



BUSINESS COMMUNICATION & REPORT WRITING

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Evaluate written, oral, and visual communication and will be able to effectively choose communication methods that are appropriate to the topic, objective, and setting;
- ✓ Discuss various effective report writing techniques.

Business Communication & Report Writing

Business Communication has a highly intellectual and technical aspect. The rules, regulations and policies of a company have to be communicated to people within and outside the organization accurately. It is regulated by certain standards. Before, business communication was limited to paperwork, telephone calls, faxes, etc. But with the breakthroughs in technology, cell phones, video conferences, emails, and satellite communication revolutionized business communication.

Types of Business Communication:

- **Oral Communication** - can be either formal or informal. Generally, business communication must be formal in the context of meetings, interviews, group discussions, speeches, etc. On the other hand, an example of an informal business oral communication would be follow-up and face-to-face interaction to clients.
- **Written Communication**- from the word itself, it includes all kinds of written instruments such as memoranda, minutes of meetings, reports, manuals, etc.

Effective Business Communication Guidelines

To be able to effectively and clearly deliver the message across, certain principles must be applied. These principles provide guidelines for the content and the style of delivery or presentation which must be adapted to avoid the big problem of miscommunication. There are only seven C's to remember such as complete, concise, consideration, concrete, clear, courtesy, and correct.

1. Complete

Your business message is complete when it contains all facts the reader or listener needs for the reaction you desire. As you strive for completeness, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- a) Provide all necessary information - answering the five W's helps make messages clear: who, what, when, where and why.
- b) Answer all the questions being asked and carefully extract the questions: some may even appear buried within a paragraph. Locate them and answer them precisely.
- c) Give something extra, when desirable - use your good judgment in offering additional material if the sender's message was incomplete.

2. Concise

A concise communication is saying what you have to say in the fewest possible words without sacrificing the other C qualities. A concise message is complete without being wordy. To achieve conciseness, observe the following suggestions:

- a) Eliminate wordy expressions – use a single word in place of phrases. For example, use ‘now’ instead of ‘at this time’.
- b) Include only relevant material - delete irrelevant words and rambling sentences.
- c) Refrain from beating around the bush – unnecessary repetitions can lead to redundancy and dullness.

3. Consideration

Consideration means preparing every message with the message receivers in mind; always try putting yourself into their shoe. The three specific ways to indicate consideration are:

- a) Focus on “you” attitude instead of “I” and “we” - using “you” does help project the “you” attitude. However, do not overuse the word as it can also lead to a negative reaction.
- b) Show the audience some benefits that will catch the interest in the receiver - readers may react positively when benefits are shown to them.
- c) Use euphemisms – Learn how to substitute some sensitive words with euphemisms that will have same meaning like “financially challenged” instead of saying poor.

4. Concrete

Concrete communication means being specific, definite, and vivid rather than vague and general particularly when describing something and in giving directions.

Using denotative (direct, explicit, often dictionary-based) are highly encouraged rather than connotative words that have implied meaning such as idioms. The following guidelines should help you compose concrete yet convincing messages.

- a) Use specific facts and figures - whenever possible, use an exact, precise statement or a figure in place of a general word to make your message more concrete.
- b) Put action in your verbs - active verbs help make your message more specific, personal, concise, and emphatic.
- c) Choose vivid, image-building words - business writing uses less figurative language than does the world of fiction.

5. Clarity

Delivering the meaning of the message from your head into the head of your reader exactly is the purpose of clarity.

- a) Choose precise, concrete and familiar words – when the meaning of words is in doubt, use more familiar words; audiences will understand them better.
- b) Construct effective sentences and paragraphs – the important characteristics to consider are length (between 17 and 20 word for an average sentence), unity, organization, coherence, and emphasis (put main ideas up front within a sentence).

6. Courtesy

Knowing the profile of your audience allows you to use statements that will make them feel respected.

The following are the suggestions for generating a courteous tone:

- a) Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful, and appreciative
- b) Use expressions that show respect - omit irritating expressions and questionable humour.
- c) Choose non-discriminatory expressions.

7. Correct

Aside from the accuracy and truth in the content, correct technicalities must also be observed in a business including proper grammar, punctuation marks, and spelling. Also, the message must be grammatically perfect without compromising the quality and the meaning of the content by:

- a) Using the right level of language and avoid the use of jargons that will not be understood by everyone.
- b) Checking the accuracy of figures, facts, and words - a good check of your data is to have another person read and comment on the validity of the material.
- c) Not making paragraph-long sentences.

