman to lead the meeting effectively, he or she may have a special Chairman's agenda which contains extra notes for the Chairman to use when introducing each item.

The Chairman's agenda follows the same basic format as the notice and agenda but the right-hand side is left blank. This is where the Chairman will make notes of important points discussed during the meeting.

These notes should assist the Chairman when preparing the minutes.

MEETING- KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1 A notice and agenda is sent out to give all members advance notice of the purpose, date, time and venue of a meeting.
- 2 An agenda is a list of topics to be discussed at a meeting.
- 3 The agenda should have ordinary business at the beginning and the end – business that is discussed at every meeting.
- 4 Special business will be included in the central section of the agenda – business that is unique to each meeting.
- 5 The Chairman may have a special agenda with extra notes to help him manage the meeting.
- 6 Minutes are a record of a meeting and they are essential for everyone who attended as well as those who were absent.
- 7 Minutes may be presented in different formats depending on the preference of each company.
- 8 It is usual to include an 'Action' column stating who is responsible for dealing with each item.
- 9 The same headings should appear on the minutes as on the agenda.
- 10 Write minutes in past tense and third person using reported speech.

Unit 7. NOTICES, ADVERTISEMENTS AND LEAFLETS

Designing Notices

When designing a notice your aim must be to ensure that your notice is seen and acted upon where necessary. Long, rambling paragraphs will not achieve this aim. When designing notices bear in mind these guidelines:

- give the notice a clear heading
- use different size print for emphasis
- use sub-headings to break up the main information logically
- use asterisks/bullet points to display points on separate lines
- use the paper effectively to display the notice attractively
- include the name of the writer at the bottom as well as a reference and date
- receives attention and cooperation.

Here are three examples of effective notices that meet all these requirements.

Types of Advertisements

There are two kinds of advertisement that you may be involved in helping to design: the small ad or line advertisement, and the display ad.

Small ads or line ads

In these ads the information is run on from line to line, often using the same font throughout, with no special layout. Charges are made by the line and there is normally a minimum charge for three or four lines.

Lots of small ads appear in a relatively small space, so you must try to use an opening which will catch the reader's attention. Then give as much summarized information as possible in as few lines as possible. But make sure you choose the right wording when considering the words to fit in a small space.

Display adverts

Display advertisements may incorporate a variety of font styles and sizes. Artwork or color may be included. Charges will be based on the number of column centimeters, often with a minimum size. Information can be displayed within the advertisement to attract special attention to specific points.

Writing Style

When asked to compile an advertisement you must be able to pick out the main points or features of whatever is being advertised and then put them over in an interesting, attractive way. It is essential to aim for your advertisement to be 'seen' when it stands next to lots of other advertisements. Here is AIDA from the advertising department explaining the technique for meeting this objective:

Attention: You must attract the reader's attention.

Interest: Get the reader's interest by mentioning something that will appeal to them

Desire: arouse the reader's desire to buy, to attend a function to find out more or to contact the writer

Action: make the audience want to do something as a result of reading the ad.

You will achieve these AIDA objectives if you follow these guidelines:

- use a company logo, prominently displayed
- compose a catchy headline and display it prominently
- use spacing to advantage, giving special items prominence
- categorize the information using sub-headings, bullet points
- clearly state the action you want the reader to take
- make your advertisement eye-catching
- aim for your advertisement to stand out from all the others around it.

Leaflets

Most organizations produce leaflets or brochures for any number of reasons:

- to publicize goods or services
- to promote special events and promotions
- to give information of any kind.

Such leaflets may take the form of single page, so they could be designed as a folded document- A4 size could be folded once or twice to make four page or six page.

Designing Leaflets

Here are some guidelines to consider when designing leaflets:

1. Use a company logo, prominently displayed.
2. Use an appropriate heading that clearly states what the leaflet is about.
3. Consider carefully the information which needs to be included in the main body of the leaflet. Break it up according to different aspects of the main theme.
4. Use sub-headings and bullet points where possible.
5. Use straightforward, simple language and short sentences.
6. Be as persuasive as possible, making everything sound interesting and beneficial.
7. Use everyday language instead of technical jargon.
8. Aim for an effective and attractive display which uses space to advantage.
9. If you want a response give full details – what to do, who to contact, telephone number, etc.
10. If a portion is to be completed, refer to Unit 15 on form design.

Unit 8. Oral Presentation

A presentation is any opportunity to communicate your point of view or ideas to an audience. This can be informal or formal, impromptu or prepared, individual or group.

Although we may not address the media or large groups of people, in business we may make presentations to our:

- bosses
- new employees
- customers
- colleagues
- suppliers.

Also, let's not forget that in a social setting, almost everyone may be required to make a speech at a party, a social gathering, a wedding, or at a party.

This unit will introduce you to the art of making presentations or public speaking where you will be more powerful, more persuasive and more impressive as a public speaker. And also more confident as you will face the opportunity of making a speech with less fear.

