

Level 2 Diploma in Team Leading

Chapter 5

Business Communication



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Business Communication (M&L 4)

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Workshop 5 and the contents of Chapter 5 of this workbook are designed to provide underpinning learning for the learning outcomes of **Unit M&L4**

Communicating Work-related Information (ML4)	
Skills CFA Reference: M&L 4 ; Level:2 ; Credit Value: 4 ; GLH: 23	
Learning Outcomes	Assessment Criteria
1. Understand the principles and techniques of work-related communication	1.1. Describe communication techniques used to gain and maintain the attention and interest of an audience 1.2. Explain the principles of effective written business communications 1.3. Explain the principles of effective verbal communications in a business environment 1.4. Describe the importance of checking the accuracy and currency of information to be communicated 1.5. Describe the importance of explaining to others the level of confidence that can be placed on the information being communicated 1.6. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of communication for different purposes
2. Be able to communicate work-related information verbally	2.1 Identify the information to be communicated 2.2 Confirm that the audience is authorised to receive the information 2.3 Provide accurate information, using appropriate verbal communication techniques 2.4 Communicate in a way that the listener can understand, using language that is appropriate to the topic 2.5 Confirm that the listener has understood what has been communicated
3. Be able to communicate work-related information in writing	3.1 Identify the information to be communicated 3.2 Provide accurate information using the appropriate written communication methods and house styles 3.3 Adhere to any organisational confidentiality requirements when communicating in writing 3.4 Use correct grammar, spelling, sentence structure and punctuation, using accepted business communication principles and formats 3.5 Justify opinions and conclusions with evidence

Introduction

This workbook and the various exercises within it, introduce you to the challenges of communicating work-related Information: key skills are examined that will enable you to confidently tackle these elements of your role or future role as a team leader and/or supervisor. The exercises will require you to consider theories that align with each topic but, importantly, you will be expected to make parallels with your own experience in the workplace, which will help in ensuring that you can lead your team effectively.

The Principles and Techniques of Work-related Communication

The line manager’s role involves a requirement to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing. What is for sure is that in organisations, people that communicate well, do well!

The first thing we must do if we are to understand workplace communication and why it is important, is to define what is meant by the word *communication*. The Concise Oxford Dictionary offers the following:

Communicate is to *‘transmit or pass on by speaking or writing’*

Communication is *‘the act of imparting, especially, news’*

What do these 2 definitions tell us?

You might conclude that communication is about passing on information verbally and/or in writing. But is this conclusion enough? How many times have we been in the situation when a simple piece of communication has been misunderstood?

Activity: Think of 3 occasions when something you said to another person was misunderstood and another 3 occasions when you misunderstood what someone else said to you. List these in Column 1 and consider why the communication failed. Write down the reasons why the communication failed in Column 2.

Misunderstood Communication	Why the Communication Failed
1.	
2.	
3.	

In considering why the communication failed, you may now have a better idea of the challenges that we face in communicating with others in the workplace! What should now be clear is that we are actually interested in effective communication.

One definition, cited in Hamilton, 2011:

'Effective communication is when the message is received as the sender intended'

Gaining Audience Attention

The first thing to note in the above definition is the word '*effective*': it is not what A says, but what B understands, that matters. To get that understanding the communicator needs to get the audience's attention. That is just as much the case in written communication as it is in verbal communication.

Before we explore the core elements of communication in greater detail, all of which combine to give an appreciation of getting shared understanding of the message, it is worth considering the types of communication that take place in businesses and organisations.

Activity: List below the types of communication that take place in your organisation. Annotate each communication type as verbal (v) or written (w):

You may have identified some or all of the following types of communication that regularly take place in organisations:

Verbal Communications
Telephone conversations Meetings One-to-one interviews (e.g. Appraisals) Informal 'water-cooler' conversations Briefings Formal presentations Video conferencing
Written Communications
Mission and Vision Statements Corporate and Business Plans Company Balance Sheets Annual Accounts Annual Report Employment and other contracts Policy documents (e.g. Equality and Diversity (E&D), Procurement) Standard operating procedures/instructions Business cases and options appraisals Performance and other reports Records of meetings (e.g. minutes) Staff appraisals Statements of Account Invoices Websites Staff newsletters House journals Letters (received and sent) E-mails and memorandum Text messages

Some of these different types of communication will be more effective than others. To understand why some are more effective than others, we need to consider the factors that contribute to effective communication and to identify the potential barriers that prevent or reduce the effectiveness of communication within companies and organisations.

Effective Work Related Communication

While it may seem obvious that workplace communication must be effective, we know communication in the workplace can be difficult. We can (and will) identify a range of factors that can adversely affect the effectiveness of workplace communication and explore how these barriers can be overcome. First, however, it is worthwhile considering the impact ineffective workplace communication can have.

Activity: From the list on the previous page, 3 types of communication have been listed below. Add 2 more of your own choice. Write down the business consequences arising from ineffective workplace communication. For example, if the communication in an appraisal is ineffective, one unwelcome consequence might be a demotivated member of staff.

Type of Communication	Impact of Ineffective Workplace Communication
Formal Presentations	
Briefing	
Records of Meetings	

From your analysis, you might have identified some or all of the following adverse consequences of ineffective workplace communication:

- Ill-informed staff;
- De-motivated staff;
- More mistakes and errors by staff;
- More workplace accidents;
- More confusion;
- Low morale of staff;
- Reduced productivity;
- Inadequate quality of outputs/products;
- Dissatisfied customers and clients;
- Conflict between team members;
- Conflict with other teams;
- Increased staff absenteeism;
- Increased numbers of staff off sick (particularly with stress-related illness);
- Impaired decision-making by staff;
- Inability of staff to solve problems effectively;
- Staff inability to cope with change;
- Reduced number of ideas and suggestions from team members;
- Reluctance of staff to take on extra work;
- Reluctance of staff to develop themselves;
- Increased likelihood of a 'blame culture' developing; and/or,
- Reluctance of staff to take responsibility for getting things done.

The list above is neither exhaustive nor definitive. However, it does illustrate that ineffective communication can manifest itself adversely in many different ways. Indeed, as a team leader, should you encounter any of the above issues, you might wish to ask yourself whether you have done all you could to ensure that team members have all the information that they need to understand, whatever scenario exists.

Communication Theory and Models

It would be easy to say that the fundamental characteristic of effective communication is its accuracy. However, focusing on accuracy in our communication might mask other characteristics that are equally important. Perhaps the place to start is to understand the process of communication.

Activity: In your own words, describe the process of effective communication, breaking the process down into its component parts or stages.

There are a number of different models of communication. Shannon and Weaver are credited with one of the earliest communication models based on the work that they did in 1949 for the Bell Laboratories (then part of the AT&T telephone company). They identified a 3-stage communication model, comprising sender, channel, and receiver: a message would come from the sender, via a channel (the telephone), to the receiver. As they developed their thinking further, they realised that the effectiveness of the channel for communication could be reduced by external factors. In the case of people communicating by telephone the effectiveness (and quality) of the communication could be adversely affected by static interference on the line or the complete loss of signal. Their work culminated in what is commonly referred to as the '*Transmission Model*'.

The Transmission Model suggests that there are 5 stages to communication, namely:

- An information source;
- A transmitter;
- A channel;
- A receiver; and,
- A decoder.

In human communication the *information source* and *the transmitter* are one of the same: the person who has a message to send. The *channel* could be the physical method of communication – that is, verbal, written or pictorial – while the *receiver* is the person to whom the message is being sent. As the *information source* and *the transmitter* are one person, so the *receiver* and *decoder* are one and the same. In other words, when you speak to a colleague, they receive your message and interpret (decode) it.

Activity: Think of a task that you routinely instruct team members to perform. Write down the instructions that you would give.

