

5

Communicating on the Job

Key Terms

communication
sender
encoder
message
channel(s)
receiver
decoder
feedback
noise
hearing
listening
comprehension
margin
block-form
modified block-form
memo
nonverbal communication
voice mail
cellular phone
walkie-talkie
multitasking
teleconferencing
videoconferencing
informal communications
commuting

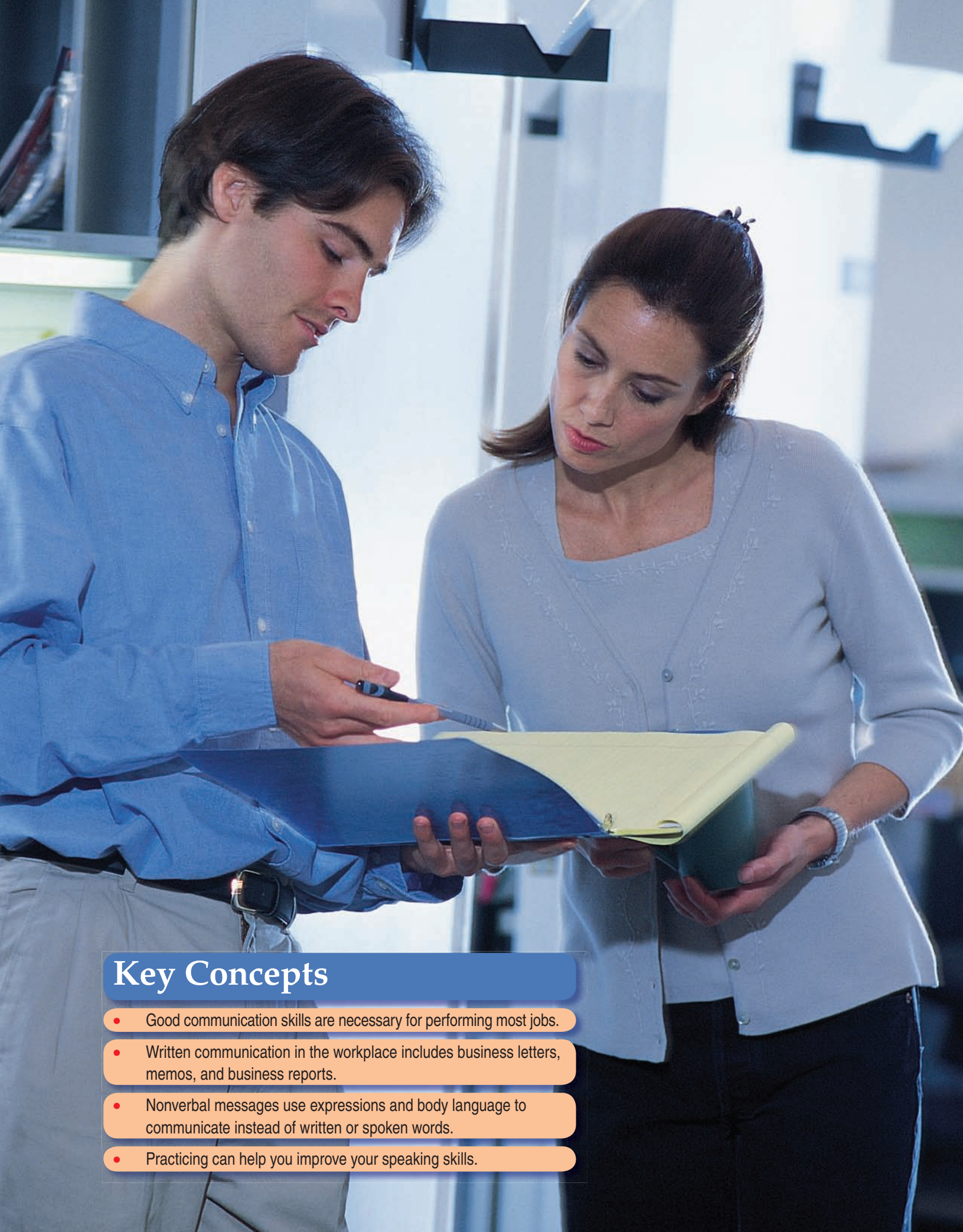
Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- **determine** how well you listen and how you can perfect this skill.
- **identify** ways you can improve your reading and comprehension skills.
- **write** business letters, memorandums, and reports.
- **identify** ways you can improve your speaking skills when interacting with others.
- **describe** technological tools in the workplace that aid communications with others.