We will cover the following important topics:

- **Planning**

- 1 Get to know your listeners
- 2 Analyze the circumstances around your talk
- 3 The location and the size of the audience

- **Writing**

- 4 Brainstorm the topic
- 5 Get the hard information
- 6 Write a draft and read it aloud
- 7 Use visual aids
- 8 Beyond the rough draft

- **Completing**

- 9 Practice, practice, practice
- 10 It's natural to feel nervous
- Deliver the presentation
- 11 Delivery of your speech
- 12 Handling questions

Get to know your listeners

One of the most common communication barriers in presentations is the speaker's assumption that they know and understand the audience. If you want to achieve your purpose, if you want your listeners to see the world from your perspective, then you need to construct messages that start with their way of seeing the world. Good speakers, in their preparation, clarify the interests and needs of their listeners and determine what values, hopes, advantages, fears and concerns their listeners have before they determine what it is they could say to those listeners.

Here are some you need to ask of two or three of the people who will be attending your presentation:

- What do you want to know about the topic? Be careful and tactful here as most people don't like to be exposed as ignorant or unknowledgeable.

- Do you know the knowledge level of the audience on this topic?
- Do you know why I'm giving this talk and why you're here?
- What sort of work have you done in this area?
- Why are you attending this presentation?
- Do you think that my topic will have an impact on your work?
- How interested are you in this topic?
- How long do you want me to present for?

Naturally, if you already have a certain amount of time allotted to you for your presentation, the last question may already be answered. If you question people carefully you may find they want you to talk briefly and then open up the meeting to questions and answers.

For example, asking, 'Are you interested in a 20-minute talk about Apple and IBM type computers?' will elicit a very different response from 'Have you ever used an Apple

Computer? What did you like about it?' The first question can be answered by a simple 'Yes', or 'No'. The second question demands a detailed answer.

So the more you know about your audience, the more you will be able to talk to them in language they understand. It's a good idea to start with the person who invited you to present. Quiz them as they will be able to make some suggestions as to how you can get a better feel of your audience.

Learn to answer questions strategically

'What's in it for me?' Your listeners always listen with this question in mind. This should guide both your topic and your sentence construction. 'What do I want to say?' You will have particular points that you want to make. Your goal must be to align your listener's needs and attitudes with your needs and attitudes. 'What is the most effective way of constructing and presenting the particular things I want to say to achieve my purpose?' Get to know about both your topic and your listeners. The two are always related.

Learn your audience's demographics

To establish your listener's values, priorities, and concerns you will need to have an idea of their demographic characteristics. You may be able to learn their age, gender, cultural identity, ethnic background, race, religious affiliations, and group memberships

A checklist on listening

- To be a good speaker, be a good listener.

- Audience analysis makes successful presentation planning. It is the starting point for the planning of any presentation.
- Make it a habit to gather information on demographic features of your audience – age, gender, occupation, cultural background, group memberships.
- Understand the role of the audience's attitude towards you as the speaker.
- Good presentations start where the audience is and then move them towards the speaker's point of view.
- What does the audience expect of you?
- Why are they here?
- What is their knowledge level?
- Do you expect friendliness, indifference or hostility?
- Will they be able to use what you are going to tell them?

Analyze the circumstances around your talk

Your presentation will be affected by location and the audience. In adjusting your

presentation to the audience, you have to decide:

- What level of language and style to use?
- What is the circumstance and occasion of your speech or talk?
- Is it a sales presentation, a speech at a wedding, or an informational speech?
- Is it a light-hearted, persuasive, political, joyful, passionate speech?
- What is the time length and situation of the presentation?

A checklist of questions about the audience

- How many people will there be in the audience?
- What is the age group of the audience?
- What are the language, literacy and numeracy levels of the audience?
- What is the gender make-up of the audience?
- What sort of work do the people do?
- Is the audience enthusiastic or depressed about the topic you have chosen?

- What has brought your audience together?

THE LOCATION AND THE SIZE OF THE AUDIENCE

The location of a meeting and the facilities provided will have a major bearing upon your ability to give an interesting presentation. If you have video, slide, audio, and overhead projector facilities, you will be able to illustrate your report.

A checklist for the venue

- The room size, seating arrangements, layout, set-up and acoustics
- The technical arrangements, e.g. microphones (either hand held or lapel mikes), power points, computer use, audio-visuals, lighting, music, and whether assistance is available (and have you notified your requirements in advance?)
- What controls are there for air-conditioning (too cold, too hot), lighting, moving people in/out?
- What are the seats like?
- Are there coffee facilities?

Brain Storming the Topic

To get further ideas on what you want to say, you should brainstorm the topic. This consists of writing down everything about the topic that comes into your head. Jot down anything you feel may be useful – quotes, ideas, anecdotes, facts, figures, examples, anything. Don't worry about organizing it yet, you can do that later. Just get your brain working and write down all you can think about the topic you are going to speak about.

Imagine that you are going to talk about a holiday trip to the Snow Mountains, and the enjoyment that can be had from such an adventure.