Now is the time to apply critical analysis to the instructions you have formulated by testing the instructions against Shannon and Weaver's Transmission Model.

Activity: Critique your instructions against Shannon and Weaver's Transmission Model, identifying where problems or issues in communication may arise.

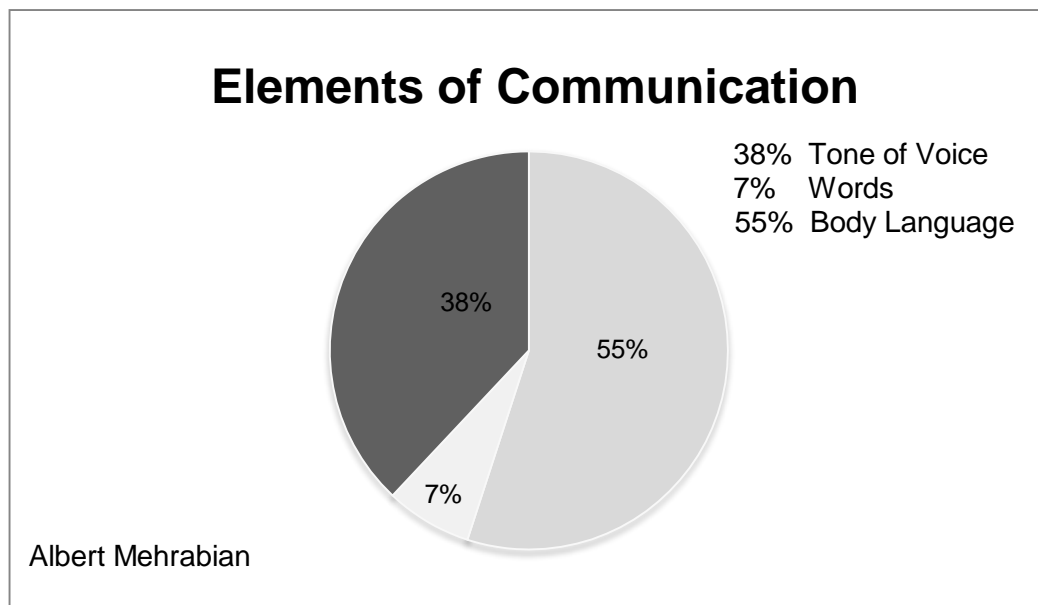
It is often difficult to see where our own instructions might be improved but you could have identified potential problems or issues around 3 key areas:

- The accuracy (or clarity) of the instructions that you are giving:
- The meaning conveyed to the receiver (their interpretation); and,
- The effectiveness of the communication (that is, do the instructions get carried out as you intended?).

Principles of Effective Verbal Communications in a Business Environment

Albert Mehrabian's research in the 1960s has been widely regarded as ground breaking. In a paper published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology in 1967 – '*Decoding of Inconsistent Communications*' – Mehrabian, a social psychologist, focused on the communication which takes place in person between 2 people, suggesting that at its most basic level, human beings verbally communicate at 3 levels: the words spoken, the tone used to emphasise the importance of the words and body language.

From his research Mehrabian concluded that people preferred to trust the non-verbal elements – tone and body language – when there was any doubt about the words themselves or the way in which the words were said. He suggested that feelings and attitudes were most accurately conveyed by the tone used and the body language supporting the message. His findings are often referred to as the 3 Vs – Verbal, Vocal and Visual – or as the '*7%-38%-55% rule*'. The diagram below shows the results of his research:



When represented as a simple division between the 3 levels of spoken communication – 7% words, 38% tone and 55% body language – it is easy to conclude that the most effective communication occurs when people talk to each other. Of course, that would make perfect sense most of the time and, indeed, is exactly why Mehrabian's findings are regularly quoted as definitive. It is worth noting, however, exactly what Mehrabian proposed. Specifically, he said that:

- 7% of the message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in the words that are spoken;
- 38% of the message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said); and,
- 55% of the message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in facial expression.

The key points to note here are:

- The words '*pertaining to feelings and attitudes*'; and,
- The phrase '*facial expression*'.

Barriers to Effective Workplace Communication

Some observers consider that many organisations fail signally to communicate effectively with their staff because team leaders and managers do not recognise the importance of communication. Arguably this is unfair. There are many potential barriers and, while the personal characteristics, preferred communication style and interpersonal skills of individual managers will contribute to the effectiveness of any particular single communication, there are other things that we should consider.

Activity: Consider the barriers or potential to effective communication within your organisation. List these below:

You may have identified a raft of potential barriers, some of which are relatively easily overcome. The list below gives examples of some of the more commonly found barriers to communication in the workplace.

Age Power (position) Authority (status) Gender Expertise and knowledge Language (including jargon, acronyms, etc) Perceptions Disability (physical and learning) Not listening	Environment Personality of sender and receiver Behaviour of sender and receiver Confidence Culture Peer pressure Values and beliefs Inappropriate audience Personal style
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The list above is not definitive and there may be barriers that are unique to your organisation. Notwithstanding, the key to effective communication, it could be argued, is in selecting the type of communication that best meets needs of the organisation and the recipients of the communication.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Methods of Communication for Different Purposes

Activity:

List the advantages and disadvantages of both oral and written communication in the workplace.

Typical purposes for oral communication at work include: letters, memos, emails, articles, reports, posters, notices, newsletters, etc.

Advantages of written communication

- Can be carefully considered before release – useful where precision is important.
- It provides a permanent record.
- Can be used to expand and clarify a verbal message.
- Useful where audit trails are important eg during legal cases or for accounting purposes.
- A signed document tends to have more validity than oral communication.
- Can be easily stored.
- Can be easily sent out to multiple people in different places.

Disadvantages of written communication

- Can absorb considerable time in producing documents.
- Only of use for sighted people.
- Documents are fixed and deny free flowing interaction.
- Feedback or decisions on a document may take a long time.
- Ineffective writing skills can limit effectiveness.
- Can be expensive to create and distribute.
- People who cannot read and write will struggle understanding the information.

Typical purposes for oral communication at work include: meetings, telephone calls, presentations, interviews, meetings, briefings, discussions, etc.

Advantages of oral communication, include:

- Instant feedback in conversations allows decisions to be made quickly.
- Is relatively easy.
- It can be time-efficient.
- Useful when relaying confidential information.
- Can be inexpensive. For example - a telephone call versus the cost of travel.
- Used effectively, it can be useful for persuading others of a point of view.
- Allows for mistakes to be immediately corrected.

Disadvantages of oral communication, include:

- Does not usually have a permanent record of what was said.
- Noise could interfere with information exchange.
- A poor speaker may lack confidence and clarity.
- Garrulous people have less impact.
- Open to misunderstanding.

Effective communication – *when the message is received as the sender intended* – can only be achieved through thinking critically about what information we wish to transmit to another person or other people. Preparation, as in many other things that we do as team leaders, is crucial. The characteristics of an effective piece of workplace communication could be summarised by the 5 Cs:

- Conciseness
- Completeness
- Courtesy
- Clarity
- Correctness

There is a strong argument to be made for the addition to the list of a sixth 'C' – *confidence*. We will discuss how this might be significant after the next activity

Activity: Consider each of the characteristics of effective communication and note down attributes that might signify 'effectiveness' for each characteristic:

Characteristic	Attributes Signifying Effectiveness
Conciseness	
Completeness	
Courtesy	
Clarity	
Correctness	

You will have considered a number of attributes in your analysis and most likely concluded the following:

- **Conciseness** concerns brevity: saying what you need to say in as few words as necessary, using short, simple sentences;
- **Completeness** requires us to ensure that the reader has the full picture (all the information and data necessary to understand the issue and any recommendations);
- **Courtesy** demands that we recognise the communication needs of the receiver (whether this is verbal or in writing) and use appropriate language;
- **Clarity** requires that the message is unambiguous; and,
- **Correctness** refers to grammar, spelling and punctuation in writing and the avoidance of slang, including in-house jargon, in verbal communication.

