CHAPTER 1

Business Communication, Management, and Success

Learning Objectives
After studying this chapter, you will know:

1. Why you need to be able to communicate well.
2. What the costs of communication are.
3. What the costs of poor communication are.
4. What the trends in business communication are.
5. What role conventions play in business communication.
6. How to solve business communication problems.
IN THE NEWS

Business Communication Lessons from Mars

Business communication problems occur everywhere, even in the depths of space. On September 23, 1999, NASA mission control lost contact with the Mars Climate Orbiter spacecraft just after it arrived at the planet Mars. The satellite vanished, and a subsequent investigation revealed that the main problem was a minor software programming error. So how is that a business communication problem? Because, according to the Mars Climate Orbiter Mishap Investigation Board report, that software error sent the satellite off course, but communication errors sent the software off course.

Like many business projects, the Mars Climate Orbiter involved a wide range of people doing a range of jobs, in a range of locations. In this case, the programmers who wrote the software that controlled the spacecraft’s engines worked in Great Britain, and used metric measurements in their calculations, while the engineers who made the satellite’s engines worked in the United States, and used English measurements. Both teams assumed that they were using the same measurement standards, neither team made any attempt to check, and no one else caught the error. With that failure, NASA lost a $125 million satellite and years of effort but gained a major public embarrassment.

It wasn’t just a case of two teams who didn’t talk to each other: the Investigation Board found communication problems throughout the project. Teams didn’t share information with each other or with management, and team members didn’t receive adequate training on critical equipment and processes. Those problems have proved difficult to fix: as of January 2007, NASA’s contractors were still communicating using different measurements. So for upcoming lunar missions, the moon base will use metric measures but the spaceships going to the moon won’t—and NASA will have to keep even more careful watch over communication between its project teams.

“In a professional setting, everything you do involves communication.”

In a professional setting, everything you do involves communication. Good business communication is about sharing information in ways that are useful to your co-workers, business partners, and clients: if the programmers, engineers, and managers at NASA had shared information, they could have saved the Mars Climate Orbiter. Good business communication is about building relationships and goodwill to create successful ventures: if the Mars Orbiter project teams had communicated more closely, they would have known what their co-workers needed for success.

Chapter Outline

Communication Ability = Promotability

“I’ll Never Have to Write Because . . .”

Communicating on the Job
- The Importance of Listening, Speaking, and Interpersonal Communication
- The Documents That Employees Write

The Cost of Communication

Costs of Poor Communication
- Wasted Time
- Wasted Efforts
- Lost Goodwill
- Legal Problems

Benefits of Improving Communication

Criteria for Effective Messages

Trends in Business and Administrative Communication
- Technology
- Focus on Quality and Customers’ Needs
- Entrepreneurship
- Teamwork
- Diversity
- Globalization and Outsourcing
- Legal and Ethical Concerns
- Balancing Work and Family
- Job Flexibility
- Rapid Rate of Change

Following Conventions

Understanding and Analyzing Business Communication Situations

How to Solve Business Communication Problems
- Answer the Six Questions for Analysis.
- Organize Your Information to Fit Your Audiences, Your Purposes, and the Situation.
- Make Your Document Visually Inviting.
- Revise Your Draft to Create a Friendly, Businesslike, Positive Style.
- Edit Your Draft for Standard English; Double-Check Names and Numbers.
- Use the Response You Get to Plan Future Messages.

How to Use This Book

Summary of Key Points

Business depends on communication. People must communicate to plan products and services; hire, train, and motivate workers; coordinate manufacturing and delivery; persuade customers to buy; and bill them for the sale. Indeed, for many businesses and nonprofit and government organizations, the “product” is information or services rather than something tangible. Information and services are created and delivered by communication. In every organization, communication is the way people get their points across and get work done.
Communication takes many forms: face-to-face or phone conversations, informal meetings, presentations, e-mail messages, letters, memos, reports, blogs, text messaging, and Web sites. All of these methods are forms of verbal communication, or communication that uses words. Nonverbal communication does not use words. Pictures, computer graphics, and company logos are non-verbal. Interpersonal nonverbal signals include how people sit at meetings, how large offices are, and how long someone keeps a visitor waiting.

**Communication Ability = Promotability**

Even in your first job, you’ll communicate. You’ll read information; you’ll listen to instructions; you’ll ask questions; you may solve problems with other workers in teams. In a manufacturing company, workers may be updating assembly or safety procedures. In an insurance company, clerks answer customers’ letters. Even “entry-level” jobs require high-level skills in reasoning, mathematics, and communicating. As a result, communication ability consistently ranks first among the qualities that employers look for in college graduates.¹

The advantage of communication skills became acutely important in this decade, after the booming economy of the 1990s and the expansion of Internet technology gave way to a more sober business environment. Robert O. Best, Chief Information Officer of UNUMProvident, an insurance corporation, cautions, “You used to be able to get away with being a technical nerd. . . . Those days are over.”² As more people compete for fewer jobs, the ones who will build successful careers are those who can communicate well with customers and colleagues—using words to teach, motivate, and build positive business relationships.

The National Commission on Writing surveyed 120 major corporations, employing nearly 8 million workers. Almost 70% of respondents said that at least two-thirds of their employees have writing responsibilities included in their position descriptions. E-mail and presentations with visuals (such as PowerPoint slides) were universal. Over half the respondents also reported other forms of communication as frequently required: memos and correspondence, 70%; formal reports, 62%; and technical reports, 59%. Respondents also noted that communication functions were least likely to be outsourced.³

Because communication skills are so important, good communicators earn more. Linguist Stephen Reder has found that among people with two- or four-year degrees, workers in the top 20% of writing ability earn, on average, more than three times as much as workers whose writing falls into the worst 20%.⁴ Jeffrey Gitomer, business consultant and author of best-selling business books, says there are three secrets to getting known in the business world; all these are communication skills:

1. Writing: “Writing leads to wealth.”
2. E-zine: “I reach more than 130,000 subscribers each week.”
3. Speaking: “The secret is being prepared.”⁵

“I’ll Never Have to Write Because . . .”

Some students think that a secretary will do their writing, that they can use form letters if they do have to write, that only technical skills matter, or that they’ll call rather than write. Each of these claims is fundamentally flawed.

Claim 1: Secretaries will do all my writing.

Reality: Because of automation and restructuring, job responsibilities in offices have changed. Today, secretaries and administrative assistants are likely to handle
Columbia Disaster Communication Failures

In 2003, the Columbia space shuttle disintegrated on re-entry, resulting in the deaths of all seven crew members. The independent research team investigating the disaster found communication problems to be the root cause of the accident. The researchers concluded that organizational barriers prevented effective communication of critical safety information and restrained communication of professionals.

The report identified the following communication problems:

- Communication flow between managers and subordinates: Managers did not heed the concerns of the engineers regarding debris impacts on the shuttle. Throughout the project, communication did not flow effectively up to or down from program managers.
- Circulation of information among teams: Although engineers were concerned about landing problems and therefore conducted experiments on landing procedures, the concerns were not relayed to managers or to system and technology experts who could have addressed the concerns.
- Communication sources: Managers received a large amount of their information from informal channels, which blocked relevant opinions and conclusions from engineers.


Part 1  The Building Blocks of Effective Messages

Complex tasks such as training, research, and database management for several managers. Managers are likely to take care of their own writing, data entry, and phone calls.

Claim 2:  I’ll use form letters or templates when I need to write.
Reality:  A form letter is a prewritten, fill-in-the-blank letter designed to fit standard situations. Using a form letter is OK if it’s a good letter. But form letters cover only routine situations. The higher you rise, the more frequently you’ll face situations that aren’t routine, that demand creative solutions.

Claim 3:  I’m being hired as an accountant, not a writer.
Reality:  Almost every entry-level professional or managerial job requires you to write e-mail messages, speak to small groups, write documents, and present your work for annual reviews. People who do these things well are likely to be promoted beyond the entry level. Employees in jobs as diverse as firefighters, security professionals, and construction project managers are all being told to polish their writing and speaking skills.

Claim 4:  I’ll just pick up the phone.
Reality:  Important phone calls require follow-up letters, memos, or e-mail messages. People in organizations put things in writing to make themselves visible, to create a record, to convey complex data, to make things convenient for the reader, to save money, and to convey their own messages more effectively.

Writing is an essential way to make yourself visible, to let your accomplishments be known.

Communicating on the Job

Communication—oral, nonverbal, and written—goes to both internal and external audiences. Internal audiences (Figure 1.1) are other people in the same organization: subordinates, superiors, peers. External audiences (Figure 1.2) are people outside the organization: customers, suppliers, unions, stockholders, potential employees, government agencies, the press, and the general public.

The Importance of Listening, Speaking, and Interpersonal Communication

Informal listening, speaking, and working in groups are just as important as writing formal documents and giving formal oral presentations. As a newcomer in an organization, you’ll need to listen to others both to find out what you’re supposed to do and to learn about the organization’s values and culture. Informal chitchat, both about yesterday’s game and about what’s happening at work, connects you to the grapevine, an informal source of company information. You may be asked to speak to small groups, either inside or outside your organization. Networking with others in your office and in town and working with others in workgroups will be crucial to your success.