Report Writing

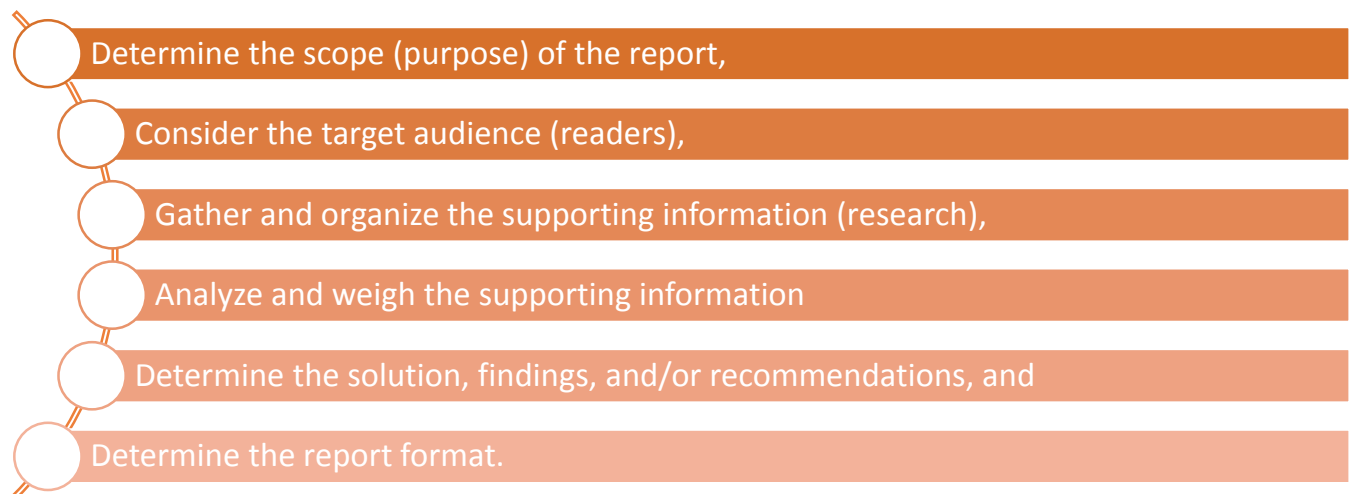
A Business Report is a medium which conveys information in light of decision making. These are statements that outline your objectives, your achieved targets, your upcoming strategies, your aims.....everything.

Some reports might present the actual solution to solve a business problem while other reports might record past business information that is used toward future business planning. The traditional business reports such as business plans serve to communicate the nature of the business and its objectives, the business management model, the operational plans, and the perceived viability of the enterprise.

Many people consider business reports as tedious and monotonous documents which take a great deal of time and effort to prepare. The reality is that they are an essential part of doing business to the extent that one's ability to be proficient in this area affects the ability of the business to pursue growth and development.

Although much of the research and analysis supporting the business report is derived from a systematic process, the actual preparation of the report is more dependent on the style than on a proven business template. Although most business reports templates are readily available, they are only a guide and the best reports are customized.

In order for the reader to have a clear understanding of why a report is written, the subject and purpose of the report must be expressly stated at the start or end. In generating a business report, the following steps should be considered:



Elements of Effective Business Report Writing

In presenting information, an effective business report should be accurate and objective.

Accurate

Accuracy in a business report includes accurate information and accurate writing. Since the information in a business report is used to make decisions, inaccurate information can lead to inaccurate decisions. Therefore, make sure your facts are right!

The accuracy of any report depends upon the correctness of the data that was gathered to prepare it. Use reliable sources and be accurate in reporting all information. The accuracy of writing depends on accurate writing mechanics (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) and accurate writing style.

To avoid writing style errors, use precise words and terms that are not likely to be misinterpreted by the reader.

Objectivity

In writing, objectivity means presenting material free from personal feelings or prejudice. You can achieve objectivity through the following technique:

- Make a distinction between facts and opinions - Limit the use of unsupported judgments and inferences,
- Report all pertinent information - Present both positive and negative aspects,
- Use bias-free language - Avoid emotional terms, such as guaranteed, tremendous, etc,
- Use impersonal style - Avoid interjecting a personal note, which might weaken a report by making it seem merely a statement of one person's opinion and belief, and
- Uses of Graphics in Business Reports – graphics for comparisons or projections are extremely effective.

Source: Adapted from "Guide to Business Report Writing" by Alan Thompson

Effective communication is a second backbone (the first being; Effective Marketing) of a company because this is something that will actually make or break all your marketing efforts.

This may be in form of written or oral communication. By written, we mean reports, financial statements, memos, invitations, and what not. Even marketing relies on effective communication in order for it to be effective!

