Business Communication Essentials

A Skills-Based Approach

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Courtland Bovée   John Thill

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Business
Communication
Essentials

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Business Communication Essentials

SIXTH EDITION

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Real-Time Updates—Learn More

Real-Time Updates "Learn More" is a unique feature students will see strategically located throughout the text, connecting you with dozens of carefully selected online media items. These elements—categorized by the icons shown below representing interactive websites, online videos, infographics, PowerPoint presentations, podcasts, PDF files, and articles—complement the text's coverage by providing contemporary examples and valuable insights from successful professionals. See page xviii for an illustration of how Real-Time Updates works.

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Preface

MAJOR CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS IN THIS EDITION

Bovée and Thill texts have long set the benchmark in this field for rigorous, high-value revisions that make sure instructors and students have the most comprehensive, realistic, and contemporary materials available. In keeping with that standard, the sixth edition of *Business Communication Essentials* offers numerous additions and improvements.

The following sections are all new, revised with new material, or streamlined for more efficient coverage:

- *Understanding Why Communication Matters* (in Chapter 1)
- *Communicating as a Professional* (in Chapter 1)
- *Communicating in a World of Diversity* (in Chapter 1)
- *Age Differences* (in Chapter 1)
- *Gender Differences* (in Chapter 1)
- *Communicating Effectively in Teams* (in Chapter 2; new coverage of collaboration)
- *Technologies for Collaborative Writing* (in Chapter 2)
- *Improving Your Nonverbal Communication Skills* (in Chapter 2; new coverage of nonverbal signals as an element of professionalism)
- *Business Etiquette in the Workplace* (in Chapter 2)
- *Business Etiquette in Social Settings* (in Chapter 2)
- *Business Etiquette Online* (in Chapter 2)
- *Understanding the Three-Step Writing Process* (in Chapter 3)
- *Analyzing the Situation* (in Chapter 3)
- *Organizing Your Message* (in Chapter 3)
- *Editing for Clarity and Conciseness* (in Chapter 5)
- *Electronic Media for Business Communication* (in Chapter 6)
- *Creating Content for Social Media* (in Chapter 6)
- *Social Networks* (in Chapter 6)
- *Business Communication Uses of Social Networks* (in Chapter 6)
- *Information and Media Sharing Sites* (in Chapter 6)
- *Media Curation Sites* (in Chapter 6)
- *Writing Email Messages* (in Chapter 6)
- *Understanding the Business Applications of Blogging* (in Chapter 6)
- *Microblogging* (in Chapter 6)
- *Making Claims and Requesting Adjustments* (in Chapter 7)
- *Ending with a Courteous Close* (in Chapter 7; under "Strategy for Routine Replies and Positive Messages")
- *Answering Requests for Information or Action* (in Chapter 7)
- *Sharing Routine Information* (in Chapter 7)
- *Fostering Goodwill* (in Chapter 7)
- *Offering Condolences* (in Chapter 7)
- *Continuing with a Clear Statement of the Bad News* (in Chapter 9; revised coverage of using conditionals)
- *Closing on a Respectful Note* (in Chapter 8; both instances)
- *Making Negative Announcements on Routine Business Matters* (in Chapter 9)

- *Rejecting Suggestions and Proposals* (in Chapter 8)
- *Refusing Social Networking Recommendation Requests* (in Chapter 8)
- *Rejecting Job Applications* (in Chapter 8)
- *Sending Negative Organizational News* (in Chapter 8)
- *Responding to Negative Information in a Social Media Environment* (in Chapter 8)
- *Developing Marketing and Sales Messages* (in Chapter 9; entire section compressed to allow more room for coverage of persuasive business messages)
- *Search Tips* (in Chapter 10)
- *Drafting Report Content* (in Chapter 11)
- *Drafting Proposal Content* (in Chapter 11)
- *Writing for Websites and Wikis* (in Chapter 11)
- *Completing Reports and Proposals* (in Chapter 11)
- *Choosing Structured or Free-Form Slides* (in Chapter 12; expanded discussion of pros and cons of each approach)
- *Designing Effective Slides* (in Chapter 12)
- *Designing Slides Around a Key Visual* (in Chapter 12)
- *Finalizing Your Slides* (in Chapter 12)
- *Creating Effective Handouts* (in Chapter 12)
- *Finding the Ideal Opportunity in Today's Job Market* (in Chapter 13)
- *Building Your Network* (in Chapter 13)
- *Planning Your Résumé* (in Chapter 13)
- *Considering Photos, Videos, Presentations, and Infographics* (in Chapter 13)
- *Motivating Action* (in Chapter 14, regarding application letters)
- *Follow-Up Messages* (in Chapter 14, formerly titled *Thank You Messages*)

New Figures in the Sixth Edition

Providing students with an array of carefully chosen and crafted examples is one of the most important functions of a business communication textbook. The sixth edition offers nearly 60 new figures, including many annotated model documents and a number of new before/after pairs that demonstrate how to fix specific problem areas in a message. Here are the new figures in this edition:

Figure	Page	Title	Annotated Model Document	Before/After Pair	Real Company
1.1	03	Sharing Information			
1.3	08	The Basic Communication Process			
1.4	10	Business Communication: 1.0 Versus 2.0			
1.5	13	Diversity at Merck			X
1.6	17	Writing for Multilingual Audiences	X	X	
1.7	18	Reaching Audiences and Building Communities with Social Media			X
2.1	34	Collaboration Technologies			X
2.2	35	Shared Workspaces			X
2.3	37	Typical Meeting Agenda			
3.3	60	Predicting the Effects of Audience Composition			
3.4	62	Media Choices	X		X
3.5	63	Visual Media			X
3.6	64	Interactive Media	X		X
3.7	67	Limiting the Scope of a Message			X
3.11	71	Storytelling as a Way to Organize Messages			X
4.3	86	Plain Language at Creative Commons	X		X
4.5	91	Online Tools for Finding Fresh Word Choices			X
5.3	114	Designing for Readability			X
5.4	117	Multimedia Tools			X

Figure	Page	Title	Annotated Model Document	Before/After Pair	Real Company
6.1	130	The Rise and Reach of Social Media			
6.2	132	Compositional Modes: Using Twitter for Teasers		X	X
6.3	134	Business Communication on Social Networks	X		X
6.4	141	Community Q&A Sites	X		X
6.7	149	Elements of an Effective Business Blog	X		X
6.8	152	Business Applications of Microblogging			X
7.5	175	Responding to a Claim When the Buyer Is at Fault	X	X	
7.7	177	Sharing Routine Information	X		X
7.8	179	Social Media News Release	X		X
8.1	193	Comparing the Direct and Indirect Approaches for Negative Messages			
8.2	194	Choosing the Direct or Indirect Approach			
8.3	201	Effective Letter Declining a Routine Request	X		X
8.6	206	Effective Message Rejecting a Job Applicant	X	X	
8.7	208	Internal Message Providing Bad News About Company Operations	X	X	
9.1	223	Appealing to Audience Needs	X		X
9.2	227	The AIDA Model for Persuasive Messages			
9.3	228	Balancing Logical and Emotional Appeals			
9.4	230	Persuasive Argumentation	X	X	
9.6	235	Persuasive Messages in Social Media	X		X
10.4	255	Summarizing Effectively			
10.7	263	Preliminary Outline of a Research Report Focusing on Conclusions	X		X
11.1	279	Achieving the Appropriate Tone for a Report	X		X
11.2	283	Writing for the Web	X		X
11.4	286	Parts of a Table			
11.12	293	Infographics			
12.6	337	Using a Key Visual to Organize Points on a Slide			
12.7	338	Writing Text for Slides			
12.8	341	Designing Effective Visuals: Selected Slides			
13.1	356	Writing the Story of You	X		
13.3	368	Crafting Your Résumé, Scenario 1: Positioning Yourself for an Ideal Opportunity	X		
13.4	369	Crafting Your Résumé, Scenario 2: Repositioning Yourself for Available Opportunities	X		
13.5	370	Crafting Your Résumé, Scenario 3: Positioning Yourself for More Responsibility	X		
13.6	373	Infographic Résumé			X
14.2	386	Unsolicited Application Letter: Poor and Improved	X	X	
14.6	402	Follow-Up Message: Poor and Improved	X	X	
14.7	403	Request for a Time Extension: Poor and Improved	X	X	