These skills remain important as you climb the corporate ladder. Good managers interact with their employees. They listen to lunch room conversations; they chat with employees over coffee. They polish their speaking skills on audiences varying in size from one to hundreds, and sometimes thousands. Such interactions are even more critical to success in light of the drive to make organizations more efficient and customer-focused. Managers today often report to more than one boss—for example, the leader of their function (such as sales or finance) and the leader of their project or customer group. At
I developed my communication skills as a technique of survival. I was born in poverty and spent two years on the welfare rolls, and I learned early that I had to communicate or die. And so I talked my way out of poverty—I communicated my way to the top.

This rule made me a millionaire. For the only way I got to where I am today was by persuading thousands of blacks and whites, some of whom were very prejudiced, that the only way they could get what they wanted was by helping me get what I wanted. All the law and prophecy of communication theory can be found in that formula.

international consulting firms, consultants may report to a director of their area of specialty and the head of their geographic region. Their communication must not only flow in several directions but cross cultural barriers as well.

The Documents That Employees Write

People in organizations produce a large variety of documents. Figures 1.3 and 1.4 list a few of the specific documents produced at Ryerson Tull. The company, which fabricates and sells steel, aluminum, other metals, and plastics to a wide

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### Figure 1.3  Internal Documents Produced in One Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Description of document</th>
<th>Purpose(s) of document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transmittal</td>
<td>Memo accompanying document, telling why it’s being forwarded to the receiver</td>
<td>Inform; persuade reader to read document; build image and goodwill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly or quarterly report</td>
<td>Report summarizing profitability, productivity, and problems during period. Used to plan activity for next month or quarter</td>
<td>Inform; build image and goodwill (report is accurate, complete; writer understands company)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and procedure bulletin</td>
<td>Statement of company policies and instructions (e.g., how to enter orders, how to run fire drills)</td>
<td>Inform; build image and goodwill (procedures are reasonable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request to deviate from policy and procedure bulletin</td>
<td>Persuasive memo arguing that another approach is better for a specific situation than the standard approach</td>
<td>Persuade; build image and goodwill (request is reasonable; writer seeks good of company)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance appraisal</td>
<td>Evaluation of an employee’s performance, with recommended areas for improvement or recommendation for promotion</td>
<td>Inform; persuade employee to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo of congratulations</td>
<td>Congratulations to employees who have won awards, been promoted, or earned community recognition</td>
<td>Build goodwill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Figure 1.4  External Documents Produced in One Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Description of document</th>
<th>Purpose(s) of document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotation</td>
<td>Letter giving price for a specific product, fabrication, or service</td>
<td>Inform; build goodwill (price is reasonable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claims adjustment</td>
<td>Letter granting or denying customer request to be given credit for defective goods</td>
<td>Inform; build goodwill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job description</td>
<td>Description of qualifications and duties of each job. Used for performance appraisals, setting salaries, and hiring</td>
<td>Inform; persuade good candidates to apply; build goodwill (job duties match level, pay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-K report</td>
<td>Report filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission detailing financial information</td>
<td>Inform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual report</td>
<td>Report to stockholders summarizing financial information for year</td>
<td>Inform; persuade stockholders to retain stock and others to buy; build goodwill (company is a good corporate citizen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank-you letter</td>
<td>Letter to suppliers, customers, or other people who have helped individuals or the company</td>
<td>Build goodwill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Business communication involves paper documents, electronic communications, but most of all, interpersonal abilities. A variety of industrial clients, has processing centers and sales offices across the United States and Canada.

All of the documents in Figures 1.3 and 1.4 have one or more of the three basic purposes of organizational writing: to inform, to request or persuade, and to build goodwill. When you inform, you explain something or tell readers something. When you request or persuade, you want the reader to act. The word request suggests that the action will be easy or routine; persuade suggests that you will have to motivate and convince the reader to act. When you build goodwill, you create a good image of yourself and of your organization—the kind of image that makes people want to do business with you.

Most messages have multiple purposes. When you answer a question, you’re informing, but you also want to build goodwill by suggesting that you’re competent and perceptive and that your answer is correct and complete. In a claims adjustment, whether your answer is yes or no, you want to portray that the reader’s claim has been given careful consideration and that the decision is fair, businesslike, and justified.

The Cost of Communication

Writing costs money. Besides the cost of computers, software, printers, paper, and sometimes postage, there is the major expense: employees’ time. Even short e-mails take time, especially now that employees write so many of them.

Document cycling processes also increase costs. In many organizations, all external documents must be approved before they go out. A document may cycle from writer to superior to writer to another superior to writer again 10 or more times before final approval.

Longer documents can involve large teams of people and take months to write. An engineering firm that relies on military contracts for its business calculates that it spends $500,000 to put together an average proposal and $1 million to write a large proposal. Good communication is worth every minute it takes and every penny it costs. In 2005/2006, the consulting firm Watson Wyatt conducted a study of the cost of communication.
335 US and Canadian companies with an average of 13,000 employees each and median annual revenues of $1.8 billion. The study found that those companies who best communicated with their employees enjoyed “greater employee engagement and commitment, higher retention and productivity, and—ultimately—better financial performance. . . .

- They boasted a 19.4% higher market premium (the degree to which the company’s market value exceeds the cost of its assets).
- They were 4.5 times more likely to report high levels of employee engagement.
- They were 20% more likely to report lower turnover rates.”8

Another significant cost of communication is e-mail storage. In addition to the exponential increase in frequency, e-mails are also growing in size. Furthermore, about a fifth of them come with attachments. And businesses are storing much of this huge load on their servers. But the cost of the hardware is only about 20% of the storage cost; the remainder is for administering and maintaining the archives. These costs include downtime when storage systems crash and time spent retrieving lost or corrupted messages. Chevron estimates its employees spend 1 1/2 to 3 days a month searching for needed information.9

Costs of Poor Communication

Poor communication can cost billions of dollars. We all can think of examples.

- As the chapter opener and the sidebar on page 6 show, the space industry has had billion dollar mistakes—mistakes where miscommunications were major contributing factors as confirmed by official government investigations.
- Hurricane Katrina caused billions of dollars of damage—damage that was worsened by horrendous miscommunications between federal, state, and private relief organizations (see sidebar on page 9).
- Amtrak cited communication failure for its loss of millions of dollars when it had to take the Acela trains out of service for weeks. Poorly written inspection instructions led to inadequate checks on brake discs.10
- The National Commission on Writing reported to Congress that states spend almost a quarter billion dollars annually on remedial writing instruction for their employees, and that indirect costs of that poor writing—from the confusions and errors caused—are probably even higher.11
- From figures provided by the members of the Business Roundtable, the National Commission on Writing calculated the annual private sector costs of writing training at $3.1 billion.12 These figures do not include the retail and wholesale trade businesses.

Not all communication costs are so dramatic. When communication isn’t as good as it could be, you and your organization pay a price in wasted time, wasted effort, lost goodwill, and legal problems.

Wasted Time

Bad writing takes longer to read as we struggle to understand what we’re reading. How quickly we can do this is determined by the difficulty of the subject matter and by the document’s organization and writing style.
Second, bad writing may need to be rewritten. Many managers find that a disproportionate amount of their time is taken trying to explain to subordinates how to revise a document. Poorly written documents frequently cycle to other people for help.

Third, ineffective communication may obscure ideas so that discussions and decisions are needlessly drawn out.

Fourth, unclear or incomplete messages may require the receiver to gather more information and some receivers may not bother to do so; they may make a wrong decision or refuse to act.

**Wasted Efforts**

Ineffective messages don’t get results. A receiver who has to guess what the sender means may guess wrong. A reader who finds a letter or memo unconvincing or insulting simply won’t do what the message asks.

One company sent out past-due bills with the following language:

> Per our conversation, enclosed are two copies of the above-mentioned invoice. Please review and advise. Sincerely, . . .

The company wanted money, not advice, but it didn’t say so. The company had to write third and fourth reminders. It waited for its money, lost interest on it—and kept writing letters.

**Lost Goodwill**

Whatever the literal content of the words, every letter, memo, or report serves either to build or to undermine the image the reader has of the writer.

Part of building a good image is taking the time to write correctly. Even organizations that have adopted casual dress still expect writing to appear professional and to be free from typos and grammatical errors.

Messages can also create a poor image because of poor audience analysis and inappropriate style. The form letter printed in Figure 1.5 failed because it was stuffy and selfish. Four different customers called to complain about it. When you think how often you are annoyed by something—a TV commercial, a rude clerk—but how rarely you call or write the company to complain, you can imagine the ill will this letter generated.

As the comments in red show, several things are wrong with the letter in Figure 1.5.

1. **The language is stiff and legalistic.** Note the sexist “Gentlemen:” and obsolete “Please be advised,” “herein,” and “expedite.”

2. **The tone is selfish.** The letter is written from the writer’s point of view; there are no benefits for the reader. (The writer says there are, but without a shred of evidence, the claim isn’t convincing.)

3. **The main point is buried** in the middle of the long first paragraph. The middle is the least emphatic part of a paragraph.