As a guide to ensuring that the 5Cs are met, Winston Churchill's advice was simple, and still relevant today, when he said, '*short words are best and the old words, when short, are best of all*'.

The 6th C – confidence – is interesting and, equally, important. Without confidence, it is less likely that you will be able to meet the other 5 characteristics. Having the confidence to reduce the number of words you use or using only simple words to explain a complex subject, whilst achieving completeness, clarity and correctness can be challenging!

Methods of Communication

From the information we have considered so far, it would be pretty easy to work out that, as team leaders (and human beings), we typically communicate in 2 main ways: verbally and in writing. What we also now know, however, is that effectiveness of our communication can be affected by many factors, including for example, body language. This knowledge might influence the way we choose to communicate with others in the workplace

Team Communication

While the medium that is used to communicate with the team might vary, there are certain core functions of a team leader that dictate what sort of communication takes place.

Activity: List below at least 5 activities that require the team leader to communicate with the team or individual team members. Try to focus on those that are important to you in your role.

Whichever activities you have identified as important will be personal to you. For a better understanding of how your choice of communication will affect your impact as a team leader, we are going to focus on the following:

- Briefing and tasking team members;
- Team meetings;
- One-to-one interviews; and,
- Feedback.

Briefing and Tasking Team Members

It goes without saying that the team leader must be able to give clear instructions to team members on a range of occasions. In allocating work to, or tasking team members, the team leader should be able to explain exactly what is required. In some companies and organisations, team leaders will have a set format to follow when briefing team members on jobs or tasks that are to be carried out. A simple 5-stage model, which you might follow when tasking team members, is BASIC A:

- **B**ackground: By explaining the context of the task, it makes it easier for team members to understand why the task has to be completed and the relative importance of it;
- **A**im: A clear objective or aim makes it easier for the team member to understand what is expected of him or her;
- **S**pecific Tasks: By stating precisely the tasks that need to be completed, who is going to do it and (if applicable) how they are going to be completed, the team member is unlikely to miss anything;
- **I**nformation: What other information does the team member need to carry out the work? This might include information on other resources that are available (people and/or materials), standards to be applied, or the Standard Operating Procedures that are to be followed;
- **C**onstraints: Are there any limitations or constraints that the team member must observe? For example, is there a budget or deadline that must be met? And,
- **A**ny Questions; While you might think that you have covered everything that the team member needs to know, it is important to give them the opportunity to ask questions. Questions enable the team member to clarify their understanding of the task; they also provide you, as the team leader, with confidence that the individual has really understood what is expected of them.

How does this model work in practice? Go to the next page and complete the activity to see how BASIC A might help you to give clear, concise and effective briefings to team members.

Activity: Using the template below, produce a briefing for a new team member, outlining a task or activity that you want him or her to complete.

Background
Aim
Specific Tasks
(Other) Information
Constraints
Any Questions (You are inviting questions from the team or team member)

Team Meetings

Running team meetings can be tricky. You want people to contribute but, at the same time, you don't want the meetings to run on for a long time (time is money!). So how do effective team leaders run meetings? What do they do to encourage participation? How do they ensure that meetings run to time?

Activity: Think about meetings you have run, or meetings that you have attended. What made the meeting effective or ineffective? List the things that worked and those that did not below.

Characteristics of Effective Meetings	Characteristics of Ineffective Meeting

Characteristics of Effective Meetings	Characteristics of Ineffective Meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear agenda: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Relevant topics; – Not too many topics; – Any Other Business to be agreed in advance; and, – Circulated in advance. • People nominated to lead discussion on specific items. • The team leader chairing the meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensuring that everyone has the chance to speak; – Summarising discussion; – Deciding actions and which team member will carry these out; and, – Motivating the team by praising and recognising achievement. • Minutes (Record of Actions) produced and circulated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No obvious purpose. • No time management (eg. too long on Any Other Business). • No advance communication of reasons for the meeting. • Lack of participation from team members. • Allowing discussion and difficult behaviour to get out of control. • A 'blame culture' emerges. • Allowing sub (or mini) meetings to take place during the main meeting. • No consensus or agreement on decisions. • Lack of enthusiasm amongst team members.

If, as a team leader, you do only one thing to improve the meetings you run, it will make a difference! For most people, a clear agenda, which gives you a framework to follow, enables everything else to happen more smoothly. For example, if you ask a team member to lead on a specific item of discussion, you can motivate them (and others) by thanking them for their input before the general discussion takes place. The structure also enables you to control the discussion: if team members stray into other agenda items, it is much easier to bring them back, saying, for example, *'we're covering that at Item 5. I'd like to leave it until then'*. People respond much better to knowing that they will have a chance to air an issue later than just being told that the topic is not for discussion.

One of the biggest time-wasters in meetings is Any Other Business (AOB). AOB is usually there to enable urgent matters of importance to be discussed. What typically happens, however, is that team members use it as an opportunity to whinge and whine about, often minor, things. A great technique for avoiding a lengthy AOB is to say that AOB items must be notified to you before the meeting so that they can go on the Agenda. If a team member approaches you before the meeting with an issue or matter that has just arisen, you can decide whether or not it is sufficiently urgent or important to be included.

Activity: Draw up a simple agenda for a team meeting for your team. Limit yourself to 5 agenda items, using the format below.

**Agenda for the Weekly Customer Service Team 1 Team Meeting
to be held at 11am on Thursday xx November 20XX in Conference Room 2**

Item	Topic for Discussion	Lead
1	Welcome and Introductions	Chair (Team Leader)
2	Minutes of the Last Meeting	Secretary
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8	Any Other Business	

Signed

Team Leader (or Secretary's) Name

Formal One-to-One Meetings

During the time that you are a team leader, there will be many occasions when you have to participate in a one-to-one meeting. Typically you might expect to hold one-to-one meetings with team members to:

- Discuss performance issues;
- Recognise achievement and effort;
- Discipline them;
- Tell someone that they are being promoted, moved to a new role, or made redundant;
- Address personal problems and welfare issues; and,
- Carry out appraisal reviews.

One-to-one meetings require different skills from those that are required, for example, to run meetings, albeit there are some things that are common: the ability to listen to what others are saying is one example.

Activity: Think about a one-to-one meeting that you have run previously or a one-to-one meeting that you have had with your supervisor or manager. List below the things that you need to do to ensure that the meeting is successful.

	Actions
Before the Meeting	
During the Meeting	
After the Meeting	

By considering each stage of the process, you have a much better chance of making the meeting effective. The table below provides you with some questions to consider which should enable you to prepare for and conduct effective one-to-one meetings.

	Considerations
Before the Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of the meeting? (e.g. appraisal) • What do I want to achieve during the meeting? • How do I want the other person to feel after the meeting? • What information do I need for the meeting? • What information does the team member need for the meeting? • Should the team member be accompanied? (e.g. by Union representative) • How long do I need to allow for the meeting? • Where should the meeting take place? • Layout of the room?
During the Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I avoid interruptions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phones disconnected/switched off? - Sign on door? • How do I create rapport? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Layout of tables and chairs? - Drinks? - Tissues? - Agree purpose of meeting? - Agree how long the meeting will last? • How do I keep to time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use a script? - List things that need to be discussed? • How do I close the meeting? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask the team member to summarise the discussion or summarise myself? - Action that is to be taken by the team member? - Action to be taken by me? - Arrangements for a follow-on meeting (if required)?
After the Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actions I promised to take? - Actions the team member agreed to take? - Further meetings?