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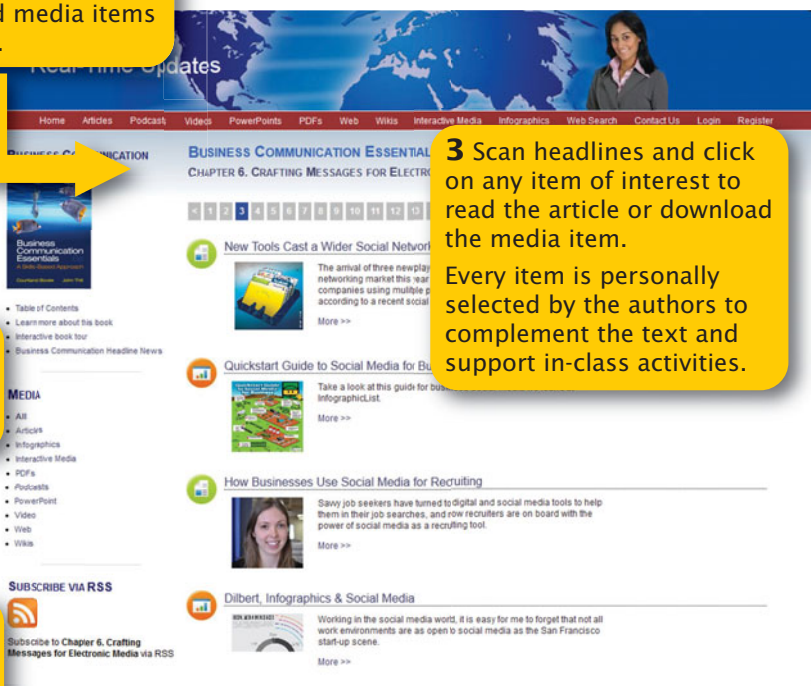
WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT STEP YOU CAN TAKE TO ENHANCE YOUR CAREER PROSPECTS?

No matter what profession you want to pursue, the ability to communicate will be an essential skill—and a skill that employers expect you to have when you enter the workforce. This course introduces you to the fundamental principles of business communication and gives you the opportunity to develop your communication skills. You'll discover how business communication differs from personal and social communication, and you'll see how today's companies are using blogs, social networks, podcasts, virtual worlds, wikis, and other technologies. You'll learn a simple three-step writing process that works for all types of writing and speaking projects, both in college and on the job. Along the way, you'll gain valuable

insights into ethics, etiquette, listening, teamwork, and nonverbal communication. Plus, you'll learn effective strategies for the many types of communication challenges you'll face on the job, from routine messages about transactions to complex reports and websites.

Colleges and universities vary in the prerequisites established for the business communication course, but we advise taking at least one course in English composition before enrolling in this class. Some coursework in business studies will also give you a better perspective on communication challenges in the workplace. However, we have taken special care not to assume any in-depth business experience, so you can use *Business Communication Essentials* successfully even if you have limited on-the-job experience or business coursework.

How This Course Will Help You

Few courses can offer the three-for-the-price-of-one value you get from a business communication class. Check out these benefits:

- **In your other classes.** The communication skills you learn in this class can help you in every other course you take in college. From simple homework assignments to complicated team projects to class presentations, you'll be able to communicate more effectively with less time and effort.

- **During your job search.** You can reduce the stress of searching for a job and stand out from the competition. Every activity in the job search process relies on communication. The better you can communicate, the more successful you'll be at landing interesting and rewarding work.

- **On the job.** After you get that great job, the time and energy you have invested in this course will continue to yield benefits year after year. As you tackle each project and every new challenge, influential company leaders—the people who decide how quickly you'll get promoted and how much you'll earn—will be paying close attention to how well you communicate. They will observe your interactions with colleagues, customers, and business partners. They'll take note of how well you can collect data, find the essential ideas buried under mountains of information, and convey those points to other people. They'll observe your ability to adapt to different audiences and circumstances. They'll be watching when you encounter tough situations that require careful attention to ethics and etiquette. The good news: Every insight you gain and every skill you develop in this course will help you shine in your career.

How to Succeed in This Course

Although this course explores a wide range of message types and appears to cover quite a lot of territory, the underlying structure of the course is actually rather simple. You'll learn a few basic concepts, identify some key skills to use and procedures to follow—and then practice, practice, practice. Whether you're writing a blog posting in response to one of the real-company cases or drafting your own résumé, you'll be practicing the same skills again and again. With feedback and reinforcement from your instructor and your classmates, your confidence will grow and the work will become easier and more enjoyable.

The following sections offer advice on approaching each assignment, using your textbook, and taking advantage of some other helpful resources.

Approaching Each Assignment

In the spirit of practice and improvement, you will have a number of writing (and possibly speaking) assignments throughout this course. These suggestions will help you produce better results with less effort:

- **First, don't panic!** If the thought of writing a report or giving a speech sends a chill up your spine, you're not alone. Everybody feels that way when first learning business communication skills, and even experienced professionals can feel nervous about major projects. Keeping three points in mind will help. First, every project can be broken down into a series of small, manageable tasks. Don't let a big project overwhelm you; it's nothing more than a bunch of smaller tasks. Second, remind yourself that you have the skills you need to accomplish each task. As you move through the course, the assignments are

carefully designed to match the skills you've developed up to that point. Third, if you feel panic creeping up on you, take a break and regain your perspective.

- **Focus on one task at a time.** A common mistake writers make is trying to organize and express their ideas while simultaneously worrying about audience reactions, grammar, spelling, formatting, page design, and a dozen other factors. Fight the temptation to do everything at once; otherwise, your frustration will soar and your productivity will plummet. In particular, don't worry about grammar, spelling, and word choices during your first draft. Concentrate on the organization of your ideas first, then the way you express those ideas, and then the presentation and production of your messages. Following the three-step writing process is an ideal way to focus on one task at a time in a logical sequence.

- **Give yourself plenty of time.** As with every other school project, putting things off to the last minute creates unnecessary stress. Writing and speaking projects in particular are much easier if you tackle them in small stages with breaks in between, rather than trying to get everything done in one frantic blast. Moreover, there will be instances when you simply get stuck on a project, and the best thing to do is walk away and give your mind a break. If you allow room for breaks in your schedule, you'll minimize the frustration and spend less time overall on your homework, too.

- **Step back and assess each project before you start.** The writing and speaking projects you'll have in this course cover a wide range of communication scenarios, and it's essential that you adapt your approach to each new challenge. Resist the urge to dive in and start writing without a plan. Ponder the assignment for a while, consider the various approaches you might take, and think carefully about your objectives before you start writing. Nothing is more frustrating than getting stuck halfway through because you're not sure what you're trying to say or you've wandered off track. Spend a little time planning, and you'll spend a lot less time writing.

- **Use the three-step writing process.** Those essential planning tasks are the first step in the three-step writing process, which you'll learn about in Chapter 3 and use throughout the course. This process has been developed and refined by professional writers with decades of experience and thousands of projects ranging from short blog posts to 500-page textbooks. It works, so take advantage of it.