4. **The request is vague.** How many references does the supplier want? Are only vendor references OK, or would other credit references, like banks, work too? Is the name of the reference enough, or is it necessary also to specify the line of credit, the average balance, the current balance, the years credit has been established, or other information? What “additional financial information” does the supplier want? Annual reports?
Bank balance? Tax returns? The request sounds like an invasion of privacy, not a reasonable business practice.

5. **Words are misused** (*herein* for *therein*), suggesting either an ignorant writer or one who doesn’t care enough about the subject and the reader to use the right word.

**Legal Problems**

Poor communication choices can lead to legal problems for individuals and organizations. The news is full of examples. US Representative Mark Foley resigned after his instant messages to House pages were published. E-mails helped bring about the fall of senior Enron executives, Boeing CEO Harry Stonecipher, Credit Suisse First Boston banker Frank Quattrone, Merrill Lynch analyst Henry M. Blodgett, Hewlett-Packard Chairperson Patricia Dunn, and Wal-Mart Vice Presidents Julie Roehm and Sean Womack. One San Francisco law firm says that 70% of their routine evidence now comes from e-mails.¹³

In particular, letters, memos, e-mails, and instant messages create legal obligations for organizations. When a lawsuit is filed against an organization, the lawyers for the plaintiffs have the right to subpoena documents written by employees of the organization. These documents may then be used as evidence, for instance that an employer fired an employee without adequate notice or that a company knew about a safety defect but did nothing to correct it.

These documents may also be used as evidence in contexts the writer did not intend. This means that a careless writer can create obligations that the organization does not mean to assume. For instance, a letter from a manager
telling a scout troop they may not visit a factory floor because it is too dangerous could be used in a worker’s compensation suit.14

Careful writers and speakers think about the larger social context in which their words may appear. What might those words mean to other people in the field? What might they mean to a judge and jury?

Benefits of Improving Communication

Better communication helps you to

- **Save time.** Eliminate the time now taken to rewrite badly written materials. Reduce reading time, since comprehension is easier. Reduce the time taken asking, “What did you mean?”
- **Make your efforts more effective.** Increase the number of requests that are answered positively and promptly—on the first request. Present your points—to other people in your organization; to clients, customers, and suppliers; to government agencies; to the public—more forcefully.
- **Communicate your points more clearly.** Reduce the misunderstandings that occur when the audience has to supply missing or unclear information. Make the issues clear, so that disagreements can surface and be resolved more quickly.
- **Build goodwill.** Build a positive image of your organization. Build an image of yourself as a knowledgeable, intelligent, capable person.

Criteria for Effective Messages

Good business and administrative communication meets five basic criteria: it’s clear, complete, and correct; it saves the audience’s time; and it builds goodwill.

1. **It’s clear.** The meaning the audience gets is the meaning the communicator intended. The audience doesn’t have to guess.
2. **It’s complete.** All of the audience questions are answered. The audience has enough information to evaluate the message and act on it.
3. **It’s correct.** All of the information in the message is accurate. The message is free from errors in spelling, grammar, word order, and sentence structure.
4. **It saves the receiver’s time.** The style, organization, and visual or aural impact of the message help the receiver read, understand, and act on the information as quickly as possible.
5. **It builds goodwill.** The message presents a positive image of the communicator and his or her organization. It treats the receiver as a person, not a number. It cements a good relationship between the communicator and the receiver.

Whether a message meets these five criteria depends on the interactions among the communicator, the audience, the purposes of the message, and the situation. No single set of words will work in all possible situations.

Trends in Business and Administrative Communication

Both business and business communication are changing. Ten trends in business, government, and nonprofit organizations affect business and administrative communication: Technology changes, including information overload and data...
security versus privacy; a focus on quality and customers’ needs; entrepreneurship; teamwork; diversity; globalization and outsourcing; legal and ethical concerns; balancing work and family; job flexibility; and the rapid rate of change.

**Technology**

In the current technological age, different forms of media are encompassing all parts of life. For instance, in 2007, the average American spends

- 1,555 hours watching television.
- 974 hours listening to the radio.
- 195 hours using the Internet.
- 86 hours playing video games.

These numbers of hours spent with media are expected to rise significantly in future years.\(^{15}\)

The business world is no exception when it comes to technology. It continually embraces all forms that help increase productivity and save money. Technology advancements provide instant communication with the click of a button. Moreover, technology makes communications across the globe seem much closer. Almost all office employees are expected to know how to navigate through the Web and to use word processing, e-mail, spreadsheet, database, and presentation software.

The following sections—electronic tools, information overload, and data security versus privacy—discuss some key issues of technology use in professional organizations.

**Electronic Tools**

Businesses are quick to adopt new forms of technology that can enhance the experience of workers and improve the bottom line. New software programs and devices continually enter the market to help businesses. However, acquiring new technology and helping workers master it entails an enormous capital investment. Learning to use new-generation software and improved hardware takes time and may be especially frustrating for people who were perfectly happy with old software. Some of the most popular workplace devices that improve productivity are wikis, social-networking tools, portable media players, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and telepresences.

**Wikis**  With the popularity of Web sites like Wikipedia, the business world has been quick to follow suit. Many organizations are using wikis, an online form of content knowledge management, in which users can post information or collaborate on projects. The access to these wikis is limited to employees of the particular organization using them, much like intranets. One way for employees to use the wikis is to bookmark Web pages with a short summary and upload the entry to the system. Once there, other employees can quickly search for information using keywords. In addition, wikis reduce the amount of e-mailing of drafts among employees who are collaborating on a project. As an added bonus, every change made to documents on a wiki is tracked.

**Social-networking tools**  Following in the footsteps of MySpace and Facebook, larger organizations are adapting social-networking tools designed specifically for businesses. The software allows users to post a profile, blog, or useful links which allow workers to interact on a more personal level. Moreover, employees can share client information, and the social-networking tools may promote collaboration. The access to the social network is usually limited to an organization’s employees.
Portable media players  Portable media players (like iPods, MP3 players, and compatible cell phones) feature the ability to broadcast streaming video and audio. Some organizations give these devices to their employees loaded with recordings of meetings, new product information, or general announcements. These devices help keep employees connected, even when they’re not always in the office.

Personal digital assistant  PDAs, such as Treo or BlackBerry (sometimes called Smartphones or wireless handheld devices), allow users to send and receive e-mail, access Web sites, conduct word processing, and make telephone calls. Many of these devices also have touch screens. Like portable media players, these devices also can broadcast streaming video and audio. With the full functionality of these devices, employees can literally be connected to their work 24/7.

Telepresence  Telepresence is the new high-end videoconferencing that puts older versions to shame by using 50-inch plasma screens and broadcast-quality cameras to create virtual meetings that are almost lifelike. These video meetings can occur across different time zones or between different nations instantaneously. However, state-of-the-art telepresence rooms cost anywhere from $150,000 up to $1,000,000. Some of the cost is associated with the actual equipment necessary to create a room, but most of the cost comes from the large amounts of bandwidth required for the conferencing. While the initial price seems high, some organizations, and the makers of these systems, quickly counter that the system will pay for itself within a few months as the amount of national or international travel is greatly reduced. Moreover, meetings never have to be delayed or postponed because of late flights or weather problems. Some estimates suggest that by 2010 telepresence rooms will see a 22% increase in sales from the $1.15 billion they grossed in 2006.16

Information Overload

New technology saves time, but it also leads to a new problem: information overload. Workers are becoming overwhelmed with all the information available to
them. Cable, RSS feeds, Web sites, listservs, and blogs increase access to news at all levels, including news in one’s professional field. The ease of desktop publishing has increased the flow of newsletters, reports, and flyers even from individual units within a business. The amount of information is becoming unmanageable:

- A Google search for information on e-mail offers over 2 million entries as of May 2007. A search for listserv offers over 32 million.
- One big legal case can use over 2 million pages of documents.\(^{17}\)
- DuPont has a document warehouse with over 200,000 boxes, each box containing about 2,500 pages.\(^{18}\)
- Chevron processes 2 million e-mails daily. The company estimates it now has 1,250 terabytes of data, where one terabyte equals the data of 1 million books.\(^{19}\)

Perhaps the biggest problem for many employees is the amount of e-mail. IDC, a research consulting firm, estimates 84 billion e-mails are sent daily.\(^{20}\) Spam clutters mailboxes—or leads to filters that stop some needed e-mail. Spam also means that many people do not open e-mail if they do not recognize either the sender or the topic. On a smaller level, workers forward unwanted jokes, pictures, and URLs. Workers who become e-mail addicts, sending too many e-mails with too little content, find that their e-mails are being opened last, if at all. Too many people forward too many messages to uncaring receivers, and the “Reply to All” button is getting a notorious reputation. A study conducted by Basex, another research firm, discovered that more people (31%) labeled normal e-mail as “most disruptive” than did so for spam (27%).\(^{21}\)

**Data security versus privacy**

As electronic information increases, so do concerns about data theft. Just as individuals take steps—like not providing important identification numbers by e-mail—to prevent identity theft, so do organizations take steps to protect their data. Organizations are now monitoring many different kinds of electronic interactions. According to a 2005 survey by the American Management Association of 526 companies,

- 76% monitor Internet usage.
- 55% store and review e-mail.
- 51% use video surveillance.
- 50% store and review computer files.
- 36% monitor computer usage.
- 22% record phone calls.\(^{22}\)