By oral, we mean seminars, workshops, telemarketing, and day-to-day public relations be it over phone or in person. Everything depends on effective business communication. Your successful way of doing business crucially depends on the way your messages are delivered and received.

There was a time whereby people would just look at the flash news of what a business has to offer and what their benefits are. Today however, that is not the case. People engage in all sorts of communication either to gain more information or merely to negotiate.

Communication is important as you will require it to negotiate with your customers, to find out more about them and to assist in the success and growth of the organization as a whole.

Remember, as an employee of a certain organization, you are an agent for that organization and therefore the words that you choose will directly or indirectly reflect on your organization. Simply put, effective communication builds a company's long-lasting reputation. It is easy to accomplish this. However, it is vital to note that once you make your first statement, the only way to change is to develop.

Points to Note when Writing Business Communication Statements

1. Focus on Customers

Whether it's a large group or one-on-one, you must ensure that customers receive exactly what you want them to receive. No misunderstandings and certainly no room for failure.

The best way to do this is to "step into their shoes" while making your speech which means use more of "you" instead of "I". Extensive use of "I" will soon diminish their interest in your product or service and you'll end up talking to yourself! Use more "You" oriented sentences. Avoid putting any unnecessary information on the report. The simpler it is to read, the easier it is to understand.

2. Avoid Business Jargon

Remember not every customer you deal with is a Harvard dropout! With that in mind, unless you're dealing with someone from your own industry, workplace or perhaps someone who is familiar with business lingo, don't use it.

It is best to use layman's terms in all your oral and written communication when dealing with customers who are not familiar with such jargon. You will definitely lead towards communication failure if you use technical and business jargon with people who don't understand it.

3. Positive Impression

Imagine you're attending a high-tech software workshop. You have no idea who or what to expect yet because you're assumingly a software fan, you don't want to miss it.

Now during the launch, imagine seeing an extremely shabby looking speaker trying to sell the software to you! The first impression would truly be terrible.

Therefore, make great first impressions instead of pessimistic ones because you will reap positive results if you are successful at creating an excellent self-presentation.

4. Watch Accusations

Accusations can lead to many communication problems. Remember to always be polite. Raising your voice or using obscene language will certainly not help in making your point any clearer and will only worsen the situation and even lead to permanent business harm. Therefore, watch your words and keep your tone low.

5. Be Firm and Be on Track

Your only goal when dealing with business communication is that your message carries positive weight, enough information and simple enough for your customer to understand. This can be in form of written or oral communications.

Any customer will actively listen to you for two minutes after which his patience will start to wither and his mind will start to wander. Therefore, be precise, to the point, and on track with what you need to convey but also make sure you give them enough information to turn them into potential clients.

6. Importance of Proof-Reading and Practice

This is a very important aspect to consider when dealing with written communication. Issues like typos, wrong names, spelling, grammar, verbs, and tenses may create huge problems within the organization as part of either making new customer relations or perhaps retaining old ones.

If the communication is oral, then it is definitely recommended that you do multiple practice runs before actually presenting yourself to a listener. Practicing in front of the mirror, a friend, family, or colleague is found to be extremely helpful.

7. Make use of Graphs and Charts

A wise man once said, “A picture is better than a thousand words”. This is true when it comes to presenting large numbers, demographics, statistics and the likes. They are better presented by using graphs or charts because they are easily understood and forever captured in the minds of the concerned parties.

8. Don't Use References

Using references within a report only makes it harder for both the writer and the reader to understand. For the writer, it becomes more of a difficult job to dig up the right reference to a corresponding point and your reader will have to flip back and forth in the report just to understand a single point.

9. Use a Speech Model

No one wants to read a 40 page report if it isn't properly organized. This means that no matter how long your report is, if it is properly organized, professionally articulated and written to suit your readers, it is sure to be read...and sometimes re-read.

Speech Model is when you make a point, explain that point and then summarize that point. In simpler terms, make sure your report has a heading, a main body and a conclusion. Remember to keep it brief, to the point and easy to understand.

10. Use Headings and Sub-Headings

Make sure you include headings and sub-heading and put them in bold so that both you and the reader are able to browse through the report more easily. There's a saying that goes *"If You Can't Do It In Two Minutes, Don't Do It At All!"* This saying positively reflects on effective communication.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Report Writing in Business: The Effective Communication of Information CIMA Publishing (14 Jan 2003) By (author) Trevor J. Bentley*
- ✓ *Business Communication Today(Prentice Hall, 2003) by Courtland L. Bovee, John V. Thill, Barbara E. Schatzman*