

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION 9e



Newman

Dear Student,

Whether you're taking this course because you have to or because you want to, you'll learn that business communication is essential to your career. At work, people communicate more than they do any other task—and no other skill is as apparent as how you communicate. Skillful communicators get the good jobs, get their ideas accepted, and get promoted. Less skilled communicators risk career stagnation and, in some cases, public embarrassment.

If you read the news, you have heard of companies' communication failures. Social media and other technologies offer companies new avenues to connect with customers, employees, and the public, yet expose every misstep for the world to see. ***Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online*** helps you navigate these obstacles and understand communication from a company's perspective.

Where do you see yourself after graduation? Will you start your own business or work for someone else? Whatever your career plans, ***Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online*** will help you be a proficient communicator and improve your chances of success. With this textbook and its online resources, you will differentiate yourself at work:

- Set yourself apart during your job search and impress employers during a job interview.
- Improve your listening skills—one of the most undeveloped communication skills.
- Write clear, concise, well-organized emails, letters, blog posts, and more.
- Deliver an outstanding oral presentation with creative visuals.
- Respond to customers' online comments and engage audiences through social media.
- Write a well-researched report using text and graphics to influence an audience.
- Select appropriate communication media: face-to-face meetings, email, instant and text messaging, videoconferencing, and so on.
- Facilitate and participate in a variety of meetings: in-person, online, teleconference, and videoconference.
- Communicate difficult messages and bad news to resistant audiences.
- Work well with others, particularly international colleagues and diverse teams of people.
- Use technology to manage meetings and work.
- Navigate complex, ethical decisions that every employee will face.

Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online is interesting to read. The conversational writing style, creative graphics, and real business examples are different from other textbooks. I also invite you to visit the book Facebook page, follow me on Twitter, and frequent my blog to learn about business communication examples in the news. I look forward to connecting with you and helping you achieve your career goals.

Sincerely,

Amy Newman

Amy Newman

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Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online, 9e

Current, fast-paced, & interesting—Just like business itself.

Take advantage of the following resources! They'll help you succeed in this course and in your career by helping you better understand business communication topics and how they apply in the real-world.

The screenshot shows the BizCom in the News website. The header includes the title "BizCom in the News" with social media icons and a subtitle "Connecting current news to the textbook, Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online (9e) for instructors and students of business communication". The main content area features a search for "literally" on Google, showing results from Merriam-Webster and Oxford Dictionaries. The Merriam-Webster result includes a definition and a discussion of its use in context. The Oxford Dictionaries result discusses the shift in the word's meaning over time. On the left side, there is a "News by Chapter" section with links to chapters 1 through 12. Below that is a "Receive Top Stories Weekly by Email" form with fields for title, first name, last name, and email, and a "Submit" button.

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Business Communication

In Person, In Print, Online

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Business Communication

In Person, In Print, Online

Amy Newman

Cornell University



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About Amy Newman

Amy Newman specializes in business communication at the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration. As a senior lecturer, she teaches two required communication courses: a freshman business writing and oral communication class and an upper-level persuasive communication class. Amy also teaches an elective, *Corporate Communication*, which focuses on communication strategy, crisis communication, and social media.

Amy was an adjunct instructor at Ithaca College; Milano, The New School for Management and Urban Policy in New York City; and eCornell, where she taught classes online. She has won several awards for excellence in teaching and student advising and grants to develop technology-based learning solutions.

Amy's research focuses on social media and other communication technologies. She has published articles and delivered presentations about instant messaging, email, and social media.

Prior to joining Cornell, Amy spent 20 years working for large companies, such as Canon, Reuters, Scholastic, and MCI. Internally, she held senior-level management positions in human resources and leadership development. As an external consultant, Amy worked to improve communication and employee performance in hospitality, technology, education, publishing, financial services, and entertainment companies.

A graduate of Cornell University and Milano, Amy is author of *Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online, 9e*. Amy has developed several multimedia company scenarios to accompany the book and maintains a blog, *BizCom in the News*.