The same study also showed that 35% track keystrokes (and time spent at the computer).\(^{23}\) Because of findings from such monitoring, some companies are blocking access to particular Web sites, especially Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and online shopping sites. The companies claim that heavy usage of these sites slows down company business such as file transfers and e-mail.\(^{24}\)

Other surveillance techniques use GPS (global positioning system) chips to monitor locations of company vehicles, as well as arrival and departure times at job sites. Data from Smart Tags on cars, showing exactly when a particular vehicle was at a particular toll station, are being used in court cases. Cell phones give approximate location signals that are accurate enough to help law enforcement officials locate suspects.\(^{25}\)
Still other security measures include bans on electronic devices such as Palm Pilots, BlackBerrys, and MP3 players. Some companies are even disabling extra USB connections to ensure employees cannot attach these devices. Others are performing random checks of laptops to look for unauthorized or unsecured files and using scans of fingerprints, eyes, or faces to limit and track access to specific computers.26

The surveillance does not necessarily stop when employees leave their offices or cars. It can continue to the company parking areas, and even employees’ personal blogs. Companies such as Google and Delta Air Lines have fired workers for content on their personal blogs. Although many workers believe their blogs are protected by the first amendment, the truth is that in most states, companies can fire employees for almost any reason except discrimination.27

Focus on Quality and Customers’ Needs

After declining during the late 1990s, customer satisfaction among American consumers has been generally on the rise. This trend has a real payoff for businesses; higher levels of the American Customer Satisfaction Index are associated with stronger sales.28 James Rosenfield, an expert in direct marketing, provides some numbers that help explain the relationship between satisfaction and sales:

Unhappy customers in industrialized countries historically tell 15 people about their experiences. [On the Internet] with one keystroke, you can now tell 150 or 1,500 or 15,000.29

Cellular phone technology is spreading worldwide.
Part 1  The Building Blocks of Effective Messages

Not only does superior customer service sell, it also increases business performance. A University of Michigan study showed that companies with high customer satisfaction scores outperformed the S&P 500, producing higher stock prices and less volatile stock values and cash flows.  

Offering superior customer service doesn’t always mean spending extra money. Southwest Airlines customer service agent Sharron Mangone convinced an entire gate area to join in a “biggest hole in the sock” contest while they waited for their plane.  

To notify customers of new merchandise, Nordstrom added RSS feeds to its Web site.  

To attract patients, hospitals and health care facilities are improving communication, including accurate estimates of wait times and improved explanations of medical procedures, exams, and tests.

Communication is at the center of the focus on quality and customers’ needs. Brainstorming and group problem solving are essential to develop more efficient ways to do things. Then the good ideas have to be communicated throughout the company. Innovators need to be recognized. And only by listening to what customers say—and listening to the silences that may accompany their actions—can an organization know what its customers really want.

Entrepreneurship

Since 1980, the number of businesses in the United States has risen faster than the civilian labor force. The US Census Bureau counted 15 million individual proprietorships (self-employed workers without employees) in 2002.  

Entrepreneurship is so popular that many business schools now offer courses, internships, or whole programs in starting and running a business.

Some established companies are trying to match the success and growth rate of start-ups by nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit within their organizations. Innovators who work within organizations are sometimes called intrapreneurs. A classic article in the Harvard Business Review made famous the examples of 3M (where researchers can spend 15 percent of their time on ideas that don’t need management approval), Thermo Electron (where managers can “spin out” promising new businesses), and Xerox (where employees write business proposals competing for corporate funds to develop new technologies).

Entrepreneurs have to handle all the communication in the organization: hiring, training, motivating, and evaluating employees; responding to customer complaints; drafting surveys; writing business plans; making presentations to venture capitalists and marketing the product or service.

Teamwork

More and more companies are getting work done through teams. Teamwork brings together people’s varying strengths and talents to solve problems and make decisions. Often, teams are cross-functional (drawing from different jobs or functions) or cross-cultural (including people from different nations or cultural groups served by the company). Teams, including cross-functional teams, helped Sarasota Memorial Hospital resolve major problems with customer and employee satisfaction. For example, team members from the emergency room recorded every step in the process from pulling into the parking lot through decisions about patient care, and then they eliminated unnecessary steps. The ER team worked with the laboratory staff to improve the process of getting test results. At Michelin, the French tire maker, teams bring together people from the United States and Europe. According to the company’s chemical purchasing manager for Europe, the exchange between the two continents helps employees on both sides of the Atlantic understand each other’s perspectives and needs.
The prevalence of teams puts a premium on learning to identify and solve problems, to share leadership, to work with other people rather than merely delegating work to other people, to resolve conflicts constructively, and to motivate everyone to do his or her best job. To learn more about working in teams, see Chapter 14 ➤.

Diversity

Teams put a premium on being able to work with other people—even if they come from different backgrounds.

Women, people of color, and immigrants have always been part of the US workforce. But for most of our country’s history, they were relegated to clerical, domestic, or menial jobs. Even when men from working-class families began to get college degrees in large numbers after World War II, and large numbers of women and minorities entered the professions in the 1960s and 1970s, only a few made it into management. Now, US businesses realize that barriers to promotion hurt the bottom line as well as individuals. Success depends on using the brains and commitment as well as the hands and muscles of every worker.

In the last decade, we have also become aware of other sources of diversity beyond those of gender and race: age, religion, class, regional differences, sexual orientation, physical disabilities. Helping each worker reach his or her potential requires more flexibility from managers as well as more knowledge about intercultural communication. And it’s crucial to help
workers from different backgrounds understand each other—especially when continuing layoffs make many workers fear that increased opportunities for someone else will come only at a cost to themselves.

Treating readers with respect has always been a principle of good business and administrative communication. The emphasis on diversity simply makes it an economic mandate as well. To learn more about diversity and the workforce, read Chapter 13 ➤.

**Globalization and Outsourcing**

In the global economy, importing and exporting are just a start. More and more companies have offices and factories around the world:

- Starbucks is serving coffee in China.
- McDonald’s is serving veggie burgers in India, where cattle are sacred.
- Alcoa, Inc., an aluminum producer, has expanded its operations in Brazil, Russia, and China.
- 3M decided to increase its operations to include China, India, Korea, and Poland.37

The site of the store, factory, or office may not be the site of all the jobs. A data center in Washington can support many workers in India as businesses are outsourcing domestically and globally. Outsourcing means going outside the company for products and services that once were produced by the company’s employees. Companies can outsource technology services, customer service, tax services, legal services, accounting services, benefit communications, manufacturing, and marketing. Outsourcing is often a win–win solution: the company saves money or gets better service, and the outsourcers make a profit. In *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman says “the accountant who wants to stay in business in America will be the one who focuses on designing creative, complex strategies. . . . It means having quality-time discussions with

Many businesses are outsourcing their customer service operations, as well as accounting, legal services, and manufacturing.

**Online Acronyms**

E-mail writers often use the following abbreviations. The quick pace of instant messaging has made these even more popular.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASAP</th>
<th>As soon as possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRB</td>
<td>Be right back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTW</td>
<td>By the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CU</td>
<td>See you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWOT</td>
<td>Complete waste of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EML</td>
<td>E-mail me later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAQ</td>
<td>Frequently asked questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMTA</td>
<td>Great minds think alike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAE</td>
<td>In any event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMHO</td>
<td>In my humble opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOW</td>
<td>In other words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOL</td>
<td>Laughing out loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRN</td>
<td>No reply necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTOH</td>
<td>On the other hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROTFL</td>
<td>Rolling on the floor laughing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THX</td>
<td>Thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTYL</td>
<td>Talk to you later</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a more complete listing of electronic abbreviations, check out the following Web site: [http://searchcrm.techtarget.com/sDefinition0_sid11_gci211776.00.html](http://searchcrm.techtarget.com/sDefinition0_sid11_gci211776.00.html).
clients.” He sees the work of the future as customization, innovation, service, and problem solving.

All the challenges of communicating in one culture and country increase exponentially when people communicate across cultures and countries. Succeeding in a global market requires intercultural competence, the ability to communicate sensitively with people from other cultures and countries, based on an understanding of cultural differences. To learn more about international communication, see Chapter 13.

Legal and Ethical Concerns

Legal fees cost US businesses millions of dollars. The price of many simple items, such as ladders, is inflated greatly by the built-in reserve to protect the manufacturer against lawsuits. Companies are finding that clear, open communication can reduce lawsuits by giving all the parties a chance to shape policies and by clarifying exactly what is and isn’t being proposed.

Ethical concerns don’t carry the same clear dollar cost as legal fees. But when the Internet stock bubble burst at the beginning of this decade, the plunging stock prices and an overall economic slowdown were accompanied by a wave of news stories about unethical and illegal corporate practices. As investors and consumers heard the accusations of accounting fraud at WorldCom, HealthSouth Corporation, Enron, and Adelphia Communications, many felt distrustful of businesses in general. At other companies, including ImClone and Tyco International, executives were accused of enriching themselves at their companies’ expense. Such breaches of financial ethics at the top of a company have tainted, and even destroyed, entire organizations. The public outcry motivated Congress to pass the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, requiring corporations to engage in much more careful control and reporting of their financial activities.