- **Learn from the examples and model documents.** This textbook offers dozens of realistic examples of business messages, many with notes along the sides that explain strong and weak points. Study these and any other examples that your instructor provides. Learn what works and what doesn't, then apply these lessons to your own writing.

- **Learn from experience.** Finally, learn from the feedback you get from your instructor and from other students. Don't take the criticism personally; your instructor and your classmates are commenting about the work, not about you. View every bit of feedback as an opportunity to improve.

Using This Textbook Package

This book and its accompanying online resources introduce you to the key concepts in business communication while helping you develop essential skills. As you read each chapter, start by studying the learning objectives. They will help you identify the most important concepts in the chapter and give you a feel for what you'll be learning. Each learning objective corresponds to one major heading within the chapter, so you can easily find the information it relates to. Following the learning objectives, the "Communication Matters" feature offers helpful advice from a successful professional who uses the same skills you will be learning in the chapter.

At the end of each chapter, "Learning Objectives: Check Your Progress" gives you the chance to quickly verify your grasp of important concepts. Following that, you'll see two sets of questions that will help you test and apply your knowledge, and two sets of projects that will help you practice and expand your skills. Chapters 6 through 14 also feature communication cases, which are more-involved projects that require you to plan and complete a variety of messages and documents. All these activities are tagged by learning objective, so if you have any questions about the concepts you need to apply, just revisit that part of the chapter.

Several chapters have activities with downloadable media such as presentations and podcasts; if your instructor assigns these elements, follow the instructions in the text to locate the correct files. You can also download the two-page Quick Learning Guide to review the essential points from the chapter. And if you'd like some help on using Facebook and Twitter for business communication, we have created screencasts with helpful advice on these topics.

In addition to the 14 chapters of the text itself, here are some special features that will help you succeed in the course and on the job:

- **Prologue: Building a Career with Your Communication Skills.** This section (immediately following this Preface) helps you understand today's dynamic workplace, the steps you can take to adapt to the job market, and the importance of creating an employment portfolio and building your personal brand.

- **Handbook.** The Handbook of Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage (see page 439) serves as a convenient reference of essential business English.

- **Real-Time Updates.** You can use this unique newsfeed service to make sure you're always kept up to date on important topics. Plus, at strategic points in every chapter, you will be directed to the Real-Time Updates website to get the latest information about specific subjects. To sign up, visit http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6. You can also access Real-Time Updates through MyBCommLab.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Courtland L. Bovée and John V. Thill have been leading textbook authors for more than two decades, introducing millions of students to the fields of business and business communication. Their award-winning texts are distinguished by proven pedagogical features, extensive selections of contemporary case studies, hundreds of real-life examples, engaging writing, thorough research, and the unique integration of print and electronic resources. Each new edition reflects the authors' commitment to continuous refinement and improvement, particularly in terms of modeling the latest practices in business and the use of technology.

Professor Bovée has 22 years of teaching experience at Grossmont College in San Diego, where he has received teaching honors and was accorded that institution's C. Allen Paul Distinguished Chair. Mr. Thill is a prominent communications consultant who has worked with organizations ranging from Fortune 500 multinationals to entrepreneurial start-ups. He formerly held positions with Pacific Bell and Texaco.

Courtland Bovée and John Thill were recently awarded proclamations from the Governor of Massachusetts for their lifelong contributions to education and for their commitment to the summer youth baseball program that is sponsored by the Boston Red Sox.

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This book is dedicated to you and the many thousands
of other students who have used this book in years past. We appreciate
the opportunity to play a role in your education, and we wish you
success and satisfaction in your studies and in your career.

Courtland L. Bovée
John V. Thill

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Prologue

Building a Career with Your Communication Skills

USING THIS COURSE TO HELP LAUNCH YOUR CAREER

This course will help you develop vital communication skills that you'll use throughout your career—and those skills can help you launch an interesting and rewarding career, too. This brief prologue sets the stage by helping you understand today's dynamic workplace, the steps you can take to adapt to the job market, and the importance of creating an employment portfolio and building your personal brand. Take a few minutes to read it while you think about the career you hope to create for yourself.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

There is no disguising the fact that you are entering a tough job market, but there are several reasons for at least some hope over the longer term. First, the U.S. economy will recover from the Great Recession, although it's going to take a while before the majority of employers feel confident enough to ramp up hiring significantly. Second, the large demographic bulge of baby boomers is moving into retirement, which should set off a chain reaction of openings from the tops of companies on downward. Third, political and business leaders here and abroad are keenly aware of the problem of unemployment among young adults, both as it affects people looking for work and in the loss of vitality to the economy. For example, programs aimed at helping graduates start companies right out of college, rather than entering the conventional job market, are springing up under government and philanthropic efforts.[1]

The ups and downs of the economic cycle are not the only dynamic elements that will affect your career, however. The nature of employment itself is changing, with a growing number of independent workers and loosely structured *virtual organizations* that engage these workers for individual projects or short-term contracts, rather than hiring employees. In fact, one recent study predicted that independent workers will outnumber conventional employees in the United States by 2020.[2]

This new model of work offers some compelling advantages for workers and companies alike. Companies can lower their fixed costs, adapt more easily to economic fluctuations and competitive moves, and get access to specialized talent for specific project needs.[3] Workers can benefit from the freedom to choose the clients and projects that interest them the most, the flexibility to work as much or as little as they want, and (thanks to advances in communication technology) access to compelling work even if they live far from major employment centers such as New York City or California's Silicon Valley.[4]

On the other hand, this new approach also presents some significant challenges for all parties. These flexibilities and freedoms can create more complexity for workers and managers, diminished loyalties on both sides, uncertainty about the future, issues with skill development and training, and problems with accountability and liability.[5] Many of these issues involve communication, making solid communication skills more important than ever.

These changes could affect you even if you pursue traditional employment throughout your career. Within organizations, you're likely to work with a combination of "inside" employees and "outside" contractors, which can affect the dynamics of the workplace. And the availability of more independent workers in the talent marketplace gives employers more

options and more leverage, so full-time employees may find themselves competing against freelancers, at least indirectly.

As you navigate this uncertain future, keep two vital points in mind. First, don't wait for your career to just happen: Take charge of your career and stay in charge of it. Explore all your options and have a plan—but be prepared to change course as opportunities and threats appear on the horizon. Second, don't count on employers to take care of you. The era of lifetime employment, in which an employee committed to one company for life with the understanding it would return the loyalty, is long gone. From finding opportunities to developing the skills you need to succeed, it's up to you to manage your career and look out for your own best interests.

How Employers View Today's Job Market

From an employer's perspective, the employment process is always a question of balance. Maintaining a stable workforce can improve practically every aspect of business performance, yet many employers want the flexibility to shrink and expand payrolls as business conditions change. Employers obviously want to attract the best talent, but the best talent is more expensive and more vulnerable to offers from competitors, so there are always financial trade-offs to consider.

Employers also struggle with the ups and downs of the economy. When unemployment is low, the balance of power shifts to employees, and employers have to compete in order to attract and keep top talent. When unemployment is high, the power shifts back to employers, who can afford to be more selective and less accommodating. In other words, pay attention to the economy; at times you can be more aggressive in your demands, but at other times you need to be more accommodating.

Companies view employment as a complex business decision with lots of variables to consider. To make the most of your potential, regardless of the career path you pursue, you need to view employment in the same way.

What Employers Look for in Job Applicants

Given the complex forces in the contemporary workplace and the unrelenting pressure of global competition, what are employers looking for in the candidates they hire? The short answer: a lot. Like all "buyers," companies want to get as much as they can for the money they spend. The closer you can present yourself as the ideal candidate, the better your chances of getting a crack at the most exciting opportunities.