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Business Communication

In Person, In Print, Online

Chapter 1

The Communication Model | Communication Need | Sender | Message | Audience | Response | Communication Context

Understanding Business Communication

Directions of Communication | The Formal Communication Network | The Informal Communication Network | **Communication Barriers** | Verbal Barriers | Nonverbal Barriers | **Communication Media Choices** | **Potential Legal Consequences of Communication** | **Ethics and Communication** | What Affects Ethical Behavior | Framework for Ethical Decision Making

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you have finished this chapter, you should be able to

- LO1** Identify the components of communication.
- LO2** Identify the major verbal and nonverbal barriers to communication.
- LO3** Describe criteria for choosing communication media.
- LO4** Avoid potential legal consequences of communication.
- LO5** Communicate ethically.

The Learning Objectives (LOs) will help you learn the material. You'll see references to the LOs throughout the chapter.

"T-shirts that combine 'Just Do It' 'Get High' with pictures of pill bottles are a more than unfortunate twist on your corporate slogan, and I urge you to remove them."¹

—THOMAS MENINO,
MAYOR OF BOSTON

Chapter Introduction: Nike's "Get High" T-Shirts

When Nike produced T-shirts with messages about using drugs, the company didn't expect a backlash—or did it? Displayed in a store window in Boston, shirts with sayings such as "Get High" and "Dope" weren't well received by the city mayor.

In a letter to the company, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino wrote,

Your window display of T-shirts with drug and profanity wordplay are [sic] out of keeping with the character of Boston's Back Bay, our entire city, and our aspirations for our young people . . . not to mention common sense.²

With the handle @BizComInTheNews, Amy Newman tweeted to @Nike for an explanation and received this response.

These tweets are consistent with Nike's statement that the T-shirts were "part of an action sports campaign, featuring marquee athletes using commonly used and accepted expressions for performance at the highest level of their sport."

An article in *Forbes* summed up the company's position this way: "if history is any guide, there is a next-to-zero chance that decision makers at the company did not anticipate some public outcry and have a planned response to it."³

The controversy may have been invited, but the situation still calls the company's ethics into question.



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COMMUNICATING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Walk through the halls of any organization—a start-up company, a *Fortune* 500 giant, a state government office, or a not-for-profit organization—and what do you see? Managers and other employees drafting emails, attending meetings, reading articles online, writing reports, conducting interviews, talking on the phone, and making presentations. In short, you see people *communicating*.

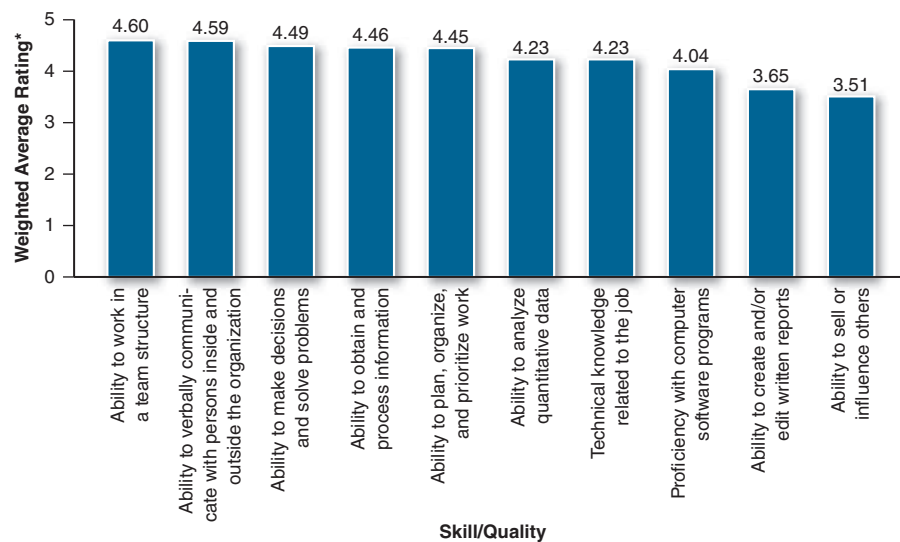
Communication is necessary for an organization to achieve its goals.