The public distrust and government regulation that followed the recent scandals have renewed attention to corporate ethics. One of the newer ethical and legal concerns involves backdating of executive stock options, a process which was used to change stock-sale proceeds (subject to ordinary income taxes) to capital gains, which were taxed at roughly half the rate. Since the proceeds being taxed can be millions of dollars, the difference is significant. SEC (Securities & Exchange Commission) investigations into backdating have led to companies correcting tax filings and restating financial result.

As Figure 1.6 suggests, language, graphics, and document design—basic parts of any business document—can be ethical or manipulative. Persuasion and gaining compliance—activities at the heart of business and organizational life—can be done with respect or contempt for customers, co-workers, and subordinates.

Ethical concerns start with telling the truth and offering good value for money. Organizations must be concerned about broader ethical issues as well: being good environmental citizens, offering a good workplace for their employees, contributing to the needs of the communities in which they operate.

Balancing Work and Family

To reduce turnover, respond to a declining labor force, and increase employee satisfaction, companies are trying to be more family friendly by proving flexible time, telecommuting, or some other type of flexible option. The balance of work and family is becoming such a popular topic that the Wall Street Journal now runs a regular column called “Work and Family.” A 2005 National Study of Employers (NSE) found that employers are increasingly offering employees
options such as flexible work hours, time off for family and personal needs, and extended career breaks for caregiving. At McGraw-Hill, 60% of the employees work at home at least some of the time and can choose a shortened week with a compressed schedule, part-time work, job sharing, or telecommuting. Aflac allows employees to adjust and compress their work day to include both on- and off-site schedules. PricewaterhouseCoopers created the “Full Circle” program which allows women to leave the company for five years while keeping in touch with current employees. During the five years, employees have the option to return to the company at any time.

At times, employees find ways other than physical presence to demonstrate their commitment and enthusiasm for organizational goals. Due to technology advances, employees can use laptops, BlackBerrys, e-mail, or cell phones to do work at any time, including weekends and evenings. The downside of this trend is that sometimes work and family life are not so much balanced as blurred. For instance, many employers are giving portable media players to workers for training courses, language lessons, and general organizational announcements to hear on their own time. Some employees are also expected to conduct business 24-hours a day because of different time zones of workplaces. The flexibility of employees is necessary in an age of downsizing and globalization, but it means that families are being impacted.

Figure 1.6 Ethical Issues in Business Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner of conveying the message</th>
<th>Qualities of the message</th>
<th>Larger organizational context of the message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language, Graphics, and Document Design</td>
<td>• Is the message an ethical one that treats all parties fairly and is sensitive to all stakeholders?</td>
<td>• How does the organization treat its employees? How do employees treat each other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the message audience-friendly? Does it respect the audience?</td>
<td>• Have interested parties been able to provide input into the decision or message?</td>
<td>• How sensitive is the organization to stakeholders such as the people who live near its factories, stores, or offices and to the general public?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do the words balance the organization’s right to present its best case with its responsibility to present its message honestly?</td>
<td>• Does the audience get all the information it needs to make a good decision?</td>
<td>• Does the organization support employees’ efforts to be honest, fair, and ethical?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do graphics help the audience understand? Or are graphics used to distract or confuse?</td>
<td>• Is information communicated in a timely way, or is information withheld to reduce the audience’s power?</td>
<td>• Do the organization’s actions in making products, buying supplies, and marketing goods and services stand up to ethical scrutiny?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the design of the document make reading easy? Does document design attempt to make readers skip key points?</td>
<td>• Is information communicated so the audience can grasp it or are data “dumped” without any context?</td>
<td>• Is the organization a good corporate citizen, helpful rather than harmful to the community in which it exists?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactics Used to Shape Response</td>
<td>• Are the arguments logical? Are they supported with adequate evidence?</td>
<td>• Are the organization’s products or services a good use of scarce resources?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are the emotional appeals used fairly? Do they supplement logic rather than substituting for it?</td>
<td>• Does the organizational pattern lead the audience without undue manipulation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the organizational pattern lead the audience without undue manipulation?</td>
<td>• Are the tactics honest? That is, do they avoid deceiving the audience?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Job Flexibility

In traditional jobs, people did what they were told to do. Now, they do whatever needs to be done, based on the needs of customers, colleagues, and anyone else who depends on their work. They help team members finish individual work; they assist office mates with pressing deadlines. They are resourceful: they know how to find information and solution ideas. They work extra hours when the task demands it. They are ready to change positions and even locations when asked to do so. They need new skill sets even when they don't change jobs.

At Sarasota Memorial Hospital, food service workers do more than bring food to patients; they open containers, resolve problems with meals, help patients read their menus, and adjust orders to meet patients’ preferences. This attentiveness not only serves the patients; it is part of a team-spirited approach to patient care that in this case frees nurses to do other work.44 The experience at Sarasota Memorial is backed up by research suggesting that the most effective workers don't see work as assigned tasks. Instead, they define their own goals based on the needs of customers and clients.45

With flatter organizations, workers are doing a much wider variety of tasks. Today’s secretaries, as mentioned earlier, are likely to be researching, planning meetings, and keeping records of the department’s expenses. Even as more bank customers use ATMs for deposits and withdrawals, banks keep tellers on hand to help with more complicated problems and to sell financial products.

Your parents may have worked for the same company all their lives. You may do that, too, but you have to be prepared to job-hunt—not only when you finish your degree but also throughout your career. That means continuing to learn—keeping up with new technologies, new economic and political realities, new ways of interacting with people.

Rapid Rate of Change

The flexibility required for the modern job market is just one area in which change is defining the workplace. Jobs that are routine can readily be done in other countries at lower cost. Many US jobs have already been subject to such “offshoring,” and more are sure to follow. The work that remains in the United States is more likely to be complex work requiring innovation, flexibility, and adaptation to new learning.46

As any employee who has watched his or her job go overseas can testify, change—even change for the better—is stressful. Many people, especially those who have felt battered by changes in the workplace, fear that more change will further erode their positions. Even when change promises improvements, people have to work to learn new skills, new habits, and new attitudes. To reduce the stress of change, scholars suggest reducing the number of major, radical changes and relying more on frequent, small, incremental changes.47

Rapid change means that no college course or executive MBA program can teach you everything you need to know for the rest of your working life. You'll need to stay abreast of professional changes by reading trade journals as well as professional Web sites and blogs, participating in professional listservs, and attending professional events. Continue to refine your skills and learn new ones. Take advantage of your company’s training courses and materials; volunteer for jobs that will help you gain new skills and knowledge. Pay particular attention to your communication skills; they become even more important as you advance up your career ladder. A survey of 1,400 financial executives found that 75% considered oral, written, and interpersonal skills even more important for finance professionals now than they were just five years ago.48
The skills you learn can stand you in good stead for the rest of your life: critical thinking, computer savvy, problem solving, and the ability to write, to speak, and to work well with other people. It’s almost a cliché, but it is still true: the most important knowledge you gain in college is how to learn.

**Following Conventions**

Conventions are widely accepted practices you routinely encounter. For example, a traditional classroom convention is for instructors to distribute a course syllabus to students near the beginning of the semester. The document wouldn’t make much sense if distributed during the final week because the appropriate context would have passed. Moreover, the document would not function correctly if it did not include conventional elements such as due dates or required readings.

Organizational settings also have conventions particular to specific organizations. You wouldn’t write an analytical report to your boss who only wanted a “yes” or “no” on whether you could make the scheduled meeting with potential clients. You would send the more appropriate and conventional response—an e-mail.

Similarly, common business communications have conventions. These conventions help people recognize, produce, and interpret different kinds of communications. Each chapter in this textbook presents conventions of traditional business documents. For example, Chapter 8 discusses conventions of job application letters, Chapter 12 highlights conventions of persuasive messages, and Chapter 17 talks about conventions of delivering oral presentations.

The key to using conventions effectively is to remember that they always need to fit the rhetorical situation—they always need to be adjusted for the particular audience, context, and purpose. For instance, Chapter 11 provides
Identity theft is such a growing concern that some companies make it the main focus of their business.

guidelines on constructing negative messages. However, you will need to adapt these guidelines based on the way your organization presents their negative messages. Some organizations will use a more formal tone than others; some present negative news bluntly, while others ease into it more gently.

Since every organization will be unique in the conventions they follow, the information presented in this text will provide a basic understanding of common elements for particular genres. You will always need to adjust the basics for your particular needs.

The best way to learn conventions in a particular workplace is to see what other workers are doing. How do they communicate with each other? Do their practices change when they communicate with superiors? What kinds of letters
Records of e-mails, instant messages, telephone records, and Web searches can be tracked by your employer and used in lawsuits. You should always observe professional practices while in the workplace.

and memos do they send? How much do they e-mail? What tone is preferred? Close observation will help your communications fit in with the conventions of your employer.

Understanding and Analyzing Business Communication Situations

The best communicators are conscious of the context in which they communicate; they’re aware of options.

Ask yourself the following questions:

• **What’s at stake—to whom?** Think not only about your own needs but also about the concerns your boss and your audience will have. Your message will be most effective if you think of the entire organizational context—and the larger context of shareholders, customers, and regulators. When the stakes are high, you’ll need to take into account people’s feelings as well as objective facts.