Specific expectations vary by profession and position, of course, but virtually all employers look for the following general skills and attributes:[6]

- **Communication skills.** The reason this item is listed first isn't that you're reading a business communication textbook. Communication is listed first because it is far and away the most commonly mentioned skill set when employers are asked about what they look for in employees. Improving your communication skills will help in every aspect of your professional life.
- **Interpersonal and team skills.** You will have many individual responsibilities on the job, but chances are you won't work alone very often. Learn to work with others—and help them succeed as you succeed.
- **Intercultural and international awareness and sensitivity.** Successful employers tend to be responsive to diverse workforces, markets, and communities, and they look for employees with the same outlook.
- **Data collection, analysis, and decision-making skills.** Employers want people who know how to identify information needs, find the necessary data, convert the data into useful knowledge, and make sound decisions.
- **Computer and electronic media skills.** Today's workers need to know how to use common office software and to communicate using a wide range of electronic media.
- **Time and resource management.** If you've had to juggle multiple priorities during college, consider that great training for the business world. Your ability to plan projects and manage the time and resources available to you will make a big difference on the job.

- **Flexibility and adaptability.** Stuff happens, as they say. Employees who can roll with the punches and adapt to changing business priorities and circumstances will go further (and be happier) than employees who resist change.

- **Professionalism.** Professionalism is the quality of performing at the highest possible level and conducting oneself with confidence, purpose, and pride. True professionals strive to excel, continue to hone their skills and build their knowledge, are dependable and accountable, demonstrate a sense of business etiquette, make ethical decisions, show loyalty and commitment, don't give up when things get tough, and maintain a positive outlook.

ADAPTING TO TODAY'S JOB MARKET

Adapting to the workplace is a lifelong process of seeking the best fit between what you want to do and what employers (or clients, if you work independently) are willing to pay you to do. It's important to think about what you want to do during the many thousands of hours you will spend working, what you have to offer, and how to make yourself more attractive to employers.

What Do You Want to Do?

Economic necessities and the vagaries of the marketplace will influence much of what happens in your career, of course, and you may not always have the opportunity to do the kind of work you would really like do. Even if you can't get the job you want right now, though, start your job search by examining your values and interests. Doing so will give you a better idea of where you want to be eventually, and you can use those insights to learn and grow your way toward that ideal situation. Consider these questions:

- **What would you like to do every day?** Research occupations that interest you. Find out what people really do every day. Ask friends, relatives, alumni from your school, and contacts in your social networks. Read interviews with people in various professions to get a sense of what their careers are like.

- **How would you like to work?** Consider how much independence you want on the job, how much variety you like, and whether you prefer to work with products, machines, people, ideas, figures, or some combination thereof.

- **How do your financial goals fit with your other priorities?** For instance, many high-paying jobs involve a lot of stress, sacrifices of time with family and friends, and frequent travel or relocation. If location, lifestyle, intriguing work, or other factors are more important to you, you may well have to sacrifice some level of pay to achieve them.

- **Have you established some general career goals?** For example, do you want to pursue a career specialty such as finance or manufacturing, or do you want to gain experience in multiple areas with an eye toward upper management?

- **What sort of corporate culture are you most comfortable with?** Would you be happy in a formal hierarchy with clear reporting relationships? Or do you prefer less structure? Teamwork or individualism? Do you like a competitive environment?

You might need some time in the workforce to figure out what you really want to do or to work your way into the job you really want, but it's never too early to start thinking about where you want to be. Filling out the assessment in Table 1 might help you get a clearer picture of the nature of work you would like to pursue in your career.

What Do You Have to Offer?

Knowing what you want to do is one thing. Knowing what a company is willing to pay you to do is another thing entirely. You may already have a good idea of what you can offer employers. If not, some brainstorming can help you identify your skills, interests, and characteristics. Start by jotting down achievements you're proud of and experiences that were satisfying, and think carefully about what specific skills these achievements demanded of you. For example, leadership skills, speaking ability, and artistic talent may have helped you

TABLE 1   Career Self-Assessment

Activity or Situation	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	No Preference
1. I want to work independently.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. I want variety in my work.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. I want to work with people.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. I want to work with technology.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. I want physical work.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. I want mental work.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. I want to work for a large organization.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. I want to work for a nonprofit organization.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. I want to work for a small business.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. I want to work for a service business.	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. I want to start or buy a business someday.	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. I want regular, predictable work hours.	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. I want to work in a city location.	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. I want to work in a small town or suburb.	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. I want to work in another country.	_____	_____	_____	_____
16. I want to work outdoors.	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. I want to work in a structured environment.	_____	_____	_____	_____
18. I want to avoid risk as much as possible.	_____	_____	_____	_____
19. I want to enjoy my work, even if that means making less money.	_____	_____	_____	_____
20. I want to become a high-level corporate manager.	_____	_____	_____	_____

coordinate a successful class project. As you analyze your achievements, you may well begin to recognize a pattern of skills. Which of them might be valuable to potential employers?

Next, look at your educational preparation, work experience, and extracurricular activities. What do your knowledge and experience qualify you to do? What have you learned from volunteer work or class projects that could benefit you on the job? Have you held any offices, won any awards or scholarships, mastered a second language? What skills have you developed in nonbusiness situations that could transfer to a business position?

Take stock of your personal characteristics. Are you aggressive, a born leader? Or would you rather follow? Are you outgoing, articulate, great with people? Or do you prefer working alone? Make a list of what you believe are your four or five most important qualities. Ask a relative or friend to rate your traits as well.

If you're having difficulty figuring out your interests, characteristics, or capabilities, consult your college career center. Many campuses administer a variety of tests that can help you identify interests, aptitudes, and personality traits. These tests won't reveal your "perfect" job, but they'll help you focus on the types of work best suited to your personality.

How Can You Make Yourself More Valuable?

While you're figuring out what you want from a job and what you can offer an employer, you can take positive steps toward building your career. First, look for volunteer projects, temporary jobs, freelance work, or internships that will help expand your experience base

TABLE 2   Career Planning Resources

Resource	URL
Career Rocketeer	**www.careerrocketeer.com**
The Creative Career	**http://thecreativecareer.com**
Brazen Careerist	**www.brazencareerist.com**
Daily Career Connection	**http://dailycareerconnection.com**
The Career Key	**http://careerkey.blogspot.com**
Rise Smart	**www.risesmart.com/risesmart/blog**
Women's Leadership Blog	**http://blog.futurewomenleaders.net/blog**
The Career Doctor	**www.careerdoctor.org/career-doctor-blog**

and skill set.[7] You can look for freelance projects on Craigslist (**www.craigslist.org**) and numerous other websites; some of these jobs have only nominal pay, but they do provide an opportunity for you to display your skills. Also consider applying your talents to *crowdsourcing* projects, in which companies and nonprofit organizations invite the public to contribute solutions to various challenges.

These opportunities help you gain valuable experience and relevant contacts, provide you with important references and work samples for your *employment portfolio*, and help you establish your *personal brand* (see the following sections).

Second, learn more about the industry or industries in which you want to work and stay on top of new developments. Join networks of professional colleagues and friends who can help you keep up with trends and events. Many professional societies have student chapters or offer students discounted memberships. Take courses and pursue other educational or life experiences that would be difficult while working full time.

For more ideas and advice on planning your career, check out the resources listed in Table 2.