Minutes of Meetings

We have considered the importance of an agenda for a team meeting. It makes sense that if we have an agenda for a team meeting, we should have some kind of record of the discussion that took place during the meeting and any agreed action. This record could be called a Record of Discussion, Action Points from a Meeting, or, more traditionally, the Minutes of the Meeting.

Communicating with Customers, Suppliers and Other Colleagues

We have looked at how we communicate with the team and individual team members, focusing primarily upon verbal communication. In our dealings with customers, suppliers and other workplace colleagues, the type of communication can be quite different.

Activity: Referring back to your earlier list of team leader workplace communication identify and list below at least 5 activities that involve communication with customers, suppliers and other colleagues.

It is highly likely that the majority of workplace communication that team leaders undertake with customers, suppliers and colleagues from other departments will be by telephone and face-to-face in meetings. The exception will be if your team is a front-line, customer-facing team, where you will have regular and routine face-to-face interaction with people. A significant proportion of the workplace communication that team leaders will engage in, therefore, with customers, suppliers and colleagues in other departments will be by e-mail or letter. In this section, we will look at interaction on the telephone and in writing.

Telephone Contact

Telephone contact accounts for a significant proportion of workplace communication. Indeed, it has been the case for many years that the telephone was (and is) a quick and easy way to communicate with colleagues, suppliers and customers alike. The telephone has many obvious advantages, in addition to speed. It is a personal form of communication and is verbal. Even though the other person cannot see you, they can hear you and interpret your tone far more easily than would be the case, say, in an e-mail or letter. Indeed, while we might imagine that a significant proportion of the message conveyed might be lost because the receiver is only hearing the words and the tone, there is evidence to suggest that our body language can be 'heard' over the phone. In contact centres, for example, customer service officers are encouraged to 'wear a smile' when talking on the phone. Moreover, they may well stand up before making a call to relax their muscles and to 'fix a smile before they dial'. If you don't believe that your body language can pass over the telephone, try this simple exercise.

Activity: Ask a colleague if you can practise your telephone technique. Phone them twice, once from a soft chair and once from a hard chair. Ask them to provide you with feedback on your tone and energy, and which phone call was most effective. Note below any observations from both your perspective and their feedback.

It is likely that from the feedback received or your own observation of the 2 calls that one felt and sounded more professional: the call you placed when sitting on a hard chair. For most of us, there will have been a physiological effect associated with the sitting in 2 different types of chair. The more upright hard chair will have forced us to sit up straight, while in the soft chair we could have ended up slouching. Either way, this will have affected our voice projection and our tone. Interestingly, there is also a psychological dimension to this. In the soft chair we will have felt more comfortable and more relaxed; this, in turn, would have affected the pitch and tone of our voice. There are many people who, when they work from home, feel the need to dress more formally to remind themselves that they are at work and not on a day off.

If we accept the proposition that telephone communication brings with it a personal touch that adds something positive to the quality of the communication, what sort of issues might arise when using the telephone?

Activity: Think about telephone calls that you have had with colleagues, suppliers and/or customers. When the call has not been particularly successful what has frustrated or annoyed you? Think about both your effectiveness and the effectiveness of the other person/people. List your ideas below.

The chances are that some of the barriers identified earlier reappear. However, it is also likely that there are 6 distinct challenges that are specific to telephone communication, namely:

- Being cut off or put through to the wrong person;
- Being left hanging on with no explanation;
- Not knowing who you are talking to and if they can help;
- Being asked lots of questions;
- Not being given the chance to explain yourself; and,
- Being called (or calling someone) at an inconvenient time.

Coupled with these specific and unique challenges, what we say and how we say it can have an immediate (and sometimes catastrophic) effect on the quality of the communication. The absence of body language to support the message we are trying to convey means that we are much more dependent upon the words we choose, and the way that we say them. Courtesy, which in this context includes friendliness, helpfulness and professionalism, becomes very important. Perhaps the key, however, is the ability to listen.

Most of us believe that we are good listeners. The reality, however, is often very different! Experts in verbal communication talk about the importance of *active listening*. The word *active* highlights the difference from ordinary listening. We are all capable of tuning in and out of conversations and missing all or part of the message. Often it does not matter too much if we do miss some of the message but there are many occasions in the workplace when it really does matter: for example, when safety instructions are being given.

Active listening is about adopting a deeper level of listening and communication than that which occurs in ordinary conversation, which can improve personal relationships, help in reducing conflict and help in fostering understanding. It is a structured, non-judgemental way of listening and responding to others. People tend not to be listening attentively when interacting in a general sense – perhaps distracted, thinking about other things, or very commonly thinking about what to say next. Effective active listening involves:

- Focusing solely on what the speaker is saying;
- Facing the speaker;
- Maintaining comfortable eye contact;
- Minimising distractions, including internal mental distractions – mind wandering, etc;
- Not making assumptions about what the speaker is thinking;
- Responding appropriately to acknowledge what is being said – using words and phrases such as ‘Really? What did you do then?’
- Ask questions for clarification once the speaker has finished;
- Suspending judgment; keeping an open mind;
- Waiting until the person has finished before deciding that you disagree; and,
- Waiting until the person has finished before defending your position if he/she is making a complaint.

Behaviours for Active Listening

<p>Non-verbal Behaviour</p> <p>Open alert posture Good eye contact Encouraging gestures Mirroring and pacing Suspending judgement Distinguish facts/feelings</p>	<p>Verbal Behaviour</p> <p>Encouraging words Clarifying Paraphrasing Summarising Reflecting (showing understanding of) emotion Open and probing questions Pausing</p>
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As our listening skills improve, we are likely to find that our communication becomes more effective because we are able to focus on what is really important.

Activity: Complete the Effective Communication Questionnaire below.

Effective Communication: a Self-Evaluation Scoring

Circle the number that matches your choice on each of the 25 questions on the self-evaluation questionnaire. Then add the circled scores in each of the columns. Finally write the scores in each column and add them together to provide you with a total.

Your Communication Knowledge and Attributes Do You.....	Most of the time	Often	Sometimes	Never
1. Tune out people who say something you don't agree with or don't want to hear?	1	2	3	4
2. Concentrate on what is being said even if you are not really interested?	4	3	2	1
3. Assume you know what the talker is going to say and stop listening?	1	2	3	4
4. Repeat in your own words what the talker has just said?	4	3	2	1
5. Listen to the other person's viewpoint even if it differs from your own?	4	3	2	1
6. Learn something from every person you meet even if it is ever so slight?	4	3	2	1

Your Communication Knowledge and Attributes Do You.....	Most of the time	Often	Sometimes	Never
7. Find out what words mean if they are used in a way that is not familiar to you?	4	3	2	1
8. Give the appearance of listening when you aren't?	1	2	3	4
9. Daydream while the speaker is talking?	1	2	3	4
10. Listen to the whole message – what the talker is saying verbally and non-verbally?	4	3	2	1
11. Concentrate on the talkers meaning rather than how he or she looks?	4	3	2	1
12. Think about what you want to accomplish with your communication?	4	3	2	1
13. Plan the best time to say what you want to say?	4	3	2	1
14. Think about how the other person may react to what you say?	4	3	2	1
15. Consider the best way to make your communication work?(written, phone bulletin board, etc)	4	3	2	1
16. Think about what kind of person you are talking to? (worried, shy, disinterested, rushed stubborn)	4	3	2	1
17. Interrupt the talker while he or she is still talking?	1	2	3	4
18. Think 'I thought he or she would have known that'?	1	2	3	4
19. Allow the talker to vent negative feelings toward you without becoming defensive?	4	3	2	1

Your Communication Knowledge and Attributes Do You...	Most of the time	Often	Sometimes	Never
20. Practise to increase your listening efficiency	4	3	2	1
21. Take notes when necessary to help you to remember?	4	3	2	1
22. Hear noises without being distracted by them?	4	3	2	1
23. Listen to the talker without judging or criticising?	4	3	2	1
24. Restate messages and instructions to be sure you understood correctly?	4	3	2	1
25. Look at the person who is talking?	4	3	2	1

Number value of questions circled in each column:

Most of the time	Often	Sometimes	Never	Totals

Scoring: 90-100 Superior -----
 79-89 Above Average -----
 68-78 Average -----
 57-67 Fair -----

Having completed this activity, you now should have a reasonable understanding of the effectiveness of your verbal communication skills. Write down in the box provided below, at least 3 things that you can improve on:

Number	Area for Improvement	What you are going to do

We have considered the importance of active listening, particularly in workplace telephone communication but we also need to consider some other ideas that might help to improve the quality of your telephone communication.