People in organizations work together to achieve a common goal that can only be reached through communication. Groups of people must interact in order to communicate their ideas, needs, expertise, and plans. Communication is how people share information, coordinate activities, and make better decisions. Understanding how communication works in companies and how to communicate competently will make you more effective in every aspect of business.

But many employees lack the communication skills required by their employers, as illustrated by these studies and examples:

- Written and oral communication skills are among the top ten skills that employers look for on college students' résumés. According to The National Association of Colleges and Employers' Job Outlook Survey, employers also rated "Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization" and "Ability to create and/or edit written reports" among the most important skills for new college hires to have, shown in Figure 1.⁴

Figure 1
Employers Rate Importance of Candidate Skills/Qualities



* 5-point scale: 1 = Not important; 2 = Not very important; 3 = Somewhat important; 4 = Very important; and 5 = Extremely important © CENGAGE LEARNING 2015

- "People who cannot write and communicate clearly will not be hired and are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for promotion," reports The College Board, based on a survey of human resource directors.⁵
- The College Board also reports that one-third of employees in U.S. blue-chip companies write poorly, and companies spend as much as \$3.1 billion each year on remedial writing training.⁶
- Two recent *Wall Street Journal* articles highlight poor business writing skills. One says that although "M.B.A. students' quantitative skills are prized by employers, their writing and presentation skills have been a perennial complaint. Employers and writing coaches say business-school graduates tend to ramble, use pretentious vocabulary, or pen too-casual emails."⁷ Another article, humorously titled, "This Embarrasses You and I*," says that, "Managers

are fighting an epidemic of grammar gaffes in the workplace. Many of them attribute slipping skills to the informality of email, texting, and Twitter, where slang and shortcuts are common.”⁸

- On a more positive note, companies that are considered highly effective communicators had 47% higher returns to shareholders than companies considered the least effective communicators. This study, by Towers Watson, a global professional services firm, calls communication “a leading indicator of financial performance and a driver of employee engagement.”⁹
- Employees who are happy with how their company communicates difficult decisions are twice as likely to be motivated to work for the company and four times as likely to recommend their company.¹⁰

Clearly, good communication skills are crucial to your success in an organization. Competence in writing and speaking will help you get hired, perform well, and earn promotions. If you decide to go into business for yourself, writing and speaking skills will help you find investors, promote your product, and manage your employees. These same skills will also help you achieve your personal and social goals.

Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages—sometimes through spoken or written words, and sometimes nonverbally through facial expressions, gestures, and voice qualities. If someone sends a message to you, and you receive it, communication will have taken place. However, when Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, testified before the U.S. Senate Banking Committee about billions of dollars in trading losses, he used a common U.S. business expression. But was his communication universally understood?¹¹

Jamie Dimon uses a common but potentially misunderstood business expression, which means revealing information to outside parties. Some consider the term sexist and racist.¹²



SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Communication is sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal messages.

THE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

How does communication happen among people and throughout an organization? In this section, we’ll discuss the communication model (or process) and the directions of communication within a company.

LO1 Identify the components of communication.