Building an Employment Portfolio

Employers want proof that you have the skills to succeed on the job, but even if you don't have much relevant work experience, you can use your college classes to assemble that proof. Simply create and maintain an *employment portfolio*, which is a collection of projects that demonstrate your skills and knowledge. You can create a *print portfolio* and an *e-portfolio*; both can help with your career effort. A print portfolio gives you something tangible to bring to interviews, and it lets you collect project results that might not be easy to show online, such as a handsomely bound report. An e-portfolio is a multimedia presentation of your skills and experiences.[8] Think of it as a website that contains your résumé, work samples, letters of recommendation, relevant videos or podcasts you have recorded, any blog posts or articles you have written, and other information about you and your skills. If you have set up a *lifestream* (a real-time aggregation of your content creation, online interests, and social media interactions) that is professionally focused, consider adding that to your e-portfolio. The portfolio can be burned on a CD or DVD for physical distribution or, more commonly, it can be posted online—whether it's a personal website, your college's site (if student pages are available), a specialized portfolio hosting site such as Behance (**www.behance.com**), or a résumé hosting site such as VisualCV (**www.visualcv.com**) that offers multimedia résumés. To see a selection of student e-portfolios from colleges around the United States, go to **http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6**, click on "Student Assignments," and then click on "Prologue" to locate the link to student e-portfolios.

Throughout this course, pay close attention to the assignments marked "Portfolio Builder" (they start in Chapter 6). These items will make particularly good samples of not

only your communication skills but also your ability to understand and solve business-related challenges. By combining these projects with samples from your other courses, you can create a compelling portfolio when you're ready to start interviewing. Your portfolio is also a great resource for writing your résumé because it reminds you of all the great work you've done over the years. Moreover, you can continue to refine and expand your portfolio throughout your career; many professionals use e-portfolios to advertise their services.

As you assemble your portfolio, collect anything that shows your ability to perform, whether it's in school, on the job, or in other venues. However, you *must* check with employers before including any items that you created while you were an employee and check with clients before including any *work products* (anything you wrote, designed, programmed, and so on) they purchased from you. Many business documents contain confidential information that companies don't want distributed to outside audiences.

For each item you add to your portfolio, write a brief description that helps other people understand the meaning and significance of the project. Include such items as these:

- **Background.** Why did you undertake this project? Was it a school project, a work assignment, or something you did on your own initiative?
- **Project objectives.** Explain the project's goals, if relevant.
- **Collaborators.** If you worked with others, be sure to mention that and discuss team dynamics if appropriate. For instance, if you led the team or worked with others long distance as a virtual team, point that out.
- **Constraints.** Sometimes the most impressive thing about a project is the time or budget constraints under which it was created. If such constraints apply to a project, consider mentioning them in a way that doesn't sound like an excuse for poor quality. If you had only one week to create a website, for example, you might say that "One of the intriguing challenges of this project was the deadline; I had only one week to design, compose, test, and publish this material."
- **Outcomes.** If the project's goals were measurable, what was the result? For example, if you wrote a letter soliciting donations for a charitable cause, how much money did you raise?
- **Learning experience.** If appropriate, describe what you learned during the course of the project.

Keep in mind that the portfolio itself is a communication project, so be sure to apply everything you'll learn in this course about effective communication and good design. Assume that potential employers will find your e-portfolio site (even if you don't tell them about it), so don't include anything that could come back to haunt you. Also, if you have anything embarrassing on Facebook, Twitter, or any other social networking site, remove it immediately.

To get started, first check with the career center at your college; many schools offer e-portfolio systems for their students. (Some schools now require e-portfolios, so you may already be building one.) You can also find plenty of advice online; search for "e-portfolio," "student portfolio," or "professional portfolio."

Building Your Personal Brand

Products and companies have brands that represent collections of certain attributes, such as the safety emphasis of Volvo cars, the performance emphasis of BMW, or the luxury emphasis of Cadillac. Similarly, when people who know you think about you, they have a particular set of qualities in mind based on your professionalism, your priorities, and the various skills and attributes you have developed over the years. Perhaps without even being conscious of it, you have created a **personal brand** for yourself.

As you plan the next stage of your career, start managing your personal brand deliberately. Branding specialist Mohammed Al-Taee defines personal branding succinctly as "a way of clarifying and communicating what makes you different and special."[9]

You can learn more about personal branding from the sources listed in Table 3, and you will have multiple opportunities to plan and refine your personal brand during this course. For example, Chapter 6 offers tips on business applications of social media, which are key to personal branding, and Chapters 13 and 14 guide you through the process of creating a

TABLE 3 **Personal Branding Resources**

Resource	URL
Personal Branding Blog	**www.personalbrandingblog.com**
Mohammed Al-Taee	**http://altaeeblog.com**
Brand Yourself	**http://blog.brand-yourself.com**
Krishna De	**www.krishnade.com/blog**
Cube Rules	**http://cuberules.com**
Jibber Jobber	**www.jibberjobber.com/blog**
The Engaging Brand	**http://theengagingbrand.typepad.com**
Brand-Yourself	**http://blog.brand-yourself.com**

résumé, building your network, and presenting yourself in interviews. To get you started, here are the basics of a successful personal branding strategy:[10]

- **Figure out the "story of you."** Simply put, where have you been in life, and where are you going? Every good story has dramatic tension that pulls readers in and makes them wonder what will happen next. Where is your story going next? Chapter 13 offers more on this personal brand-building approach.

- **Clarify your professional theme.** Volvos, BMWs, and Cadillacs can all get you from Point A to Point B in safety, comfort, and style—but each brand emphasizes some attributes more than others to create a specific image in the minds of potential buyers. Similarly, you want to be seen as something more than just an accountant, a supervisor, a salesperson. What will your theme be? Brilliant strategist? Hard-nosed, get-it-done tactician? Technical guru? Problem solver? Creative genius? Inspirational leader?

- **Reach out and connect.** Major corporations spread the word about their brands with multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns. You can promote your brand for free or close to it. The secret is networking, which you'll learn more about in Chapter 13. You build your brand by connecting with like-minded people, sharing information, demonstrating skills and knowledge, and helping others succeed.

- **Deliver on your brand's promise—every time, all the time.** When you promote a brand, you make a promise—a promise that whoever buys that brand will get the benefits you are promoting. All of this planning and communication is of no value if you fail to deliver on the promises your branding efforts make. Conversely, when you deliver quality results time after time, your talents and professionalism will speak for you.

We wish you great success in this course and in your career!

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Business Communication Foundations

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1

Understanding Business Communication in Today's Workplace

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

1 Define *communication* and explain the importance of effective business communication.

2 Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context.

3 Describe the communication process model and explain how social media are changing the nature of business communication.

4 Define *ethics*, explain the difference between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse, and list six guidelines for making ethical communication choices.

5 Explain how cultural diversity affects business communication and describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively across cultural boundaries.

6 List four general guidelines for using communication technology effectively.

Communication Matters ...

> "Assertiveness adds power and conviction to a message and enables a leader's voice to be heard."
>
> —Scott Edinger, founder of Edinger Consulting Group and co-author of *The Inspiring Leader*

If you want to make your voice heard in the business world, follow Scott Edinger's advice: "You can clearly tell the difference between a message communicated with passion and vigor as a leader asserts his or her point of view and one that lacks the energy of conviction."[1] A healthy level of assertiveness is based on confidence, and confidence comes from having the knowledge and skills needed to do your job well. This course will help you develop the single most important skill you can have in any career: the ability to communicate effectively.

Scott Edinger

Being assertive will help you be heard on the job, but to be assertive you need the skills and knowledge that produce a healthy degree of confidence.

Understanding Why Communication Matters

Communication is the process of transferring information and meaning between *senders* and *receivers*, using one or more written, oral, visual, or electronic media. The essence of communication is sharing—providing data, information, insights, and inspiration in an exchange that benefits both you and the people with whom you are communicating.[2] As Figure 1.1 indicates, this sharing can happen in a variety of ways, including a simple and successful transfer of information, a negotiation in which the sender and receiver arrive at an agreed-upon meaning, and situations in which the receiver creates a different message than the one the sender intended to convey.