The 5Cs is a good place to start – Concise, Complete, Courteous, Clear and Correct – when thinking about telephone communication. However, as we all know the telephone is a dynamic environment, so consider the following tips:

- Courtesy.
 - Always identify yourself and listen without interrupting;
 - Respond as necessary to ensure the other person knows that you are engaged;
 - Stop talking if interrupted;
 - Do not switch off half way through;
 - Do not hurry people;
 - Do not keep the caller hanging on the line without going back to them; and,
 - Thank the person for calling.

- Friendliness and Helpfulness.
 - Try putting yourself in the caller's place;
 - Speak clearly and with a smile;
 - Be positive about the conversation;
 - Be aware of how important your voice is in conveying a friendly and professional personality;
 - Be enthusiastic and show an interest in the other person's communication;
 - Be sincere in your attempts to help;
 - Never get cross, even if you are provoked;
 - If you promise to take certain action do it as agreed; and,
 - Deal with any problems diplomatically.

- Message Taking. When you are taking a message, the information taken must be accurate and sufficiently detailed to allow your colleagues to follow up the query or issue. Consider using this checklist:
 - Who the call is for;
 - The date and time of the call;
 - Name of caller and company;
 - Their telephone/fax number;
 - Reason for the call and urgency of the call;
 - A convenient time to return the call;
 - Your name; and,
 - Details of anything you have agreed with the caller.

The telephone is an essential vehicle for effective communication in the workplace and can assist your effectiveness as a team leader if you use it properly. It is a personal form of communication and has many advantages over written communication. However, there are times when only a written message will do.

Techniques Used to Gain and Maintain the Interest of an Audience

Unless you are able to gain and maintain the interest and attention of your audience, you cannot communicate effectively. You need to be able to engage the audience to want to listen, understand, and act on the information you present. Your own commitment and enthusiasm can provide a good platform for your delivery although there are a number of techniques for ensuring you make a positive impact and that you hold the audience's attention and interest throughout your talk. Audience attention and interest tends to be best at the beginning and end of a presentation. The challenge is to engage and re-engage attention and interest throughout the talk or presentation.

Activity:

Think about presenters you have seen in the past, what techniques have they applied to good effect in helping maintaining interest and attention?

Your responses could be many and varied but may include some of the following techniques:

- Audience preparation. By exposing listeners to the material prior to the event, assimilation and thinking may be enhanced.
- Support your key points with examples and first-hand experience to endorse your credibility.
- Know your audience. Ensure they are receiving the most recent, relevant information available.
- Ask questions. The best questions are ones that get your audience thinking. Rhetorical questions work as well as questions that require a response. Simply by turning your audience members' brains from passive to active you are encouraging engagement in your presentation.
- Repetition. Information is remembered through repetition. Skilful presenters repeat key points throughout their presentation.
- Use threes. People remember key points delivered in threes.
- Analogies and metaphors can be used to aid understanding. For example... describing an organisation as similar to an oil tanker in that it takes 17 miles to stop and change direction would be a metaphor.
- Humour can be effective in focusing attention when used appropriately.
- Encouraging listeners to take notes, helps increase their attention.
- Be brief and stick to time.

Gaining and maintaining interest relates directly to having prepared your communication thoroughly.

A useful acronym that gives structure to the planning process is 'SPAM':

Situation – the time, place and context, and venue.

Purpose – Why are you giving this presentation or briefing? What do you need or want to relay and what do you want your audience to gain?

Audience – Effective presentations and briefings are audience oriented, focusing on their needs. How many are there likely to be and what level of formality is required? What is their level of knowledge of the subject? What are their current knowledge, background, expectations and education? All of these factors will affect the level at which you 'pitch' your presentation or briefing.

Method – What method or approach is likely to be most effective? How much time do you have for the presentation or briefing? What resources are available and needed?

Principles of Effective Written Communication

Effective writing is largely about simplicity of expression, accuracy of content and brevity of style. At the end of the day, your purpose in writing is to pass on information, to achieve an objective or to get agreement to do something. If you are misunderstood, fail to convince, or do not get the desired result, your written communication will have been ineffective.

Often the most difficult part of writing a letter, a work e-mail, a report or any business document is getting started! Most of us will remember from our school days, the teacher telling us to plan our work. What they were trying to instill in us was an understanding of the importance of having a clear and easily understood structure. While there is no one absolute way to approach this task, you might consider using the ROOSTER framework.

ROOSTER stands for **R**ecipient, **O**utcome, **O**bjective, **S**tructure, **T**one, **E**dit, and **R**eview (KW Hamilton, 2012).

Recipient (or Reader): Who am I writing to?

- How well do I know them?
- What type of document/letter should I use?

Outcome: Why am I writing?

- To help me to achieve an outcome?
- To keep people informed?
- To ask them for a decision?

Objective

- What does the reader(s) know about the issue/subject?
 - How much background information do I need to give?
 - Relevance?
- Differentiate between fact and opinion:
 - Make sure that facts are accurately presented; and,
 - Where an opinion is required, say whose opinion it is, so your reader knows what authority they should attach to that view.

Structure

- Select the appropriate template used by your company/organisation (if there is one);
- If there is no template or the correspondence requires only a short and self-explanatory message, use (as a generic framework) an introduction, a body and an end:
 - **Introduction.** Summarize any background information and say why you are writing, usually in one paragraph.
 - **Body.** Present the facts and list any arguments or problems in a logical sequence. The body may require one or more paragraphs.
 - **End.** Summarize the key points and highlight any follow-up action that is needed.

Tone: It is important to pitch the tone of correspondence correctly. Every piece of correspondence that you write, even if you are representing a personal view, is either for a colleague within your organisation or is being written on behalf of your organisation. Consider:

- **The reader's perspective.** Always be helpful, efficient, polite and as friendly as the subject allows. Seek to put over a positive image:
 - If you have to deal with something difficult, such as a complaint, think of the person first, not the problem. How would you wish to be treated in the same circumstances?
 - Take a professional approach, not an emotional one: be firm even when the answer you give is not that sought by the recipient;
 - Resist the temptation to score points: a point scored is damage to your reputation and that of your company or organisation; and,
 - Concentrate on saying what you can do, not what you cannot.
- **Who you are representing.** Where you are the person writing and signing the correspondence, refer to yourself and the actions you carry out on behalf of your department or organisation by using the first person singular: 'I', 'me', 'my'; or,
- **Representing a wider view.** Where you refer to the actions, opinion or wishes of other people within your department or organisation, use the first person plural: 'we', 'our', or 'us'.

Edit

- Editing is an important part of effective writing. Indeed, it is rare that anything we write is 'word-perfect' and it is usual to consider your first effort as a 'draft'. Editing involves:
 - Checking your draft for grammar, spelling and punctuation;
 - Asking yourself whether the information you have included is relevant and necessary to ensure understanding; and,
 - Ensuring that you have used simple language.