• **Should you send a message?** Sometimes, especially when you’re new on the job, silence is the most tactful response. But be alert for opportunities to learn, to influence, to make your case. You can use communication to build your career.

• **What channel should you use?** Paper documents and presentations are formal and give you considerable control over the message. E-mail, phone calls, and stopping by someone’s office are less formal. Oral channels are better for group decision making, allow misunderstandings to be cleared up more quickly, and seem more personal. Sometimes you may need more than one message, in more than one channel.

• **What should you say?** Content for a message may not be obvious. How detailed should you be? Should you repeat information that the audience already knows? The answers will depend on the kind of message, your purposes, audiences, and the corporate culture. And you’ll have to figure these things out for yourself, without detailed instructions.

• **How should you say it?** How you arrange your ideas—what comes first, second, and last—and the words you use shape the audience’s response to what you say.
How to Solve Business Communication Problems

When you’re faced with a business communication problem, you need to develop a solution that will both solve the organizational problem and meet the psychological needs of the people involved. The strategies in this section will help you solve the problems in this book. Almost all of these strategies can also be applied to problems you encounter on the job.

• **Gather knowledge.** What are the facts? What can you infer from the information you’re given? What additional information might be helpful? Where could you get it? What emotional complexities are involved?

• **Use the six questions for analysis in Figure 1.7 to analyze your audience, your purposes, and the situation.** Try to imagine yourself in the situation, just as you might use the script of a play to imagine what kind of people the characters are. The fuller an image you can create, the better.

• **Brainstorm solutions.** In all but the very simplest problems, there are several possible solutions. The first one you think of may not be best. Consciously develop several solutions. Then measure them against your audience and purposes: Which solution is likely to work best?

• **If you want to add or change information, get permission first.** You can add facts or information to the problems in this book only if the information (1) is realistic, (2) is consistent with the way real organizations work, and (3) does not change the point of the problem. If you have any questions about ideas you want to use, ask your instructor. He or she can tell you before you write the message.

Sometimes you may want to use a condition that is neither specified in the problem nor true in the real world. For example, you may want to assume you’re sending a letter in April even though you’re really writing it in October. Change facts only with your instructor’s approval.

Use this process to create good messages:

Answer the six questions for analysis in Figure 1.7.

Organize your information to fit your audiences, your purposes, and the context.

Make your document visually inviting.

Revise your draft to create a friendly, businesslike, positive style.

Edit your draft for standard spelling, punctuation, and grammar; double-check names and numbers.

Use the response you get to plan future messages.

**Answer the Six Questions for Analysis.**

The six questions in Figure 1.7 help you analyze your audience(s), purpose(s), and the organizational context.

1. **Who is (are) your audience(s)? What audience characteristics are relevant for this particular message? If you are writing or speaking to more than one person, how do the people in your audience differ?**

   How much does your audience know about your topic? How will they respond to your message? Some characteristics of your audience will be irrelevant; focus on ones that matter for this message. Whenever you address several people or a group, try to identify the economic, cultural, or situational differences that may affect how various subgroups may respond to what you have to say.
2. What are your purposes in communicating?

What must this message do to solve the organizational problem? What must it do to meet your own needs? What do you want your audience to do? To think or feel? List all your purposes, major and minor. Specify exactly what you want your audience to know or think or do. Specify exactly what kind of image of yourself and of your organization you want to project.

Even in a simple message, you may have several related purposes: to announce a new policy, to make the audience aware of the policy’s provisions and requirements, and to have them feel that the policy is a good one, that the organization cares about its employees, and that you are a competent communicator and manager.

3. What information must your message include?

Make a list of the points that must be included; check your draft to make sure you include them all. To include information without emphasizing it, put it in the middle of a paragraph or document and present it as briefly as possible.

4. How can you build support for your position? What reasons or audience benefits will your audience find convincing?

Brainstorm to develop reasons for your decision, the logic behind your argument, and possible benefits to the audience if they do as you ask. Reasons and audience benefits do not have to be monetary. Making the audience’s job easier or more pleasant is a good audience benefit. In an informative or persuasive message, identify at least five audience benefits. In your message, use those that you can develop most easily and most effectively.

Be sure the benefits are adapted to your audience. Many people do not identify closely with their organizations; the fact that the organization benefits from a policy will help the individual only if the saving or profit is passed directly on to the employees. Instead, savings and profits are often eaten up by returns to stockholders, bonuses to executives, and investments in plants and equipment or in research and development.

5. What objection(s) can you expect your audience to have? What negative elements of your message must you de-emphasize or overcome?

Some negative elements can only be de-emphasized. Others can be overcome. Be creative: Is there any advantage associated with (even though not caused by) the negative? Can you rephrase or redefine the negative to make the audience see it differently?
6. What aspects of the total situation may affect audience response? The economy? The time of year? Morale in the organization? The relationship between the audience and the communicator? Any special circumstances?

Audiences may like you or resent you. You may be younger or older than they are. The organization may be prosperous or going through hard times; it may have just been reorganized or may be stable. All these different situations will affect what you say and how you say it.

Think about the news, the economy, the weather. Think about the general business and regulatory climate, especially as it affects the organization specified in the problem. Use the real world as much as possible. Think about interest rates, business conditions, and the economy. Is the industry in which the problem is set doing well? Is the government agency in which the problem is set enjoying general support? Think about the time of year. If it’s fall when you write, is your business in a seasonal slowdown after a busy summer? Gearing up for the Christmas shopping rush? Or going along at a steady pace unaffected by seasons?

To answer these questions, draw on your experience, your courses, and your common sense. Read The Wall Street Journal or look at a company’s Web site. Sometimes you may even want to phone a local business person to get information. For instance, if you needed more information to think of audience benefits for a problem set in a bank, you could call a local bank to find out what services it offers customers and what its rates are for loans.

Organize Your Information to Fit Your Audiences, Your Purposes, and the Situation.

You’ll learn several different psychological patterns of organization later in this book. For now, remember these three basic principles:

1. Put good news first.
2. In general, put the main point or question first. In the subject line or first paragraph, make it clear that you’re writing about something that is important to the reader.
3. Disregard point 2 and approach the subject indirectly when you must persuade a reluctant audience.

Make Your Document Visually Inviting.

A well-designed document is easier to read and builds goodwill. To make a document visually attractive

- Use subject lines to orient the reader quickly.
- Use headings to group related ideas.
- Use lists and indented sections to emphasize subpoints and examples.
- Number points that must be followed in sequence.
- Use short paragraphs—usually six typed lines or fewer.

If you plan these design elements before you begin composing, you’ll save time and the final document will probably be better.

The best physical form for a document depends on how it will be used. For example, a document that will be updated frequently needs to be in a loose-leaf binder so the reader can easily throw away old pages and insert new ones.
Help Your Customers (to) Fish

Fish, a business best seller for over a decade, presents the Fish philosophy. Under this philosophy, managers and employees use a friendly, businesslike, positive style with these basic elements:

• **Choose your attitude.** Employees at any job can choose the attitude toward the work they perform. Not all jobs are glamorous: the work of a fish seller is difficult, but the employees at Pike Place Fish choose to have “playful, cheerful” attitudes toward work. Choose your responses to the work you perform.

• **Play.** Work is serious business, but you can have fun while you work. At Pike Place Fish, employees throw fish. At First Guaranteed, employees turn on small lights when they have a good idea. The benefits to playing at work are low turnover, pride in the work, increased sales, and energy toward the work.

• **Make their day.** Customers should be included in the fun. Pike Place Fish selects customers to help catch the thrown fish. Respectfully engage customers to create positive energy and goodwill.

• **Be present.** Employees should be focused and engaged at work so they can help their colleagues and customers.

How can you adapt the Fish philosophy in your workplace and life?


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### Revise Your Draft to Create a Friendly, Businesslike, Positive Style.

In addition to being an organizational member or a consumer, your reader has feelings just as you do. Writing that keeps the reader in mind uses you-attitude. Read your message as if you were in your reader’s shoes. How would you feel if you received it?

Good business and administrative writing is both friendly and businesslike. If you’re too stiff, you put extra distance between your reader and yourself. If you try to be too chummy, you’ll sound unprofessional. When you write to strangers, use simple, everyday words and make your message as personal and friendly as possible. When you write to friends, remember that your message will be filed and read by people you’ve never even heard of: avoid slang, clichés, and “in” jokes.

Sometimes you must mention limitations, drawbacks, or other negative elements, but don’t dwell on them. People will respond better to you and your organization if you seem confident. Expect success, not failure. If you don’t believe that what you’re writing about is a good idea, why should they?

You emphasize the positive when you

• Put positive information first, give it more space, or set it off visually in an indented list.

• Eliminate negative words whenever possible.

• Focus on what is possible, not what is impossible.

### Edit Your Draft for Standard English; Double-Check Names and Numbers.

Business people care about correctness in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. If your grasp of mechanics is fuzzy, if standard English is not your native dialect, or if English is not your native language, you’ll need to memorize rules and perhaps find a good book or a tutor to help you. Even software spelling and grammar checkers require the writer to make decisions. If you know how to write correctly but rarely take the time to do so, now is the time to begin to edit and proofread to eliminate careless errors. Correctness in usage, punctuation, and grammar is covered in Appendix B ➤.