The Communication Model

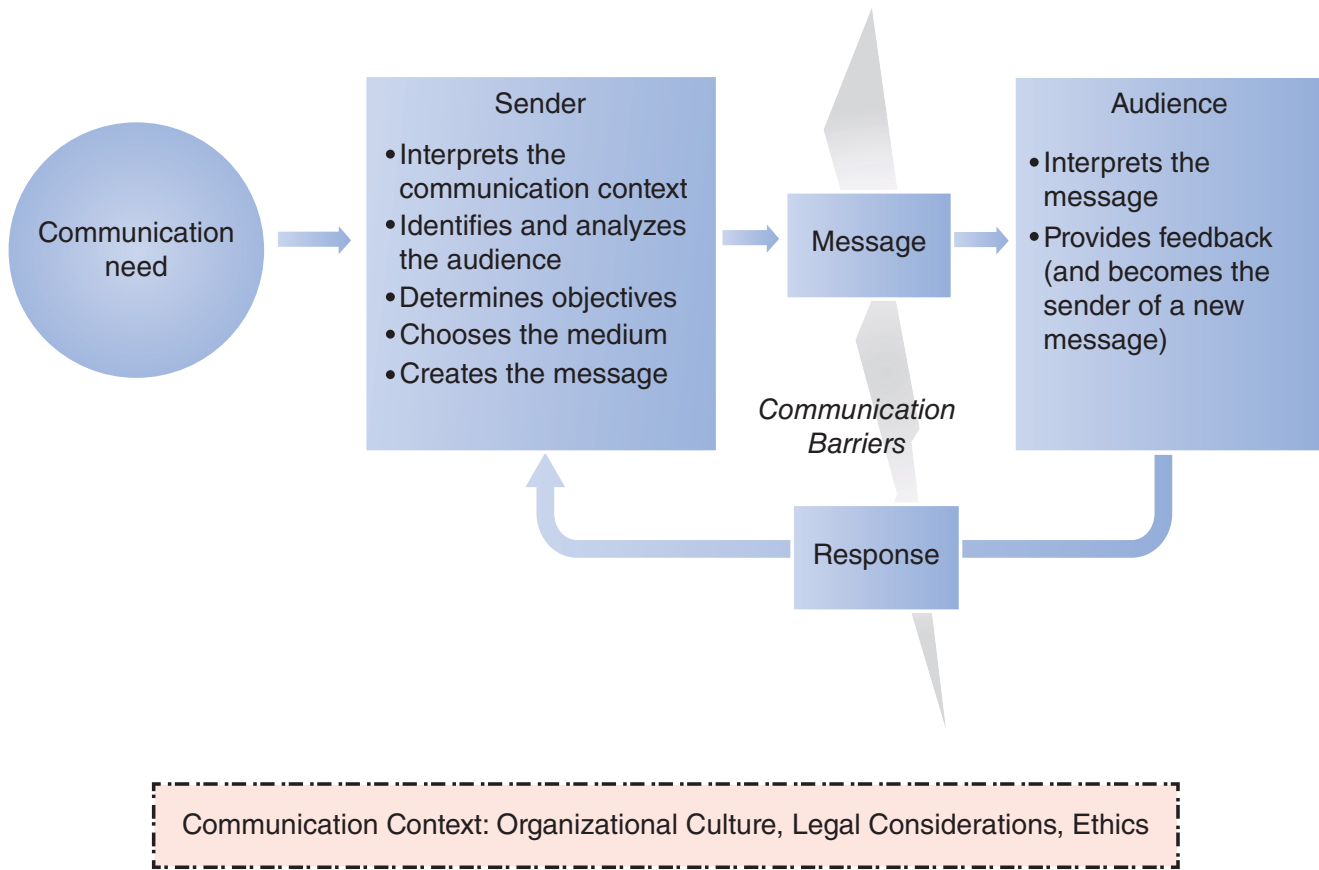
The communication model consists of the communication need, sender, message, audience, and response, as shown in Figure 2. Consider the example of one company acquiring another. Imagine that you are the VP, business development, and need to announce this decision to all employees. Other stakeholders—for example, customers and investors—will have to be informed, too, but let’s use the example of internal communication here.

Communication Need

A **communication need**—either from the sender’s mind or from an organizational situation—starts the process of communication in organizations. After you and

A communication need begins the process.

Figure 2
The Communication Model



COURTESY OF AMY NEWMAN

the rest of the executive management team decide to acquire a company, you agree that you'll announce the decision to employees.

Sender

As the message **sender**, you have a lot of work to do to ensure that the message is received as you intend:

- **Interpret the communication context:** You'll consider the organizational culture (e.g., how formal the language should be), legal constraints (e.g., whether you should avoid making certain statements in writing), and the ethical circumstances (e.g., whether employees will be worried about losing their jobs).
- **Identify and analyze the audience:** You'll think about the wide range of employees who will receive the message. What is important to them, and how are they likely to react?
- **Determine objectives:** You'll identify what, specifically, you want employees to think, do, or feel about your message.
- **Choose the medium:** You'll choose a way to convey your message, for example, by email.
- **Create the message:** Finally, you'll write the email and get it ready for distribution.