Review

- After editing and finalising your draft, it is advisable to ask someone else to review the document, particularly if it is going outside of the company or organisation. An independent reviewer should be able to understand and explain to you exactly what the purpose of the correspondence is. If they cannot, the document is not 'fit for purpose'. This review should also include proofreading for potential errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation.

E-mail Correspondence

E-mail messages are an easy and quick way of corresponding. Typically, e-mails tend to have an informal style, which brings both benefits and potential problems.

Easily forwarded from one person to the next, e-mails enable people to communicate information quickly, sometimes without even reading the mail before passing it on. Indeed, as a manager there may be times when it is entirely appropriate to forward an e-mail straight on to a colleague, asking them to action the message without further reference to you. Aside from people misunderstanding the message (for whatever reason), one of the biggest potential drawbacks of e-mails is the number of e-mails that are copied unnecessarily to colleagues. For example, a person sends an e-mail to a customer or colleague in another department and copies the message to their Boss thinking that it will help their Boss to know that they have taken some action. This 'helpful' behaviour can lead to their Boss getting 'snowed under' with a plethora of e-mails which he or she then spends (and wastes) time reading.

Similarly, the informality of the e-mail can easily lead to misunderstanding and confusion. As with all written correspondence, we rely upon the words to communicate tone. For example, the recipient of the e-mail might easily interpret a comment considered humorous by the sender differently because the context (and therefore the tone) is unclear to them. Indeed, the use of punctuation, and particularly the exclamation mark, can lead to misunderstanding, frustration and, occasionally, anger.

Activity: Consider the following message from one colleague to another, identify the potential problems with the e-mail and rewrite it, using the template below.

From:	Peter Brooke, Accounts	Sent: Thu 30/04/XX 11:59
To:	Alan Jones, Sales	
cc:	Priti Patel, Sales Manager	
Subject: Monthly Expenses		
<p>Hiya mate,</p> <p>Just going through your expenses claim for March and noticed that you stayed at the Hilton – we’re obviously paying you too much! Wonder who you were trying to impress? Anyway, the claim form’s wrong so you’ll have to redo it and sharp-ish! I’ll need it by 5 o’clock, if you want to get paid this month!</p> <p>Cheers,</p> <p>Bogsy</p>		

From:	Peter Brooke, Accounts	Sent: Thu 30/04/XX 11:59
To:	Alan Jones, Sales	
cc:	Priti Patel, Sales Manager	
Subject: Monthly Expenses		

Despite its informality, the e-mail message is now a pivotal part of business communication. In many respects, it has replaced the Company memo (memorandum) that was used as a more informal method of internal communication in most organisations and large companies for many years. Critically e-mails now serve the same purpose and have the same status as any other type of business correspondence. An e-mail may need to be filed (electronically or in hard copy) if, for example, it is the principal record of a decision, formal advice or instruction. Consequently, such e-mail is likely to be subject to Freedom of Information and Data Protection law, which means that the e-mail would be available for public scrutiny.

Activity: You have taken a phone call from a customer. The customer has complained about the service one of your team has provided. You have investigated the complaint and have listened to the recording of the call. You are satisfied that your colleague handled the customer's original request in a professional way. You have tried to call the customer back but there is no reply. You decide that you are going to e-mail the customer with the response to his complaint. Write a list of the things you might need to consider.

In choosing to use e-mail, you should consider some or all of the following:

- The 5 Cs;
- ROOSTER;
- Use of acronyms, abbreviations or jargon;
- Use of capitals, bold font and underlining;
- Use of an e-mail signature block, including your surname, job title, address, and telephone numbers (with dialling codes);
- Size of any attachments (consider use of hyperlinks if the recipient can access common file storage areas, e.g. iCloud);
- Inappropriate language (this could be as simple being too personal);
- Spelling (use a spell-checker but make sure it is set to *English (UK)*; and,
- General presentation.

Writing Letters

In many companies and organisations, business letters are used less frequently than they once were. In a lot of cases, the e-mail has simply taken the place of the letter. However, there will always be a need for the formal business letter, whether it is sent by post or attached as document to an e-mail. The purpose of the business letter is usually to communicate with people in other companies or organisations, customers and clients.

Written in a more formal style, the business letter may be used to request information or action from a third party, or to reply directly to a request for information or action by a third party. While the overall style of the letter will depend on the relationship between the parties, one of the key benefits of a business letter is that it provides a permanent record of formal correspondence. For example, some companies insist that customers write to them formally to complain.

Layout for a Business Letter

In producing a formal letter, the general rules governing effective writing apply (the 5Cs and ROOSTER). The usual layout for a business letter comprises:

- **Company Letter Head**, including name and address of the recipient, any unique identifier (file reference) and the date;
- **Salutation**, the opening greeting (may be written by hand);
- **Subject Title**;
- **Text**, the subject matter, including any proposed or required action;
- **Signature Block**, giving full details of the signatory; and,
- **Other information**, including any documents that are enclosed or attached and details of other recipients of the letter (courtesy copies).

There is one particular difficulty that many people experience, however, when they try to write a formal business letter: the salutation and subscription. In simple terms, many of us are unsure how to address the recipient of the letter and how to sign-off the letter. The salutation – the opening address – of a formal business letter should be either,

'Dear Sir/Madam', or, 'Dear Mr Hayes', or, if you know the recipient well, 'Dear Andy'. The subscription – how you sign off the letter – will depend entirely on the salutation used. 'Dear Sir/Madam' will require the subscription 'Yours faithfully', while 'Dear Mr Hayes' or 'Dear Andy' requires the subscription 'Yours sincerely'.

Activity: One of your staff has decided to resign to go and work for a competitor. He has asked you to help him to write a formal letter tendering one month's notice of his intention to resign and stating his reasons. Draft the letter of resignation below:

	<p>Philip Jones 21 Broad Street Godmanchester Nr Huntingdon. Cambridgeshire PE11 3RZ</p>

Example Letter of Resignation

HR Manager [Name of Company and address]	Philip Jones 21 Broad Street Godmanchester Nr Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE11 3RZ
	15 February XXXX
Dear Sir or Madam,	
<u>Letter of Resignation – Philip Jones</u>	
<i>I am writing to advise that I am resigning from my post as production line supervisor with effect from 15 March XXXX. While I have enjoyed working for the Company, I have been offered a new job at [another company] which will pay me more than I am earning now.</i>	
Yours faithfully,	
Philip Jones	

Similarly, one-to-one meetings with staff should be properly documented. In most companies and organisations, there is an appraisal process and formal documentation for this. For other one-to-meetings, it is customary for team leaders to keep a record of what was discussed.

Activity: Find out how your company or organisation keeps records of one-to-one meetings; (see your HR officer). Obtain a copy and keep this for future reference; make notes below on the format.

If you are unable to find a procedure for keeping a record of a one-to-one meeting with a member of staff, you should consider recording the following:

- Date of the meeting;
- Purpose of the meeting;
- Who attended (it is possible that in a disciplinary hearing you might allow the individual to have a personal representative with them);
- Key points from the discussion;
- Any disagreements;
- Agreed action(s), who is going to take these and by when; and,
- Arrangements for future follow-on meetings.

It is arguably good practice to let the individual team member review the record of interview for accuracy. If they are content, both of you should sign it as a 'true record' and you should give them a copy to keep. By doing this, you lessen the likelihood of future disagreement over what was discussed. It also reduces or mitigates the risk of the team member taking your company or organisation to an employment tribunal claiming unfair dismissal if, at a later stage, he or she is dismissed.