If you then have a close look at the notes you have written, you can probably find a theme that you can develop and that can become the central idea of the talk. Keep the early points in mind. Remember who the audience is going to be, try to include stories of your own, or stories that your audience don't already know. If you have some personal anecdote that will illuminate the story, jot it down.

At the end of the brainstorming you will have worked out a theme for your talk. You could argue that having a holiday in the Snow Mountains is a really refreshing and different holiday!

A checklist for brainstorming

- Do you already have some good stories, analogies or examples?
- Do you have the facts and statistics necessary to support your argument?
- Have you got the must-know, should-know and the nice-to-know points?
- Do you have more material than you need in case you need to stretch the presentation out?

Get the Hard Information

Now that you have your ideas in some kind of order, you have to gather sufficient evidence to back up your ideas. The quality of a good speech is often determined by the quality of the information it provides. Start now to read up and research as much information as possible on holidaying in the Snow Mountains. Can you find any interesting statistics?

Some unusual facts? Something that will keep your audience interested? For example, you could gather information from tourist associations about the frequency of visits to particular snowy areas of the world. You could research holiday packages from the backpacking variety right up to the five-star quality range! You could find out which country offers the best variety of snow ski holidays. Why not also get facts about how the holiday resorts started, and a bit of their history?

The facts, statistics, quotes and opinions that your research produces will add to the persuasiveness of your presentation. Remember to present statistics in an interesting and dramatic way. The value of facts and figures is two-fold. They lend authority to your presentation and increase your audience.

Checklist for your key facts

- Have you collected sufficient facts and figures to support your argument?
- Do you have good quotes that are entertaining and memorable for your audience?
- Have you checked to ensure that your information is relevant and up-to-date?
- Have you double-checked your information to make sure that it will withstand criticism and is accurate?

Write a Draft and Read Aloud

Once you have come up with a good idea and theme, done your research and have good quotes and a good solid body of interesting information, the best way to develop your speech is to let it stew for a while. The more time you let the

ideas float around in your head, the clearer they'll become and the easier you will be able to write them down.

When you write the first draft of your speech, it should contain the three basic elements:

- The introduction
- The discussion
- The conclusion

You will want to change the speech as you read over it and as you practice it. During this process, you will be able to polish your draft, add some things to it, and take some things away. Some things you will want to expand on and you will be able to improve your expression and provide better examples as you keep on drafting. Let us look at these three basic elements in detail.

The introduction

If the speech is a formal one, it is customary to thank the people who invited you there. You might also have to address and thank important people who are there at the presentation. Spend about 10% of your allotted time on your introduction. It has become an accepted procedure to grab the attention of your audience immediately.

Much like a newspaper headline, hit the audience between the eyes with a catchy headline that grabs their attention immediately. To help you, study the headlines in newspapers, or have a look at the headlines in the monthly magazines, and get an idea of how to write attention grabbing headlines.

After you have delivered the headline, follow it by a clear and concise statement of what you intend to talk about, 'Today, I'm going to show you how to ...' Express your point clearly and concisely so that your audience knows where you stand on this issue.

Checklist of questions to ask yourself about your introduction

- Do you have a headline that will 'grab' your audience's attention?
- Have you included a statement that clearly states your topic and expands your headline?
- Have you clearly stated your point-of-view and where you stand on the issues?
- Have you tested and practiced your introduction so that it is clear and easy to understand?

Checklist of points to remember

- Keep your examples on a personal level. People want to listen to your story, not a heap of dry facts.
- Verbal communication is the least successful way of communicating so keep to a fairly low number of points.
- Make your points clear.
- Use appropriate audio-visual aids to keep your audience interest up.
- Use the appropriate body gestures to help get your points across.
- Make sure you signpost along the way, i.e. keep your audience informed of where you are in your speech, 'There are five points, and the third point is...' so the audience knows how you are progressing and when you are going to finish.
- Do you have sufficient evidence to 'sway' or to persuade your audience to take action or to agree with your point of view?
- Have you picked several 'must-know' points that are powerful?
- Do you have a logical flow to your argument?
- Are your facts presented in an easy fashion so that the audience understands the information?

The conclusion

Audiences tend to remember the beginning and end of a speech. These are the parts of speech that your audience finds easiest to remember, so they can become the parts in which the most important information can be conveyed. So remember to signpost your audience when you are finishing your talk by pausing and announcing clearly 'in conclusion' or 'to sum up'. Once your audience knows that you will be winding up your presentation soon, they will pay more attention again and this is an opportunity for you to explain your main argument, or the points that you want to make, again.

Checklist to remember about your conclusion

- Repeat the important points.
- Use different words and different illustrations to get your point across.
- Keep your conclusion short and to the point (around 10% of the total speaking time).
- Try and end with a big bang. If you can think of a one-liner or a memorable expression, now is the time to use it.

- Use a key transition statement to show you are coming to the end of your presentation.
- Decide how you are going to summarize your argument.
- Have a clear call to action so that your audience will take action after you have finished your talk.