Message

Whether a communication achieves the sender's objectives depends on how well you construct the **message** (the information to be communicated). Oral messages might be transmitted through a staff meeting, individual meeting, telephone

The message conveys information in some form (the medium).

conversation, voice mail, podcast, conference call, videoconference, or even less formally, through the company grapevine. Written messages might be transmitted through an email, a report, a blog post, a web page, a brochure, a tweet, or a company newsletter. Nonverbal messages might be transmitted through facial expressions, gestures, or body movement. As we'll discuss later in this chapter, choosing the right **medium** for your audience, message, and objectives is critical to the success of your communication.

The purpose and content of your message may be clear, but messages often are obstructed by verbal and nonverbal barriers. Employees may misinterpret your email or not read it at all.

Audience

As the receiver of your message, the **audience** filters the communication and reacts by doing the following:

- Interprets the message: Each audience member (in this situation of acquiring a new company, each employee) will **filter** the message according to his or her knowledge, experience, background, and so on. When communication is successful, the message is interpreted as originally intended.
- Provides feedback: Employees may be happy about the news and apply for a job to work in the new company, or they may believe the company is expanding too rapidly and will gossip about it during lunch.

At this point, the audience becomes the sender of a new message—the response.

The audience filters the communication and reacts.

Response

As a new message, the audience's **response** to your communication begins the cycle again—and is subjected to the same complexities of the original process.

The Dynamic Nature of Communication

You probably know from your own experience that communication rarely flows neatly from one stage to the next, with the sender and audience clearly identified at any given point. Two or more people often send and receive messages simultaneously. For example, the look on your face when you receive a message may tell the sender that you understand, agree with, or are baffled by the message being sent. And your feedback may prompt the sender to modify what he or she says. The model helps us understand each step of the process—but communication is far more complicated than presented in the graphic.

Communication is not a linear, static process.

Directions of Communication

For an organization to be successful, communication must flow freely through formal and informal channels.

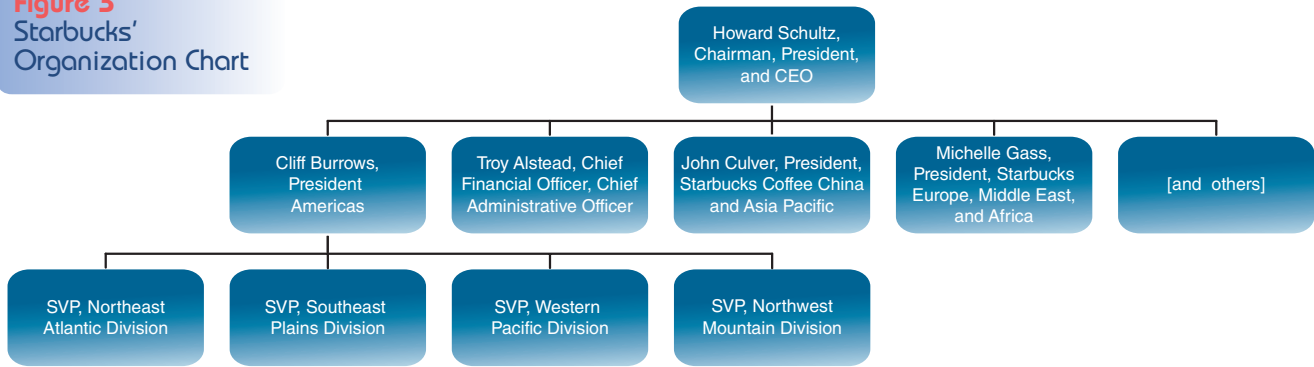
The Formal Communication Network

Three types of communication make up an organization's **formal communication network**: downward, upward, and lateral. Information may be transmitted in these directions, which we'll illustrate with Starbucks' organization chart, shown in Figure 3.¹³

The formal communication network consists of downward, upward, and lateral (horizontal) communication.