The third type of record that we shall consider is a record of a conversation or meeting with a customer, supplier or colleague. The format will be broadly the same as that used for a one-to-one meeting. The key difference will be whether or not there is a need to share the record you keep. For example, if a customer has made a complaint, it would be appropriate and prudent to respond formally to the complaint. In most cases this would involve writing them a letter, or, depending upon the approach your company or organisation takes, you might send an e-mail. If, on the other hand, you are responding to a telephone enquiry for a price on a product, it might be sufficient simply to keep a record of the price quoted on a customer database.

A lot of companies and organisations consider it best practice to confirm verbal discussions in an e-mail or letter. For example, a colleague asks you for advice on the delivery of a product to a customer and you advise that the product will not be despatched for 2 working weeks. Your colleague could e-mail stating their understanding of what was agreed. The text might be as short and as simple as this:

'Further to our discussion earlier today, you advised that the product XXXXXXXX for Mr YYYYYY [the customer] would be despatched in 2 working weeks, on Thursday XX January 20XX. I should be grateful if you would keep me informed of any changes in the anticipated date of despatch.

Very many thanks.'

In general, record keeping is not difficult. It simply requires that we keep a proper record of communication that is important. For most companies and organisations, record keeping involves keeping an audit trail of events. Auditable record keeping enables the organisation to do a number of things. First, it enables the organisation to review and improve processes to provide a better service to its customers or to improve efficiency; second, proper records enable the organisation to deal effectively with complaints or disputes (both external and internal); third, it provides a mechanism for

ensuring that strategic, operational and tactical decisions are properly implemented; fourth, it enables proper investigation of incidents that take place in the workplace; and, finally, it ensures that in the absence of a member of staff (through sickness, holidays, etc), the organisation does not grind to a halt. As a team leader, the efficiency and effectiveness of your team will often depend on the quality of the records you keep: time spent ensuring that the records you keep are accurate and up to date will be time well spent.

The Importance of Checking the Accuracy and Currency of Information to be Communicated

Accuracy relates to information being based on substantiated facts or truthful accounts. In other words, its 'correctness'. If information used in business is inaccurate, then decisions will be erroneous and ultimately unnecessary costs are likely to be incurred. Similarly, information may have been accurate but become inaccurate because it is out of date. Lack of currency will lead to problems for business and may lead competitors to have greater advantages over you if the information they are operating with is both current and accurate.

All details included in workplace communication should be carefully checked for accuracy, in consultation with a more experienced or knowledgeable person if necessary. For example: events, dates, names, results/statistics, discussions, actions.

Beyond the factual detail spelling, grammar and format should be checked. Spell-check is a useful feature on word processors but may not always be completely accurate. Another person may best do proofing of documents, as we will often miss errors when reading our own work.

The Importance of Explaining the Level of Confidence that can be Placed on the Information Communicated

If information is known to lack accuracy or currency then you should state this in your communication so that any necessary considerations can be taken. Managers need to be confident in the information provided to them to enable decisions to be made and implemented. You should therefore express your level of confidence in information you are providing or contributing to the collation of.

Distinguishing Facts from Opinion

It is important to be clear what in your communication relates to facts and what relates to opinions (either your or others' opinions). A fact tells us something that can be proved. If it can be proved, your audience will want to know... how and according to whom? If you are presenting supportable facts then they should be indisputable and supported with evidence.

An opinion on the other hand tells the audience what you think, feel, or believe and cannot be proved. There is nothing wrong with opinion and it is opinion or judgements about situations that drive most organisational decision-making. If you are presenting opinion then you will need to explain why your opinion should be adopted if you are to successfully convince your audience.

Some pointers in distinguishing between facts and opinions are:

- Opinion 'clue words' include: *always, never, all, none, least, greatest, best, and worst*;
- Facts often contain dates, numbers, or ages. They are about a specific person, place, or thing. You can find information to prove what is stated;
- Some opinions can be written like they are facts, but if you cannot find information to verify its validity, it is probably an opinion; and,
- To determine a fact, ask yourself, '*Can I prove this statement?*'

Being Able to Communicate Work-Related Information Verbally

Identifying Information to be Communicated

Identifying information to be communicated requires application of judgement in deciding what to include and what to leave out. In workplace communication, the convention is to communicate factually, in concisely and in an easily digestible style. Material communicated needs to be relevant, accurate, professionally presented and pitched at the right level for the audience.

Knowing the intended outcomes of your communication is critical in deciding what to include. Everything included needs to add weight to the points you are trying to make and have relevance to the intended outcome(s). When constructing and proofing written work, you should ask yourself, under each sub heading...does the information included add to the point I need to make? Information can come from a variety of sources including:

- Primary sources - the original information or evidence that has not been amended. Generally, primary information is better than that from secondary sources.
- Secondary sources - something relayed through somebody else.

Confirming the Audience is Authorised to Receive the Information

Often the nature of workplace communication requires that the information be protected from people who are not authorised to have the information. This requires you to know the audience and to what level they are authorised to access the information. If you are unsure then you will need to consult staff that are more experienced and consider leaving out sensitive information. This 'need to know' principle – i.e. do the people present need to know this? - is worth applying in making your judgements as to whether information is appropriate for disclosure to your audience

Provide Accurate Information Using Appropriate Verbal Communication Techniques

As discussed in the knowledge elements of this unit (Part A), accuracy relates to information being based on substantiated facts or truthful accounts. In other words, its 'correctness'. If information used in business is inaccurate, then decisions will be erroneous and ultimately unnecessary costs are likely to be incurred. Similarly,

information may have been accurate but become inaccurate because it is out of date. Lack of currency will lead to problems for business and may lead competitors to have greater advantages over you if the information they are operating with is both current and accurate.

You should take appropriate care to ensure that all details included in your verbal communication are accurate, especially in relation to events, dates, names, results/statistics, discussions, actions etc.

Communicate in a Way that the Listener Can Understand, Using Language that is Appropriate to the Topic

Importantly, communication has not taken place until the person(s) being communicated with has understood the message as the sender intended. In essence, this requires that your choice of language is appropriate for your audience. Your communication should be pitched at a level that the audience will understand and not include unnecessary jargon or abbreviations that may be unfamiliar to the audience or individuals present. Equally the language needs to be appropriate to the topic. Plain English is invariably best.

Confirming that the Listener Has Understood what Has Been Communicated

Activity:

How could you confirm that the listener has understood what you have said?

It is important that we have a mechanism for checking that listeners have understood the information communicated as you intended. This can be judged via close observation of body language during your talk or better still through questioning either throughout or at the end.

Being Able to Communicate Work-Related Information In Writing

Identifying Information to be Communicated

The principles relating to identifying information to be communicated in writing are essentially the same as those outlined above relating to communicating verbally.

Provide Accurate Information Using Appropriate Written Communication Methods and House Styles

Further to the comments made regarding accuracy in verbal communication it is worth pointing out that in written communication, the convention is to communicate factually, in concise formats in an easily digestible style. Liberal use of headings, sub headings, bullet points and graphics in documents help for example with brevity and ease of digestion of the information. Material communicated needs to be relevant, accurate, professionally laid out and in accordance with any relevant 'house style' or standard formats.

Standard formats help to provide structure to a document and ensure that you do not leave out key elements of information. Most large companies and organisations have developed their own 'in-house' writing conventions and standards. 'House' writing conventions are developed to assist and enable staff in the organisation to prepare and produce effective written correspondence, setting out some or all of the following:

- Standard document formats and templates;
- Processes for submitting documents for approval;
- Rules on 'house' style:
 - Structure (how documents are to be formatted);
 - Any limits on length of reports;
 - Use of titles and headings;
 - Use of paragraphs;
 - Use of annexes and appendices;
 - Use of bullets;
 - Numbering conventions (page, paragraph and annexes and appendices);
 - Use of abbreviations and acronyms;
 - Use of capital letters;
 - Use of numbers;
 - Use of punctuation;
 - Spelling conventions (American English or UK English);
 - Acceptable fonts and font sizes;
 - Insertion of tables, charts and other objects (e.g. photographs) into reports; and
 - Use of specialist terminology.