Reading Advantage

Write the main headings in the chapter, leaving space under each heading. As you read the chapter, write three main points that you learned from reading each section.



Key Concepts

- Good communication skills are necessary for performing most jobs.
- Written communication in the workplace includes business letters, memos, and business reports.
- Nonverbal messages use expressions and body language to communicate instead of written or spoken words.
- Practicing can help you improve your speaking skills.

Communication skills are very important in securing a job. **Communication** is the process of conveying a message, thought, or idea so it is accurately received and understood. Through good communication skills, people share feelings, ideas, facts, and opinions while performing day-to-day tasks on the job.

Employers expect workers to listen, read, write, and speak accurately. It is important to ask your supervisor how to perform a communication task if you are unsure. It is also important to be courteous as you use these skills. In addition to possessing the basic skills, employers want workers to be skillful in using current communication technology. Some common communication devices are explained in this chapter.

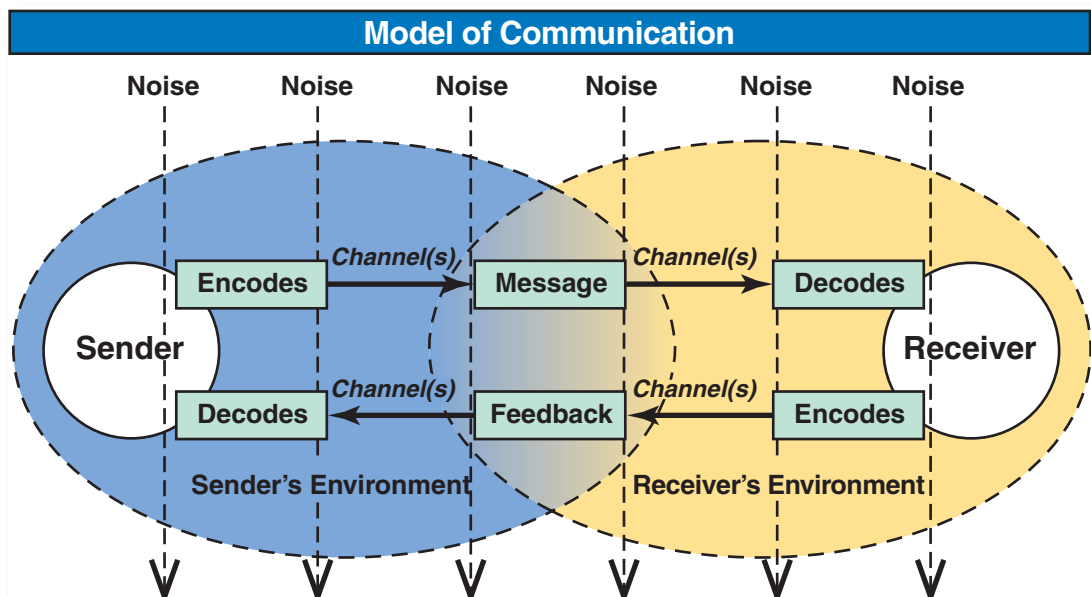
Employees with up-to-date communication skills will have no difficulty succeeding and advancing in a job. Poor communication skills, on the other hand, will be costly to you and your employer. A lack of these skills has led to the firing of employees.