You will invest a lot of time and energy in this course to develop your communication skills, so it's fair to ask whether it will be worthwhile. This section outlines the many ways in which good communication skills are critical for your career and for any company you join.

1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE
Define *communication*, and explain the importance of effective business communication.

Communication Is Important to Your Career

No matter what career path you pursue, communication skills will be essential to your success at every stage. You can have the greatest ideas in the world, but they're no good to your company or your career if you can't express them clearly and persuasively. Some jobs, such as sales and customer support, are primarily about communicating. In fields such as engineering or finance, you often need to share complex ideas with executives, customers, and colleagues, and your ability to connect with people outside your field can be as important as your technical expertise. If you have the entrepreneurial urge, you will need to communicate with a wide range of audiences, from investors, bankers, and government regulators to employees, customers, and business partners.

Ambition and great ideas aren't enough; you need to be able to communicate with people in order to succeed in business.
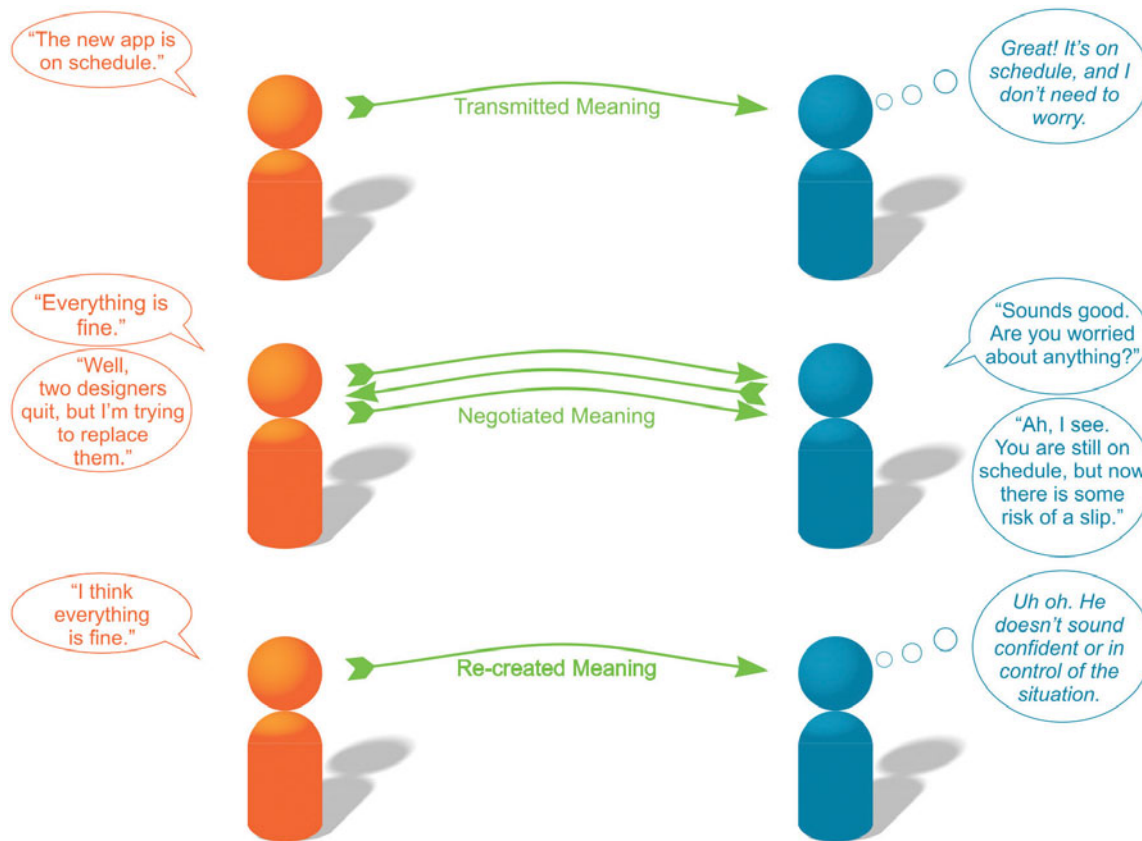
Figure 1.1   Sharing Information
These three exchanges between a software project manager (left) and his boss (right) illustrate the variety of ways in which information is shared between senders and receivers. In the top exchange, the sender's meaning is transmitted intact to the receiver, who accepts what the sender says at face value. In the middle exchange, the sender and receiver negotiate the meaning by discussing the situation. The negotiated meaning is that everything is fine *so far*, but the risk of a schedule slip is now higher than it was before. In the bottom exchange, the receiver has a negative emotional reaction to the word "think" and as a result creates her own meaning—that everything probably *is not* fine, in spite of what the sender says.

As you take on leadership and management roles, communication becomes even more important. The higher you rise in an organization, the less time you will spend using the technical skills of your particular profession and the more time you will spend communicating. Top executives spend most of their time communicating, and businesspeople who can't communicate well don't stand much chance of reaching the top.

In fact, improving your communication skills may be the single most important step you can take in your career. The world is full of good marketing strategists, good accountants, good engineers, and good attorneys—but it is not full of good communicators. View this as an opportunity to stand out from your competition in the job market.

Improving your communication skills could be the single most important thing you do for your career.

Many employers express frustration at the poor communication skills of many employees—particularly recent college graduates who haven't yet learned how to adapt their communication styles to a professional business environment. If you learn to write well, speak well, listen well, and recognize the appropriate way to communicate in any situation, you'll gain a major advantage that will serve you throughout your career.[3]

This course teaches you how to send and receive information more effectively and helps you improve your communication skills through practice in an environment that provides honest, constructive criticism. You will discover how to collaborate in teams, listen effectively, master nonverbal communication, and participate in productive meetings. You'll learn about communicating across cultural boundaries. You'll learn a three-step process that will help you write effective business messages, and you'll get specific tips for crafting a variety of business messages using a wide range of media, from social networks to blogs to online presentations. Develop these skills, and you'll start your business career with a clear competitive advantage.

Communication Is Important to Your Company

Effective communication delivers a variety of important benefits.

Aside from the personal benefits, communication should be important to you because it is important to your company. Effective communication helps businesses in numerous ways. It provides[4]

- Closer ties with important communities in the marketplace
- Opportunities to influence conversations, perceptions, and trends
- Increased productivity and faster problem solving
- Better financial results and higher return for investors
- Earlier warning of potential problems, from rising business costs to critical safety issues
- Stronger decision making based on timely, reliable information
- Clearer and more persuasive marketing messages
- Greater employee engagement with their work, leading to higher employee satisfaction and lower employee turnover

What Makes Business Communication Effective?

Effective communication strengthens the connections between a company and all of its **stakeholders**, those groups affected in some way by the company's actions: customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, neighbors, the community, the nation, and the world as a whole.[5] To make your communication efforts as effective as possible, focus on making them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive:

Effective messages are practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive.

- **Provide practical information.** Give recipients useful information, whether it's to help them perform a desired action or understand a new company policy.
- **Give facts rather than vague impressions.** Use concrete language, specific detail, and information that is clear, convincing, accurate, and ethical. Even when an opinion is called for, present compelling evidence to support your conclusion.
- **Present information in a concise, efficient manner.** Concise messages show respect for people's time, and they increase the chances of a positive response.
- **Clarify expectations and responsibilities.** Craft messages to generate a specific response from a specific audience. When appropriate, clearly state what you expect from audience members or what you can do for them.

An informative subject line helps people grasp key content immediately.

The greeting is friendly without being too casual.

This paragraph emphasizes the importance of the meeting.

The writer offers everyone a chance to participate, without making anyone feel guilty about not being able to attend in person. (*WebEx* is an online meeting system.)

Like the greeting, the close has a warm and personal tone, without being too casual.