Downward Communication. **Downward communication** is the flow of information from managers to their employees (people who report to them). From the Starbucks organization chart, we could assume that Howard Schultz, as CEO and president, communicates downward to his direct reports. When Starbucks decides

Figure 3
Starbucks'
Organization Chart



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to close stores, for example, he would likely communicate this message to Cliff Burrows (president, Americas), who would then communicate the bad news to his direct reports, the divisional senior vice presidents. This is called **cascading communication**, which directs information from one level in an organization down to another.

Employees have many justifiable complaints about their managers' communication. A Florida State University study proves the adage "Employees don't leave a company; they leave a manager."¹⁴ Some of the disappointing results are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4
In FSU Study,
Employees Rate
Their Supervisors



Source: Barry Ray, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Boss?" Florida State University, FSU News, December 4, 2006.

Another issue with downward communication is that managers assume their employees receive and understand their messages. From our discussion on filters—and probably from your own experience—you know this isn't always the case. Employees pay attention to their managers' messages, but managers need feedback from employees to determine whether their messages are received as intended.

Upward Communication. **Upward communication** is the flow of information from lower-level employees to upper-level employees or managers. Upward communication provides upper management with feedback about their communication, suggestions for improving the business, and information needed for decision making. Encouraging employees to voice their opinions and concerns is one of the most important parts of a manager's job.

In the example of Starbucks closing stores, Troy Alstead, as chief financial officer, probably gave oral and written financial reports to Howard Schultz to tell him which stores were underperforming. Lower-level employees may have expressed their frustration about the closings through formal upward communication channels, for example, during team meetings.

Lateral (or Horizontal) Communication. **Lateral communication** (also called **horizontal communication**) is the flow of information among peers within an organization. Through lateral communication, employees coordinate work, share plans, negotiate differences, and support each other. At Starbucks, managers responsible for closing a store probably communicate with each other to coordinate messages and timing—and perhaps to console each other during the process.

Lateral communication can be challenging in an organization because you're trying to influence people but have no management authority over them. This is particularly difficult when the lateral communication is **cross-functional**—across different departments, divisions, or branches. In these situations, you'll need to rely on your relationship-building and persuasive communication skills to rally support and accomplish your goals.

The Informal Communication Network

The **informal communication network** (or **grapevine**) transmits information through unofficial channels within the organization. Employees share what's happening in the company in person (while eating in the cafeteria or refilling their coffee cup) and online (on social networking sites and blogs).

Without good formal communication, the grapevine will take over. People need information, particularly when they fear change that may affect them: layoffs, benefit cuts, or organizational restructurings. Although the grapevine is surprisingly accurate (75% to 90% according to some studies),¹⁵ managers who let the grapevine function as employees' main source of information miss out on the chance to convey their own messages.

Websites such as Glassdoor.com provide a public forum for current and former employees to voice their opinions about companies. As you can imagine, employees posted negative comments when Starbucks closed stores. This is potentially embarrassing for a company, but there's little management can do about the site—or any informal communication network.

Rather than trying to eliminate the grapevine (a futile effort), competent managers pay attention to it and act promptly to counteract false rumors. They use the formal communication network (meetings, email, the intranet, and newsletters) to ensure that all news—positive and negative—gets out to employees as quickly and as completely as possible. Savvy managers also identify key influencers in an organization to get accurate messages infused into the grapevine.

The free flow of information within the organization allows managers to stop rumors and communicate their own messages to employees. However, managers face additional challenges at work: verbal and nonverbal barriers to communication.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Considering the complexity of the communication process and the many communication channels, your messages may not always be received exactly as you intend. As mentioned earlier, verbal and nonverbal barriers can interfere with the communication process.

Verbal Barriers

Verbal barriers are related to what you write or say. They include inadequate knowledge or vocabulary, differences in interpretation, language differences, inappropriate use of expressions, overabstraction and ambiguity, and polarization.

Inadequate Knowledge or Vocabulary

Before you can communicate an idea, you must first *have* the idea and know enough about it. Assume, for example, that you're Michelle Gass, president, Starbucks

The informal communication network transmits information through unofficial channels within the organization.

LO2 Identify the major verbal and nonverbal barriers to communication.

You must know enough about both your topic and your audience to express yourself precisely and appropriately.