Effective Communication

Communication in the workplace is effective when the message received matches the one sent. This sounds much easier to do than it actually is. Perhaps the intended receiver of your message does not understand it. Perhaps, too, something prevents your message from reaching the intended receiver. In both cases, your communication is not effective. Ineffective communications occur more often than you might guess.

A model of the complete communication process is illustrated in 5-1. The process includes the following parts:

- **Sender**—the person (possibly you) who starts the communication process and has a mental image of what he or she wants to communicate



5-1

Understanding a communication model may help you become a better communicator.

- **Encoder**—the sender’s mind, which forms a mental image of the message being sent
- **Message**—something that is understood by the senses (usually something spoken, written, or printed)
- **Channel(s)**—how the message is delivered (by voice, a printed document, an image, or another means)
- **Receiver**—the person who gets the message
- **Decoder**—the receiver’s mind, which forms a mental image of the message received
- **Feedback**—a clue that reveals what message was received
- **Noise**—anything that interrupts the message

As you can see, the communication process is more complex than just speaking or writing to another person. The minds of both the sender and the receiver of the message are actively involved. The reaction of the message receiver signals what he or she understood. If the reaction is unusual or unexpected, it can mean that the receiver got the wrong message.

If you ask a coworker, for example, where office supplies are located, you expect an answer. If he continues staring at the computer screen, the feedback may indicate that he did not hear you. When the coworker answers with directions to the office supplies, you know your message is understood. In some cases, feedback is not necessary because you know the message was correctly communicated. However, the only way to be certain a message is understood is by providing feedback to the sender.

Noise is any interference that distorts the meaning of the message. Noise can be a mechanical sound, such as a ringing phone, loud conversation, or squeaky machines. Noise can also be a psychological factor that takes many forms. An example of psychological noise is when a customer does not hear you because of anger over a failed product. Psychological noise can also result from personality conflict between the sender and receiver. Psychological noise is very common and affects most conversations.

Practically every communication in the workplace is an opportunity for a breakdown to occur. By recognizing this possibility, you are more likely to make a greater effort to communicate accurately.

Listening Skills

Some people never seem to listen. They become so involved in what they will say that they do not bother to listen to others. Have you ever encountered people who seem to be thinking about something else when you are talking to them? Do you ever do the same to others?

Sometimes listening is considered the same as hearing, but it is not. **Hearing** is recognizing sound. **Listening** involves understanding what you hear. For communication to occur, a message must be sent, received, and understood. Therefore, if a person is not listening when a message is sent, communication does not take place.

Reflect Further

Have you ever expressed a message that wasn’t understood? If so, why did the communication break down? What part(s) of the communication model failed?

People often fail to listen when they are in the following situations:

- *They are interrupted.* A person's ability to listen is affected when someone walks into the room, a telephone rings, or other people are talking nearby.
- *They think they know what will be said.* Sometimes people only listen to part of a conversation because they think "I've heard this before."
- *They do not agree with what is said.* When people do not agree with what is said, they often block the information from entering their minds. They refuse to listen to the speaker.
- *They are having difficulty hearing.* People do not listen when they cannot hear well. For example, you may stop listening when someone is speaking so softly you cannot understand what is said.
- *They are distracted by the speaker.* Sometimes the speaker has distracting mannerisms, speaks in a monotone, or does not make eye contact with the audience. This discourages listening.
- *They do not understand the words.* Not knowing the meanings of words used by the speaker handicaps the listener.
- *They start thinking about something else.* When people allow their minds to wander, they fail to concentrate on what is being said.

Thinking It Through

Is it possible to talk to someone but not communicate?



To be a good listener, you concentrate on what is said, 5-2. You do not let yourself become distracted. You block out everything except the voice of the speaker. Do not interrupt the speaker unless you do not understand what is being said. Then ask the speaker to explain in more detail what he or she is saying. Being a good listener will help you be a better worker. Listening is a skill you can improve with practice.

5-2

A good listener pays attention to what is being said and shows a sincere interest in what the speaker is saying.