The email signature provides additional information and alternative contact options.

The opening paragraph fills in missing information so that everyone can grasp the importance of the message.

The request provides enough information to enable readers to respond.

The closing paragraph invites questions ahead of time so that they don't derail the meeting.

Web 2.0 strategy meeting, Tues. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. - Message (HTML)

File   Edit   View   Insert   Format   Tools   Actions   Help   Type a question for help

Attach as Adobe PDF   » Paragraph   ▾ Arial   ▾ 12 ▾ | A | B *I* U | ≣ ≣ ≣ ≣ | ≣ ≣ | 律 律 | — .

To...   <Customer Service list>
Cc...
Subject: Web 2.0 strategy meeting, Tues. 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Hi Team,

The Web 2.0 consultant we discussed at last week's status meeting is available to meet with us next Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. For those of you who missed the meeting, Walter Johnson has helped a number of organizations use Web 2.0 tools to improve customer service programs. He's agreed to spend several hours with us to answer any questions we have about these technologies.

This meeting is a great opportunity for us to learn about important innovations in customer service, so let's make sure we get the most out of it. I'd like each of the project leaders to brainstorm with your groups and prepare questions that are relevant to your specific parts of the Web 2.0 project. Please email these questions to Pete (peter.laws@sprenco.com) by the end of the day Thursday, and he'll forward them to Mr. Johnson before the meeting.

Details:
Tuesday, March 12
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Mt. Shasta room
We're ordering in sandwiches; please register your choice on the intranet by Monday at 5:00 p.m.

For those of you who can't attend in person, please dial in on the conference line. You'll be able to see the PowerPoint slides via WebEx, as usual. If you have any questions about the meeting, feel free to drop by my office any time on Friday.

Thanks,
Shari

Shari Washington
Group Manager, Retail Systems
Office: 747-579-1852
Mobile: 747-443-6868

MyBCommLab Apply Figure 1.2's key concepts. Go to **mybcommlab .com** and follow this path: Course Content ➔ Chapter 1 ➔ **DOCUMENT MAKEOVERS**

Figure 1.2   Professional Communication
Notice how this message is more formal and "professional" sounding than the messages you typically send to your friends and family. Except for short messages between close colleagues and team members, most employers will expect you to communicate in a style that is more formal than the style you use for personal communication. *Source:* Used with permission from Microsoft.

- **Offer compelling, persuasive arguments and recommendations.** Show your readers precisely how they will benefit by responding the way you want them to respond to your message.

    Keep these five characteristics in mind as you review Figure 1.2.

Communicating as a Professional

You've been communicating your entire life, of course, but if you don't have a lot of work experience yet, meeting the expectations of a professional environment might require some adjustment. A good place to start is to consider what it means to be a professional. **Professionalism** is the quality of performing at a high level and conducting oneself with purpose and pride. It means doing more than putting in the hours and collecting a paycheck; true professionals go beyond minimum expectations and commit to making meaningful contributions. Professionalism can be broken down into six distinct traits: striving to excel, being dependable and accountable, being a team player, demonstrating a sense of etiquette, making ethical decisions, and maintaining a positive outlook (see Table 1.1 on the next page).

    A key message from Table 1.1 is how much these elements of professionalism depend on effective communication. For example, to be a team player, you have to be able to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and interact with a wide variety of personalities. Without strong

2 LEARNING OBJECTIVE
Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context.

Communication is an essential part of being a successful professional.

TABLE 1.1   Elements of Professionalism

Trait	What It Means
Be the best	■ Pros strive to excel, to be the best they can be at everything they do. ■ Excelling at every level is how pros build a great career.
Be dependable	■ Pros keep their promises and meet their commitments. ■ Pros learn from their mistakes and take responsibility for their errors.
Be a team player	■ Pros know how to contribute to a larger cause. ■ Team players make others around them better.
Be respectful	■ Pros know that good business etiquette is a sign of respect for those around them. ■ Respecting others is not only good etiquette, it's good for one's career.
Be ethical	■ Responsible professionals strive to avoid ethical lapses. ■ Pros weigh their options carefully when facing ethical dilemmas.
Be positive	■ Successful people believe in what they're doing and in themselves. ■ Pros don't complain about problems; they find them and fix them.

communication skills, you won't be able to perform to your potential—and others won't recognize you as the professional you'd like to be.

This section offers a brief look at the skills that employerswill expect you to have, the nature of communication in an organizational environment, and the importance of adopting an audience-centered approach.

Understanding What Employers Expect from You

Employers expect you to have a broad set of communication skills, and you can practice all of these skills in this course.

Given the importance of communication in business, employers expect you to be competent at a wide range of communication tasks:[6]

- Organizing ideas and information logically and completely
- Expressing yourself coherently and persuasively in a variety of media
- Building persuasive arguments to gain acceptance for important ideas
- Evaluating data and information critically to know what you can and cannot trust
- Actively listening to others
- Communicating effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Using communication technologies effectively and efficiently
- Following accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of high-quality writing and speaking
- Adapting your messages and communication styles to specific audiences and situations
- Communicating in a civilized manner that reflects contemporary expectations of business etiquette
- Communicating ethically, even when choices aren't crystal clear
- Respecting the confidentiality of private company information
- Following applicable laws and regulations
- Managing your time wisely and using resources efficiently

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Will your social media habits kill your career?

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This is a long list, to be sure, but all these skills can be practiced and developed over time. Start by taking advantage of the opportunities you will have throughout this course, and you'll be well on your way to making a successful transition to the professional environment.

Communicating in an Organizational Context

In addition to having the proper skills, you need to learn how to apply those skills in the business environment, which can be quite different from your social and scholastic environments. Every company has a unique communication system that connects people within the organization and connects the organization to the outside world. The "system" in this broad sense is a complex combination of communication channels (such as the Internet and department meetings), company policies, organizational structure, and personal relationships.

To succeed in a job, you need to figure out how your company's system operates and how to use it to gather information you need and to share information you want others to have. For example, one company might rely heavily on instant messaging, social networks, and blogs that are used in an open, conversational way by everyone in the company. In contrast, another company might use a more rigid, formal approach in which information and instructions are passed down from top managers and employees are expected to follow the "chain of command" when seeking or distributing information.

You will need to adjust your communication habits to the more formal demands of business and the unique environment of your company.

Adopting an Audience-Centered Approach

Successful business professionals take an **audience-centered approach** to their communication, meaning that they focus on understanding and meeting the needs of their readers and listeners. Providing the information your audiences need is obviously an important part of this approach, but it also involves such elements as your ability to listen, your style of writing and speaking, and your ability to maintain positive working relationships. You'll have the chance to explore all these aspects throughout this course.

Focus on the needs of your audiences to make your messages more effective.

An important element of audience-centered communication is **etiquette**, the expected norms of behavior in a particular situation. In today's hectic, competitive world, the notion of etiquette might seem outdated and unimportant. Some people might even consider such "rules" a threat to their individual freedom of expression.[7] However, the way you conduct yourself can have a profound influence on your company's success and your career. When executives hire and promote you, they expect your behavior to protect the company's reputation. The more you understand such expectations, the better chance you have of avoiding career-damaging mistakes.

Long lists of etiquette rules can be overwhelming, and you'll never be able to memorize all of them. Fortunately, you can count on three principles to get you through just about any situation: respect, courtesy, and common sense. Moreover, these principles will encourage forgiveness if you do happen to make a mistake. As you encounter new situations, take a few minutes to learn the expectations of the other people involved. Don't be afraid to ask questions. People will respect your concern and curiosity. You'll gradually accumulate a lot of knowledge, which will help you feel comfortable and be effective in a wide range of business situations. Chapter 2 offers more information about business etiquette.

Respect, courtesy, and common sense will help you avoid etiquette mistakes.