Whether or not your organisation has developed its own 'house' standards, producing effective written correspondence depends on following some basic principles.

Activity:

Establish whether your company has its own house style. If it does obtain a copy and study the conventions required. Note the main requirements below.

Adhere to any Organisational Confidentiality Requirements when Communicating in Writing

As with verbal communication you would not wish to breach any confidences are workplace confidentiality norms in you written communication. For example you would want to be very careful to whom you passed an employee’s personal file as the information would be private and confidential, limited to only those that ‘need to know’ its contents. You should seek out and digest any guidance regarding confidentiality within organisational and also seek to be aware of any relevant legislative requirements such as contained within the Data Protection Act (DPA).

Use Correct Grammar, Spelling, Sentence Structure and Punctuation

In order to make sure that your written communication is as effective as possible, it is important to ensure that you have high standards in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Mistakes in any of these areas may give the impression that you are badly educated and unprofessional. You will be judged on any mistakes you make; the 'horns and halo' effect can come into play here. This is where one observed trait becomes the basis of a judgement about you, and any other evidence about you is disregarded or ignored. It leads to inaccurate and unrealistic opinions about people, and can be very damaging.

Grammar is a word that can strike fear into the hearts of adults. At one point, in the 1960s and 1970s, it was not considered necessary to teach it in schools. This has now changed, but there remains a generation or two of adults for whom grammar remains a mystery.

Grammar simply refers to the rules that govern how we speak and write a language. It encompasses sentence structure, punctuation, tense and spelling. This section will examine some ways to ensure that any writing you do for business is as accurate as possible. Some common areas of confusion are addressed; making small improvements in your skills in these areas will have a big impact on your writing.

Punctuation

For ease of reading, your sentences need to be as concise as possible; aim for around 15 words. Any more than this and they may become difficult to read. Sentences start with a capital letter and can end in, a full stop, a question mark or an exclamation mark. Commas, colons and semi colons are internal sentence punctuation marks.

Punctuation Marks			
Full stop	.	Colon	:
Comma	,	Semi colon	;
Question mark	?	Brackets (parentheses)	()
Exclamation mark	!	Apostrophe	'

Semi colons

It is important that commas are not used where a full stop should be used. This is called comma splicing, and although it is commonly used, it is wrong. For example, consider the following sentence.

'I find writing letters difficult, I usually leave them until the last minute.'

The sentence is made up of two independent clauses that could stand alone as sentences in their own right. Here, it would be better to separate them with a full stop, so they make two shorter sentences.

'I find writing letters difficult. I usually leave them until the last minute.'

Alternatively, a connective or a semi colon could be used, as in the examples below.

'I find writing letters difficult; I usually leave them until the last minute.'

'I find writing letters difficult, so I usually leave them until the last minute.'

Semi colons are a useful tool in writing but should not be over-used. Used properly, they can add a sophistication and subtlety to your writing, allowing you to express ideas precisely and powerfully.

To use one correctly, there needs to be a connection between the two clauses in the sentence. Both clauses need to be independent too; they both need to be able to stand alone as a sentence. If both of these criteria are not present, then using one is not suitable.

Colons - for lists

A colon is the correct punctuation mark for introducing a list as in the following example.

The team included:

David;
Brian; and,
John.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used in two ways; they can show omission and possession.

Omission

Omission is when letters are left out of words. This is commonly referred to as contraction. Contractions are generally used in speech but it is considered best practice in formal writing to use the full version of the word. It is still important however, to

understand how contractions are used. The apostrophe replaces the missing letters. Here are some examples:

Do not = don't
 He is = he's
 We have = we've
 I will = I'll

There are lots of examples to choose from, and the key to success is to understand where the apostrophe should be used.

Possession

A more common use of the apostrophe in business writing is when it is used to show possession. This is also the most common area for confusion and inaccuracy of use. A common mistake that people make is to put an apostrophe where there should not be one. Often, if someone is unsure, they may just add one to be on the safe side! It is important to be aware that some people, particularly the older generation, may see this as a real lack of education if you make this mistake. It really is worth learning the rules in this case.

- To show possession, add apostrophe 's' if the noun is singular and does not end in 's'. Some examples:

Sally's letters
 Frank's desk
 Moira's report

- If the noun already ends in 's' (if it is a plural or the owner ends in 's'), the apostrophe is added after the s that is already there. For example,

Charles' books - *the books belonging to Charles*
 The girls' uniforms - *the uniforms belonging to the girls*

- For plurals that do not end in s, add apostrophe 's'. For example:

The men's toilets
 The women's changing rooms

It's and its

It is very common to confuse these two words. It's means it is or it has.

Its is a personal pronoun like *his*, *hers* or *theirs*. So 'it's getting close to the deadline; we need to submit our tender,' means *it is*, whereas, 'the team met its targets,' refers to the targets belonging to the team, i.e. possession, and so would be equivalent to saying '*their*'. If in any doubt over whether to use it's or its, say the sentence aloud. Replace it's with 'it is' or 'it has' - if it makes sense, it is the right choice. If not, you will need to use 'its'.

Spelling

The most common mistake when it comes to spelling is the incorrect use of homophones. A homophone is a word that sounds the same as another one, but has a different meaning.

An example we discussed in the previous section is *its* and *it's*. Others include:

- there/their/they're
- knows/nose
- hole/whole
- affect/effect
- loose/lose
- principle/principal
- accept/except
- advise/advice
- all right/alright
- every day/everyday
- passed/past
- quiet/quite
- then/than
- whose/who's
- could have/could of

Our research shows that the most commonly misspelled word on the Internet at the time of writing is 'definitely'. It is commonly spelled as *definatly* - but it is wrong! Your reader will be able to tell the difference; a spellchecker may not always because it will not understand the context of the sentence. For this reason, it is important that you understand the differences between the meanings yourself.

Activity: Using the list above, find the correct meaning of each word. Write sentences that illustrate the correct meaning of each, or that makes the differences clear.

Justifying Opinions and Conclusions with Evidence

It is important to be clear what in your communication relates to facts and what relates to opinions (either your or others' opinions). A fact tells us something that can be proved. If it can be proved, you should refer to the evidence i.e.... how and according to whom? If you are citing a reference then you might include why you believe that the reference is credible. If you are including supportable facts then they should be indisputable.

An opinion on the other hand tells the reader what you think, feel, or believe and cannot be proved. There is nothing wrong with opinion and it is opinion or judgements about situations that drive most organisational decision-making. If you are presenting opinion then you will need to explain why your opinion should be adopted if you are to successfully convince your audience.

Some pointers in distinguishing between facts and opinions are:

- Opinion 'clue words' include: *always, never, all, none, least, greatest, best, and worst*;
- Facts often contain dates, numbers, or ages. They are about a specific person, place, or thing. You can find information to prove what is stated;
- Some opinions can be written like they are facts, but if you cannot find information to verify its validity, it is probably an opinion; and,
- To determine a fact, ask yourself, '*Can I prove this statement?*'

Bibliography/Further Reading

Author	Title	Publisher
Rachel Bladon	English Grammar	Usborne Publishing Ltd
Gill Hasson	Brilliant Communication Skills: What the Best Communicators Know, Do and Say	Pearson
Cliff Atkinson	Beyond Bullet Points: Using Microsoft PowerPoint to Create Presentations That Inform, Motivate, and Inspire	Microsoft Press
Mike Adams	Public Speaking Tips: Improve your presentation skills, stop your fear of public speaking and do an effective presentation	Amazon Media
Susan Jeffers	Feel The Fear and Do it Anyway	Arrow

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