Reading and Comprehension Skills

Reading and comprehension skills are important in the workplace. In almost every work situation, you will be expected to read many types of printed materials that involve your job. Reading skill involves more than just being able to sound the words aloud. It involves **comprehension**, or the ability to understand the material. To be an effective employee, you will need to understand the memos, reports, books, directions, and other documents associated with your job.

In the Real World

Are You Listening, Quentin?

At a department meeting, Quentin's supervisor introduced a new process that the company will begin using in the manufacture of their products. He explained that the new process would require a large new machine. In order to make room for the new machine, all the other machines in the department would need to be relocated. He said, "This new semiautomatic machine will be placed along the east wall. All other machines will be placed along the north and west walls."

The supervisor began to explain how the heavy equipment should be moved. Suddenly Quentin said, "Why don't we put the new machine along the east wall?"

The room became silent. The supervisor replied that the idea was a good one, but had already been discussed.

Embarrassed, Quentin said, "I'm sorry. I didn't hear you."

The supervisor had spoken loud enough for everyone to hear him easily. Quentin had perfect hearing, but he wasn't paying attention. Most of his coworkers laughed at him, shaking their heads.

Questions to Discuss

1. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent), what rating do Quentin's listening skills deserve?
2. Do you think Quentin's coworkers were rude to him? What might this incident do to Quentin's reputation?
3. What can you learn from Quentin that would make you a better listener?

In Quentin's case, for example, comprehension is important. He will be operating new technical equipment. He knows he must read the instruction manuals and carefully follow directions to operate the machines safely. As a result, he will avoid an accident and prevent damage to the machines. His skill in reading and understanding what he reads will benefit him and his employer. He will gain some new skills. This could help him advance on the job. His skills will save his employer time and money.

Being able to read the printed materials at your training station will help you do the job well. Good reading and comprehension skills can help you find information quickly and save time. You can also gain new knowledge and skills through reading that can help you advance to a better job.

Even good readers can improve their reading skills. Sharpening these skills will help you read faster and remember more of what you read. The following guidelines may help you become a better reader:

- *Read with a purpose.* Before you start to read, you should know why you are reading something. Then you can focus on reading the information you really need. For example, Quentin will read the instruction manuals so he can operate the machines safely. Your purpose might be to learn something new or to find answers.
- *Look over the material you are reading first.* Once you have a purpose for reading, you can decide how fast you want to read. Read quickly if you want just the main ideas. Do this by reading the first paragraph, main headings, and last paragraph. This tells you what information is covered. If you have to remember detailed information, read more slowly. Look over the material first, and then go back and read it carefully. Quentin will follow these guidelines as he reads through the manuals.
- *Try to read for meaning.* The best way to remember what you read is to concentrate. Do not let your mind wander. After you finish reading a section of material, think about the main ideas. Picture these ideas in your mind. This will help you understand what you read. Another way to understand the meaning of what you read is to organize and outline the main ideas in your mind or on paper. This can help you understand the writer's message.
- *Try to improve your vocabulary.* Improving your vocabulary is very important to improving comprehension. As you read, you will find one or more words you do not know. Sometimes you can determine the meaning by the way the word is used in the sentence or paragraph. If the meaning still is not clear, use a dictionary to check the word's meaning. You may even come across certain words or terms that relate to the type of work you do. Many businesses have their own special vocabulary. These special words are used to describe products or operations for that specific business. They also make communication among employees more efficient. Learning these words or terms can help you read and understand job-related materials.

As Quentin reads his manual, he will find several new technical terms. He can ask his coworkers what the terms mean or check a dictionary; or they can use the grammar check on the computer. Either method will help him do his job well.

Reflect Further

Give an example of something you were able to read but had difficulty comprehending. What did you do to understand the meaning better?

Writing and Keyboarding Skills

Many employers consider written communication skills one of the most important job skills an employee can have. Why? The main reason is few people possess this skill. Poor communication causes employers to lose business and money. Therefore, the ability to write a message clearly and accurately is an important skill to have in the working world.