Exploring the Communication Process

Even with the best intentions, communication efforts can fail. Messages can get lost or simply ignored. The receiver of a message can interpret it in ways the sender never imagined. In fact, two people receiving the same information can reach different conclusions about what it means.

Fortunately, by understanding communication as a process with distinct steps, you can improve the odds that your messages will reach their intended audiences and produce their intended effects. This section explores the communication process in two stages: first by following a message from one sender to one receiver in the basic communication model, and then by expanding on that approach with multiple messages and participants in the social communication model.

3 LEARNING OBJECTIVE
Describe the communication process model, and explain how social media are changing the nature of business communication.

The Basic Communication Model

Many variations of the communication process model exist, but these eight steps provide a practical overview (see Figure 1.3):

1. **The sender has an idea.** Whether a communication effort will ultimately be effective starts right here and depends on the nature of the idea and the motivation for sending it. For example, if your motivation is to offer a solution to a problem, you have a better chance of crafting a meaningful message than if your motivation is merely to complain about a problem.

2. **The sender encodes the idea as a message.** When someone puts an idea into a **message**, he or she is **encoding** it, or expressing it in words or images. Much of the focus of this course is on developing the skills needed to successfully encode your ideas into effective messages.

3. **The sender produces the message in a transmittable medium.** With the appropriate message to express an idea, the sender now needs a **communication medium** to present that message to the intended audience. To update your boss on the status of a project, for instance, you might have a dozen or more media choices, from a phone call to an instant message to a slideshow presentation.

4. **The sender transmits the message through a channel.** Just as technology continues to increase the number of media options, it also continues to provide new **communication channels** senders can use to transmit their messages. The distinction between medium and channel can get a bit murky, but think of the medium as the *form* a message takes (such as a Twitter update) and the channel as the system used to *deliver* the message (such as the Internet).

5. **The audience receives the message.** If the channel functions properly, the message reaches its intended audience. However, mere arrival is not enough. For a message to truly be received, the recipient has to *sense* the presence of a message, *select* it from all the other messages clamoring for attention, and *perceive* it as an actual message (as opposed to random noise).[8]

6. **The receiver decodes the message.** After a message is received, the receiver needs to extract the idea from the message, a step known as **decoding**. Even well-crafted, well-intentioned communication efforts can fail at this stage because extracting meaning is a highly personal process that is influenced by culture, experience, learning and thinking styles, hopes, fears, and even temporary moods. As you saw in Figure 1.1, receivers sometimes decode the same meaning the recipient intended, but sometimes they can decode—or re-create—entirely different meanings. Moreover, audiences tend to extract the meaning they expect to get from a message, even if it's the opposite of what the sender intended.[9]

7. **The receiver responds to the message.** In most instances, senders want to accomplish more than simply delivering information. They often want receivers to respond in particular ways, whether it's to invest millions of dollars in a new business venture or to accept management's explanation for why it can't afford to give employee bonuses this year. Whether a receiver responds as the sender hopes depends on the receiver
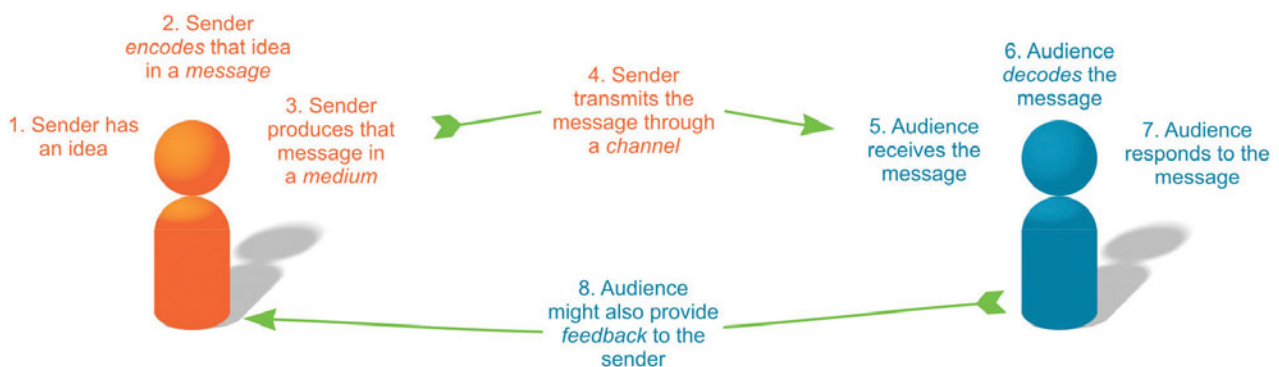

Figure 1.3   The Basic Communication Process
This eight-step model is a simplified view of how communication works in real life; understanding this basic model is vital to improving your communication skills.

(a) *remembering* the message long enough to act on it, (b) being *able* to act on it, and (c) being *motivated* to respond.

8. **The receiver provides feedback.** If a mechanism is available for them to do so, receivers can "close the loop" in the communication process by giving the sender **feedback** that helps the sender evaluate the effectiveness of the communication effort. Feedback can be verbal (using written or spoken words), nonverbal (using gestures, facial expressions, or other signals), or both. Just like the original message, however, this feedback from the receiver also needs to be decoded carefully. A smile, for example, can have many different meanings.

Considering the complexity of this process—and the barriers and distractions that often stand between sender and receiver—it should come as no surprise that communication efforts frequently fail to achieve the sender's objective. Fortunately, the better you understand the process, the more successful you'll be.

The Social Communication Model

The basic model presented in Figure 1.3 illustrates how a single idea moves from one sender to one receiver. In a larger sense, it also helps represent the traditional nature of much business communication, which was primarily defined by a *publishing* or *broadcasting* mindset. Externally, a company issued carefully scripted messages to a mass audience that often had few options for responding to those messages or initiating messages of their own. Customers and other interested parties had few ways to connect with one another to ask questions, share information, or offer support. Internally, communication tended to follow the same "we talk, you listen" model, with upper managers issuing directives to lower-level supervisors and employees.

However, in recent years, a variety of technologies enabled and inspired a new approach to business communication. In contrast to the publishing mindset, this **social communication model** is interactive, conversational, and usually open to all who wish to participate. Audience members are no longer passive recipients of messages but active participants in a conversation. Social media have given customers and other stakeholders a voice they did not have in the past. And businesses are listening to that voice. In fact, one of the most common uses of social media among U.S. businesses is monitoring online discussions about a company and its brands.[10]

The social communication model is interactive, conversational, and usually open to all who wish to participate.

Instead of transmitting a fixed message, a sender in a social media environment initiates a conversation by sharing valuable information. This information is often revised and reshaped by the web of participants as they share it and comment on it. People can add to it or take pieces from it, depending on their needs and interests.

Just as *Web 2.0* signified the second generation of World Wide Web technologies (blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other social media tools you'll read about in Chapter 6), **Business Communication 2.0** is a convenient label for this approach to business communication. Figure 1.4 on the next page lists some of the deep and profound differences between traditional and social models of business communication.

Social media tools present some potential disadvantages that managers and employees need to consider.

The social communication model offers many advantages, but it has a number of disadvantages as well. Potential problems include information overload, fragmented attention, information security risks, distractions that hurt productivity, the need to monitor and respond to numerous conversational threads, and blurring of the line between personal and professional lives, which can make it difficult for people to disconnect from work.[11]

Of course, no company, no matter how enthusiastically it embraces the social communication model, is going to be run as a club in which everyone has a say in every business matter. Instead, a hybrid approach is emerging in which some communications (such as strategic plans and policy documents) follow the traditional approach, while others (such as project management updates and customer support messages) follow the social model.

You can learn more about business uses of social media in Chapter 6.

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