Always proofread your document before you send it out. Double-check the reader’s name, any numbers, and the first and last paragraphs.

### Use the Response You Get to Plan Future Messages.

Evaluate the feedback, or response, you get. The real test of any message is “Did you get what you wanted, when you wanted it?” If the answer is no, then the message has failed—even if the grammar is perfect, the words elegant, the approach creative, the document stunningly attractive. If the message fails, you need to find out why.

Analyze your successes, too. You know you’ve succeeded when you get the results you want, both in terms of objective, concrete actions and in terms of image and goodwill. You want to know why your message worked. Often, you’ll find that the principles in this book explain the results you get. If your results are different, why? There has to be a reason, and if you can find what it is, you’ll be more successful more often.
How to Use This Book

This book has many aids to help you learn the material.

- Chapter outlines, learning objectives, and headings all provide previews of the contents. They can give you hooks on which to hang the information you are reading.
- Examples of written documents provide illustrations of effective and ineffective communications. Comments in red ink highlight problems; those in blue ink note effective practices.
- Words and phrases in bold are defined in the glossary at the end of the book.
- Sidebars provide workplace examples of ideas discussed in the text. They are categorized for you by the icons that appear beside them. A gold star with any icon signifies a classic example.
  - On-the-job examples have flip chart icons.
  - Ethics and legal examples have scale icons.
  - Web sites have a hand holding an @ sign.
  - Technology examples have laptop icons.
  - International examples have globe icons.
  - Fun examples have balloon icons.
- Chapter summaries at the end of each chapter, and review questions at the beginning of each set of chapter exercises, help you review the chapters for retention.

The last problem in each set of chapter exercises is an ongoing case to provide you with a richer context for problem solving. It involves the home store chain Mosaic, and various characters.

Mosaic, headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, is a nationwide home store chain that sells furniture, bedding, kitchenware, and bath accessories targeted at middle-class households. Its main competitors are IKEA, Crate & Barrel, and Pottery Barn. Mosaic has stores in 32 of the continental United States and is always looking to expand nationally and possibly even internationally. The chain also offers customers the convenience of shopping for merchandise online without ever leaving their homes.

The organization fosters a diverse work environment and places high emphasis on collaboration among workers. Moreover, it is nationally ranked in the Top 100 Best Places to Work.

The three main characters in the case are Yvonne, Demetri, and Sarah. Yvonne heads the Communications Department at Mosaic’s headquarters and oversees two junior managers, Demetri and Sarah, who are also responsible for one or two other workers. Demetri is responsible for the communication publications for the physical stores, while Sarah is in charge of communications for the Web site. Yvonne’s Communication Department oversees publication of routine mass correspondences with customers, production of Mosaic’s annual report, and assemblage of training manuals for store managers/employees. It also hosts training sessions on Mosaic’s style of professional communication.

Summary of Key Points

- Communication helps organizations and the people in them achieve their goals. The ability to write and speak well becomes increasingly important as you rise in an organization.
People put things in writing to create a record, to convey complex data, to make things convenient for the reader, to save money, and to convey their own messages more effectively.

Internal documents go to people inside the organization. External documents go to audiences outside: clients, customers, suppliers, stockholders, the government, the media, and the general public.

The three basic purposes of business and administrative communication are to inform, to request or persuade, and to build goodwill. Most messages have more than one purpose.

Poor writing wastes time, wastes effort, and jeopardizes goodwill.

Good business and administrative writing meets five basic criteria: it’s clear, complete, and correct; it saves the reader’s time; and it builds goodwill.

To evaluate a specific document, we must know the interactions among the writer, the reader(s), the purposes of the message, and the content. No single set of words will work for all readers in all situations.

Ten trends affecting business and administrative communication are technology changes, including information overload and data security versus privacy; a focus on quality and customers’ needs; entrepreneurship; teamwork; diversity; globalization and outsourcing; legal and ethical concerns; balancing work and family; job flexibility; and the rapid rate of change.

To understand business communication situations, ask the following questions:

- What’s at stake—to whom?
- Should you send a message?
- What channel should you use?
- What should you say?
- How should you say it?

The following process helps create effective messages:

- Answer the analysis questions in Figure 1.7.
- Organize your information to fit your audiences, your purposes, and the context.
- Make your document visually inviting.
- Revise your draft to create a friendly, businesslike, positive style.
- Edit your draft for standard English; double-check names and numbers.
- Use the response you get to plan future messages.

Use these six questions to analyze business communication problems:

1. Who is (are) your audience(s)? What characteristics are relevant to this particular message? If you are writing or speaking to more than one person, how do the people in your audience differ?
2. What are your purposes in communicating?
3. What information must your message include?
4. How can you build support for your position? What reasons or benefits will your audience find convincing?
5. What objection(s) can you expect your audience to have? What negative elements of your message must you de-emphasize or overcome?
6. What aspects of the total situation may affect audience response? The economy? The time of year? Morale in the organization? The relationship between the audience and communicator? Any special circumstances?
A solution to a business communication problem must both solve the organization’s problem and meet the needs of the writer or speaker, the organization, and the audience.

CHAPTER 1 Exercises and Problems

1.1 Reviewing the Chapter

1. Why do you need to be able to communicate well? (LO 1)
2. What are some myths about workplace communication? What is the reality for each myth? (LO 1)
3. What are the costs of communication? (LO 2)
4. What are the costs of poor communication? (LO 3)
5. What are the 10 trends in business communication? What do these trends mean for you? (LO 4)
6. What role do conventions play in business communication? (LO 5)
7. What are the components of a good problem-solving method for business communication opportunities? (LO 6)

1.2 Assessing Your Punctuation and Grammar Skills

To help you see where you need to improve in grammar and punctuation, take the Diagnostic Test, B.1, Appendix B.

1.3 Letters for Discussion—Landscape Plants

Your nursery sells plants not only in your store but also by mail order. Today you’ve received a letter from Pat Sykes, complaining that the plants (in a $572 order) did not arrive in a satisfactory condition. “All of them were dry and wilted. One came out by the roots when I took it out of the box. Please send me a replacement shipment immediately.”

1. Dear Sir:

I checked to see what could have caused the defective shipment you received. After ruling out problems in transit, I discovered that your order was packed by a new worker who didn’t understand the need to water plants thoroughly before they are shipped. We have fired the worker, so you can be assured that this will not happen again.

Although it will cost our company several hundred dollars, we will send you a replacement shipment.

Let me know if the new shipment arrives safely. We trust that you will not complain again.

2. Dear Pat:

Sorry we screwed up that order. Sending plants across country is a risky business. Some of them just can’t take the strain. (Some days I can’t take the strain myself!) We’ll send you some more plants sometime next week and we’ll credit your account for $572.
3. Dear Mr. Smith:

I’m sorry you aren’t happy with your plants, but it isn’t our fault. The box clearly says, “Open and water immediately.” If you had done that, the plants would have been fine. And anybody who is going to buy plants should know that a little care is needed. If you pull by the leaves, you will pull the roots out. Since you don’t know how to handle plants, I’m sending you a copy of our brochure, “How to Care for Your Plants.” Please read it carefully so that you will know how to avoid disappointment in the future.

We look forward to your future orders.

4. Dear Ms. Sykes:

Your letter of the 5th has come to the attention of the undersigned.

According to your letter, your invoice #47420 arrived in an unsatisfactory condition. Please be advised that it is our policy to make adjustments as per the Terms and Conditions listed on the reverse side of our Acknowledgment of Order. If you will read that document, you will find the following:

“. . . if you intend to assert any claim against us on this account, you shall make an exception on your receipt to the carrier and shall, within 30 days after the receipt of any such goods, furnish us detailed written information as to any damage.”

Your letter of the 5th does not describe the alleged damage in sufficient detail. Furthermore, the delivery receipt contains no indication of any exception. If you expect to receive an adjustment, you must comply with our terms and see that the necessary documents reach the undersigned by the close of the business day on the 20th of the month.

5. Dear Pat Sykes:

You'll get a replacement shipment of the perennials you ordered next week.

Your plants are watered carefully before shipment and packed in specially designed cardboard containers. But if the weather is unusually warm, or if the truck is delayed, small root balls may dry out. Perhaps this happened with your plants. Plants with small root balls are easier to transplant, so they do better in your yard.

The violas, digitalis, aquilegias, and hostas you ordered are long-blooming perennials that will get even prettier each year. Enjoy your garden!

1.4 Online Messages for Discussion—Responding to Rumors

The Acme Corporation has been planning to acquire Best Products, and Acme employees are worried about how the acquisition will affect them. Ed Zeplin, Acme’s human resource manager, has been visiting the message boards on job search sites and sees a dramatic rise in the number of messages posted by people claiming to be Acme employees. Many of the messages are spreading rumors about layoffs, and most of the rumors are false.

The following messages are possible responses that Ed can post to the message boards. How well does each message meet the needs of the reader, the writer, and the organization? Is the message clear, complete, and correct? Does it save the reader’s time? Does it build goodwill?
1. It Will Be Great!
Author: L. Ed Zeplin, HR
Date: Tuesday, May 23

I am happy to tell you that the HR news is good. Two months ago, the CEO told me about the merger, and I have been preparing a human resource plan ever since.