Extend Your Knowledge

Accurate Keyboarding Is a Job Skill

Keyboarding skill is not the same as writing skill. In fact, some of the fastest and most accurate keyboarders do not compose messages. They simply key-in existing data and become skilled by doing it often. Keyboarding is a tool often associated with office work. However, this skill is needed even in manufacturing plants where machines are controlled with computers and keyboards.

Good writing skills involve composing written or printed communications. It requires the presentation of clear, logical thoughts. Writing skills become especially important as you advance on the job.

Today, few written communications in the workplace are handwritten except quick notes. The vast majority of written and printed communications in the workplace are prepared with a computer keyboard. When people key-in data well, they are applying their typing skills to a computer keyboard, 5-3. You may wish to take a keyboarding course to learn the correct procedures.

Basic keyboarding skill is a tool to help you compose workplace communications. The basic types of written communications in the workplace include business letters, memorandums, and reports.

Business Letters

Writing a business letter is different from a personal letter to a friend or relative. When writing a personal letter, you can use your own style of writing. You can write just as you would talk to the person face to face. You can write on bright red stationery or yellow paper with polka dots. Also, you do not ordinarily keep a copy of every personal letter you write.

Letters written in the workplace, however, are more formal. There are certain parts that should be included in every business letter. There are certain styles that are considered acceptable. There are certain ways business letters should appear. Word processing programs often have a variety of templates for writing business letters. Keeping a copy of every business letter you write is also important.

Thinking It Through

How can poor writing skills prevent a person from getting ahead on the job?



5-3

Keyboard skills are essential in today's workplace.

Parts of a Business Letter

Most business letters have eight standard parts—the return address, date, inside address, salutation, body, complimentary close, signature and name, and reference initials. Each part is described here and identified in 5-4.

- *Return address*—tells the reader from where the letter came. Most companies have their return addresses printed on their stationery, which is called *letterhead*. (If you are using blank paper for a business letter, you will need to add the return address. See 5-5.)
- *Date*—tells the reader when the letter was written. (If you are using blank paper, the date appears with the return address as shown in 5-5.)
- *Inside address*—includes the name, business title, and address of the person to whom the letter is written. It is the same address as that on the envelope.
- *Salutation*—is the greeting that precedes the body of the letter. The most widely used salutation is *Dear Mr. (Mrs., Ms., or Miss) Jones*. If you are writing to a group of men and women, you can use *Gentlemen* or *Ladies*. If you know the person on a first-name basis, you can write *Dear Terry*. A colon (:) always follows the salutation.
- *Body*—contains the message.
- *Complimentary close*—formally ends the message. Most business letters have one of the following closings: *Sincerely*, *Yours truly*, or *Cordially*. A comma follows the closing.
- *Signature, printed name, and business title*—follow the complimentary close. You should sign your name in ink above your printed name. Usually you sign both your first and last name. If you are on a first name basis with the person to whom you are writing, simply sign your first name. Your business title appears directly below your name.
- *Reference initials*—identify the writer of the letter and the typist. Below your business title, your initials as the writer of the letter usually appear in capital letters. These are followed by a colon or slash and the typist's initials in lowercase letters. The common forms used are *MLD/ch* and *MLD:ch*. If the writer of the letter is also the typist, then only one set appears or no initials at all.



Thinking It Through

If a business letter is missing one or more of the standard parts, does this reflect badly on the company, the person who wrote it, or the one who keyed-in the letter?

Return address

H.B. Jones Welding
812 N. 7th Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri 65100

Date

November 15, 20xx

Inside address

Acme Welding Supply
999 Camden St.
St. Louis, MO 63000

Salutation

Dear Sir or Madam:

Body

Please send me information about the new Acme welding machines you advertised in the Welding Journal last month. My company rebuilds heavy road construction equipment, and we need to replace five of our welding machines.

If you have a salesperson in the Kansas City area, we would appreciate having him or her call us at 876-555-4567 or e-mail us at acme@acme.com.

Complimentary close

Sincerely,

Signature and typed name

Jackie Jones
Jackie Jones
Purchaser

Reference initials

JRJ/ra

5-4

Most business letters have eight standard parts.

687 Sunnybrook Lane
Clinton, IL 60466
November 20, 20xx

Acme Welding Supply
999 Camden Street
St. Louis, Missouri 63000

To Whom It May Concern:

I understand your company rebuilds and repairs road construction equipment. I am an owner of a small road-repair business who works primarily on local country roads. I need to have an asphalt paving machine repaired as soon as possible.

Please contact me so I know what to do to get this machine repaired. Can one of your representatives identify its problem and fix it on site? I would appreciate a phone call at your earliest convenience. My 24-hour number is 815-555-3231.

Sincerely,

William Brown
President

5-5

The main purpose of a request letter is to get the reader to do something for you.

Types of Business Letters

A business letter is usually written for one of three reasons:

- to request information, merchandise, or service
- to send good news or a neutral message
- to deliver bad news

To address these different reasons, there are three main types of business letters: request letters, good news and neutral-message letters, and bad-news letters. The type of message you communicate will determine which type of letter to write and what information to include. The following are guidelines for writing each type of letter.

Request Letters

When the main purpose of your message is to ask the reader to do something, you are writing a request letter. In this case, it is important to cover three points.

- Introduce your request and state why you are making it.
- Include any details necessary for the reader to respond to your request correctly.
- State clearly what action you want the reader to take and when.

For example, if you are ordering merchandise, it is important that you include the name of the merchandise, quantity wanted, order or catalog number, size, color, and any other important information. Also, give the reader the name and address to which the merchandise should be sent. Tell the reader when the order is needed and how it will be paid.

In the closing paragraph, you should also include a statement of appreciation. You might write this: "I would appreciate a phone call at your earliest convenience," as shown in 5-5.

Good-News and Neutral-Message Letters

Letters that answer requests; grant favors; express appreciation; or make announcements about events, policies, and procedures can be written by the good-news/neutral-message letter plan. These types of letters are usually easy to write because you tell the reader something pleasant or not controversial.

In a good-news/neutral-message letter, there are three important points to tell the reader.

- State the news or the main idea.
- Explain any details, facts, or reasons that relate to it.
- End the letter on a positive and friendly note.

For example, suppose your job is to fill a mail order for a customer. If the customer ordered four items and you only have three items in stock, explain when the other item will be sent. Thank the customer for doing business with your company. Let the person know you will be glad to fill future orders. If your company is also sending information about a new product or service, provide complete information about it and how to obtain it. See 5-6.

Acme Welding Supply
999 Camden Street
St. Louis, Missouri 63000

November 20, 20xx

Ms. Jackie Jones, Purchaser
H.B. Jones Welding
812 N. 7th Avenue
Kansas City, MO 65100

Dear Ms. Jones:

Thank you for your letter requesting information about our new Acme welding machine. Enclosed is a booklet describing the machine to familiarize you with its exceptional features.

Ken Adams is our Acme welding machine representative in the Kansas City area. He would be happy to demonstrate the welding machine to you and answer any questions you may have about its use for your company. Ken will be calling you this week to arrange a visit.

Again, thank you for your interest. Ken will be happy to fill an order for you if you decide the Acme welding machine or any of our other products will meet your needs.

Sincerely,

Larry Smith

Larry Smith
Sales Manager

LS/rb

5-6

Good-news or a neutral-message letter is written when answering requests, granting favors, expressing appreciation, or making announcements about events, policies, and procedures.

Bad-News Letters

Acknowledging orders you cannot fill, turning down requests, and announcing news about price increases or discontinued services are examples of bad-news messages. The wording of bad-news letters is very important. You want to tell the reader the bad news without the reader forming a bad impression of your company.