I want you to know about this because morale has been bad, and it shouldn’t be. You really should wait for the official announcements, and you’ll see that the staffing needs will remain strong. My department has been under a lot of pressure, but if you’ll be patient, we’ll explain everything—the staffing, the compensation.

Our plan should be ready by Monday, and then if you have any questions, just contact your HR rep.

2. HR Staffing
Author: HR Boss
Date: Tuesday, May 23

The rumors are false. Just ask anyone in HR. There will be no layoffs.

3. Don’t Believe the Rumors
Author: lezeplin@acme.com
Date: Tuesday, May 23

Acme has 475 employees, and Best Products has 132 employees. Our human resource plan for next year calls for 625 employees. If you do the math, you can see that there will be no layoffs. Rather, we will be hiring 20 employees. Of course, as we consolidate operations with Best, there will be some redeployments. However, our plan indicates that we will be able to retain our current staff. All employees are valued at Acme, as our current benefits package testifies.

Our HR plan is based on the best analytic techniques and a business forecast by a top consulting firm. If you’re an employee, you should review our business plan, at the Our Goals page on Acme’s intranet. Everyone should read Acme’s mission statement on our home page, www.acme.com/homepage.html.

4. Layoff Rumors Do Acme a Disservice
Author: Zeplin in HR
Date: Tuesday, 23 May

If you come here to get your company information, you aren’t getting the straight story. The people posting to this discussion board are spreading false rumors, not the truth. If you want to know the truth about Acme, ask the people who have access to the information.

As HR manager, I can assure you we won’t be laying off employees after the merger with Best Products. I’m the one who approves the staffing plan, so I should know. If people would ask me, instead of reading the negative, whining lies at this site, they would know the facts, too.
If people really cared about job security, they would be meeting and exceeding their work goals, rather than wasting their time in rumor-mongering on message boards. Hard work: that's the key to success!

The True Story about Lay-Offs
Author: lezeplin@acme.com
Date: Tuesday, 23 May

Whenever there is a merger or acquisition, rumors fly. It's human nature to turn to rumors when a situation seems uncertain. The case of Acme acquiring Best Products is no exception, so I'm not surprised to see rumors about layoffs posted on this message board.

Have no fear! I am working closely with our CEO and with the CEO and human resource manager at Best Products, and we all agree that our current staff is a valuable asset to Acme, to Best, and to our combined companies in the future. We have no plans to lay off any of our valued people. I will continue monitoring this message board and will post messages as I am able to disclose more details about our staffing plans. In the meantime, employees should watch for official information in the company newsletter and on our intranet.

We care about our people! If employees ever have questions about our plans and policies, they should contact me directly.

L. Ed Zeplin, HR Manager

1.5 Discussing Communication Barriers

With a small group, discuss some of the communication barriers you have witnessed in the workplace or classroom. What confuses audiences? What upsets them? What creates ill will? What causes loss of interest? Try to pinpoint exactly how the communication broke down. How closely do the problems you’ve identified coincide with the content from Chapter 1?

1.6 Identifying Poor Communicators

Almost everyone has come in contact with someone who is a poor communicator. With a small group, discuss some of your experiences with poor communicators either in the workplace or in the classroom. Why was the communicator ineffective? What would have made communication clearer? After your discussion, develop a list of poor communication traits and what can be done to overcome them.

1.7 Identifying Emerging Trends in Business Communication

With a small group, discuss current trends in business communication. Which of the trends outlined in this chapter seem most prominent in your workplace or classroom experiences? Discuss some of the implications of each trend.

When finished with your discussion, type a memo to your instructor that discusses your involvement with a business communication trend. Your memo should describe the trend and include a specific example. Moreover, you should predict what impact this trend will have in the future. Use complete memo format with appropriate headings. (See Appendix A for examples of memo format.) Use a conversational writing style; check your draft to polish the style and edit for mechanical and grammatical correctness.
1.8 Understanding the Role of Communication in Your Organization

Interview your supervisor to learn about the kinds and purposes of communication in your organization. Your questions could include the following:

- What channels of communication (e.g., memos, e-mail, presentations) are most important in this organization?
- What documents or presentations do you create? Are they designed to inform, to persuade, to build goodwill—or to do a combination?
- What documents or presentations do you receive? Are they designed to inform, to persuade, to build goodwill—or to do a combination?
- Who are your most important audiences within the organization?
- Who are our most important external audiences?
- What are the challenges of communicating in this organization?
- What kinds of documents and presentations does the organization prefer?

**As your instructor directs,**

- Share your results with a small group of students.
- Present your results in a memo to your instructor.
- Join with a group of students to make a group presentation to the class.
- Post your results online to the class.

1.9 Introducing Yourself to Your Instructor

Write a memo (at least 1½ pages long) introducing yourself to your instructor. Include the following topics:

**Background:** Where did you grow up? What have you done in terms of school, extracurricular activities, jobs, and family life?

**Interests:** What are you interested in? What do you like to do? What do you like to think about and talk about?

**Achievements:** What achievements have given you the greatest personal satisfaction? List at least five. Include things that gave you a real sense of accomplishment and pride, whether or not they’re the sort of thing you’d list on a résumé.

**Goals:** What do you hope to accomplish this term? Where would you like to be professionally and personally five years from now?

Use complete memo format with appropriate headings. (See Appendix A for examples of memo format.) Use a conversational writing style; check your draft to polish the style and edit for mechanical and grammatical correctness. A good memo will enable your instructor to see you as an individual. Use specific details to make your memo vivid and interesting. Remember that one of your purposes is to interest your reader!

1.10 Introducing Yourself to Your Collaborative Writing Group

Write a memo (at least 1½ pages long) introducing yourself to the other students in your collaborative writing group. Include the following topics:

**Background:** What is your major? What special areas of knowledge do you have? What have you done in terms of school, extracurricular activities, jobs, and family life?

**Previous experience in groups:** What groups have you worked in before? Are you usually a leader, a follower, or a bit of both? Are you interested in a quality product? In maintaining harmony in the group? In working efficiently? What do you like most about working in groups? What do you like least?

**Work and composing style:** Do you like to talk out ideas while they’re in a rough stage or work them out on paper before you discuss them? Would you rather have a complete outline before you start writing or just a general idea? Do you want to have a detailed schedule of everything that has to be done and who will do it, or would you rather “go with the flow”? Do you work best under pressure, or do you want to have assignments ready well before the due date?

**Areas of expertise:** What can you contribute to the group in terms of knowledge and skills? Are you good at brainstorming ideas? Researching? Designing charts? Writing? Editing? Word processing? Managing the flow of work? Maintaining group cohesion?

**Goals for collaborative assignments:** What do you hope to accomplish this term? Where does this course fit into your priorities?

Use complete memo format with appropriate headings. (See Appendix A for examples of memo format.) Use a conversational writing style; edit your final draft for mechanical and grammatical correctness. A good memo will enable others in your group to see you as an individual. Use details to make your memo vivid and interesting. Remember that one of your purposes is to make your readers look forward to working with you!
1.11 Describing Your Experiences in and Goals for Writing

Write a memo (at least 1½ pages long) to your instructor describing the experiences you’ve had writing and what you’d like to learn about writing during this course. Answer several of the following questions:

- What memories do you have of writing? What made writing fun or frightening in the past?
- What have you been taught about writing? List the topics, rules, and advice you remember.
- What kinds of writing have you done in school? How long have the papers been?
- How has your school writing been evaluated? Did the instructor mark or comment on mechanics and grammar? Style? Organization? Logic? Content? Audience analysis and adaptation? Have you gotten extended comments on your papers? Have instructors in different classes had the same standards, or have you changed aspects of your writing for different classes?
- What voluntary writing have you done—journals, poems, stories, essays? Has this writing been just for you, or has some of it been shared or published?
- Have you ever written on a job or in a student or volunteer organization? Have you ever edited other people’s writing? What have these experiences led you to think about real-world writing?
- What do you see as your current strengths and weaknesses in writing skills? What skills do you think you’ll need in the future? What kinds of writing do you expect to do after you graduate?

Use complete memo format with appropriate headings. (See Appendix A for examples of memo format.) Use a conversational writing style; edit your final draft for mechanical and grammatical correctness.

1.12 Mosaic Case

Yvonne, who manages Mosaic’s Communications Department, holds routine staff meetings so that she can assign tasks and team members can update her about their progress on larger projects. (Refer back to page 31 for a general overview of Mosaic.)

Based on your initial reading of Chapter 1, consider the following questions:

- What types of situations do you think members of Yvonne’s communication team face on a regular basis?
- What kinds of ethical concerns does Yvonne face with the workers in her department?
- What are the biggest challenges Yvonne has to deal with both internally and externally?
- What kinds of communication training do you think Yvonne gives the junior managers of Mosaic?
- How do you think the communication department impacts the quality of interaction customers have with Mosaic?
- How important is this department to the overall success of Mosaic?
- Scan the table of contents of this textbook. What kinds of problems do you think the team will run into during your semester?