Usually there are four important points to tell the reader:

- Say something positive that interests the reader, yet relates to the bad news.
- Explain why the request cannot be granted or why the situation must be different from the way the reader wants it.
- Offer a constructive suggestion or an alternative.
- End the letter on a friendly, positive note.

Thank the reader sincerely for making the request, but indicate that it cannot be filled and explain why. For example, maybe your company does not carry the exact item requested but a very similar product that may interest the reader. Perhaps you can direct the reader to a company that does carry the item. Finally, express continued interest in the reader, and invite him or her to contact you in the future. See 5-7.

Appearance of a Business Letter

A key factor that influences the appearance of a letter is the space devoted to margins. A **margin** is the blank space around the printed or written material. A letter needs top, side, and bottom margins. The top margin is usually formed by the space around the company's letterhead. Ideally, margins should be the same size all around the letter so they frame the message like a picture. To do this, companies usually stock two sizes of stationery: the normal 8½ × 11-inch and a smaller size.

Although the office assistant is usually responsible for the appearance of a letter, the writer also needs to know how a business letter should look. Most business letters are arranged in one of two ways: block form and modified-block form.

With the **block-form** letter, all parts begin at the left margin and paragraphs are not indented. The good-news letter in 5-6 is in block form on stationery with a letterhead. If you type a letter on blank paper, the return address should also begin at the left margin. Since all parts of the letter begin at the left margin, this is the faster style to key-in.

With the **modified block-form** letter, all parts begin at the left margin except the return address (if keyed-in), date, complimentary close, name, and signature. Also, the paragraphs of the body may be indented. The bad-news letter in 5-7 is a modified block-form.

The placement of the parts of a letter is also important. If the return address is keyed-in, it is usually placed on line 12 with the date keyed-in directly below it. On letterhead stationery, the date should appear about two lines below the last line of the company letterhead, which is usually line 14.

Thinking It Through

Before you begin writing any type of business letter, why should you first decide what type of letter is needed?

Acme Welding Supply
999 Camden Street
St. Louis, Missouri 63000

December 2, 20xx

Mr. J. T. McRae
McRae & Sons Construction
110 East Rd.
Independence, MO 65923

Dear Mr. McRae:

Thank you for your order for three Acme welding machines.

Since the demand for this newest welding device has far exceeded our sales expectations at this time of year, we are temporarily out of stock. However, our production manager has assured me that a new supply of welding machines will be available within ten days.

You can plan on receiving a rush shipment of your welding machines by December 15. We are confident you and your employees will agree that the performance of these lightweight welding machines far surpasses everything you have used to date.

Sincerely,

Larry Smith

Larry Smith
Sales Manager

LS/rb

5-7

The main purpose of a bad-news letter is to tell the reader unfavorable news without the reader forming a bad impression of your company.

The inside address is placed two to eight lines below the date, depending on the length of the letter. The shorter the letter, the more lines you should leave between the date and the inside address. The salutation appears two lines below the inside address. The body of the letter begins two lines below the salutation. It is single-spaced with double spacing between paragraphs. The complimentary close is two lines below the last line of the body. About four lines below the complimentary close, the name and business title should appear. This allows room for the person's signature. Two lines below the business title is the location of the reference initials.

Most business letters are printed on white or off-white paper. They should appear neat and clean with no smudges, fingerprints, or creases.

Appearance of a Business Envelope

Business envelopes should repeat the inside address of the business letter slightly below the center point of the envelope. The return address should appear in the upper-left corner. This address includes the full name and address of the person sending the communication. The return address is especially important if, for any reason, the letter cannot be delivered.

The U.S. Postal Service appreciates the use of uppercase letters on envelopes because these work best with their scanning equipment. Many businesses, however, continue to use upper- and lowercase letters. Always include the two-letter state abbreviation developed by the Postal Service and the zip code.

Memos

When you want to send a written message to someone at work, you do not send a business letter—you send a memorandum. A memorandum, or **memo**, is an informal written message from one person or department to another person, persons, or department(s) in the same company. It may be a short note to remind others of a coming event or to explain a new company rule. Memos are short because they usually deal with only one subject. Therefore, they tend to be fast and easy to write. Memos may be sent as hard copy or as e-mail.

Parts of a Memo

The standard parts of a memo are described here and shown in 5-8.

- **Date**—This indicates when the memo was written. The date can be expressed completely as November 10, 20xx, or abbreviated as 11/10/xx. The abbreviated date is more informal. Which choice is a better choice depends on the situation and your company's style.

Thinking It Through

When might it be better to communicate with a business letter instead of a phone call?

Department of Industrial Technology

Memo

Date: October 22, 20xx
To: Jim Jenkins, Director
 Warehouse Chemical Stores
From: Joe Larks, Foreman
 Production Lab – Room 30
Subject: RUSH – Sulfuric Acid

We are using our last bottle of sulfuric acid. Please send 20 gallons of concentrated sulfuric acid to our department by 10:00 a.m. tomorrow. Thanks.

5-8

Memos are usually short, informal messages that deal with one subject.

Thinking It Through

What kind of a message is ideal in memo form where you, a parent, or a friend works? What topics do you think are too lengthy for a memo?

- *To*—The names of the person(s) or department(s) receiving the memo appear here. If the memo is going to just one person with whom you work closely, you may use a first name or nickname, such as *Kesha*. However, you should refer to your reader by title and position if the person is a superior or someone unfamiliar to you, or if the memo will be filed as a record. In these situations, you would use *Kesha Jones, Personnel Manager*.
- *From*—The name of the person or department sending the memo appears here. Whether you include the first name only, the full name, or full name and business title depends on the situation. More formal situations require a full name and business title.
- *Subject*—After this heading, briefly state the purpose of the memo. For example, if you are requesting office supplies, the subject line of your memo might be *Office Supplies Needed*. Sometimes *RE*, a shortened expression for *regarding*, is used instead of *SUBJECT*.
- *Body*—This contains the message. The same general guidelines that apply to writing business letters also apply to memos. The big difference is length since a memo can be as short as one sentence.

Appearance of a Memo

Some businesses may have a special type of stationery to use for memos. It may have *Memorandum* and the company's name at the top of the page. If your company does not have memo stationery, regular typing paper can be used.

In most cases, a memo format is available on your computer at work. You simply key-in the information after each heading. Although there are no set guidelines for typing memos, here are some tips for memo placement. The words *Date*, *To*, *From*, and *Subject* should be followed by colons at the left margin. There should be one line of white space between each heading. The body of the memo should begin under the subject line after one or two lines of white space, regardless of the length of the message. The message is usually single-spaced.

Thinking It Through

How does the appearance of a memo differ from that of a business letter?

Business Reports

Business reports are written to present a new idea, explain a problem that needs action, or summarize work done to date. They are usually written to help the receiver(s) understand a significant business situation, solve a business problem, or make a decision. Business reports are either formal or informal.

Formal reports are usually long and about complex problems. They usually include a cover, title page, table of contents, introduction, body, summary, and bibliography. They often include graphs, tables, and illustrations to explain specific points.

Informal reports are generally short and usually include just the body of the message, like the body of a letter or memo. Weekly reports on sales, number of phone calls received, and department accomplishments are examples of informal reports. Often the information appears on company reporting forms.

As with letters and memos, you will need to plan what you want to include in a report before you begin writing:

- *Define the purpose.* Why are you writing the report? What do you need to tell the receiver?
- *Consider who will receive the report.* Who wants or needs the report? How much detail do they need or prefer?
- *Determine what ideas to include.* What points will you need to cover to accomplish the report's purpose?

When preparing any report, write clearly, concisely, and accurately. Present the facts objectively. This means you should make sure you do not let your personal feelings about the subject influence what you report.

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication can affect the content of what people try to communicate more than what is said or heard. **Nonverbal communication** is any message that does not use written or spoken words. People alter the meaning of what they say with facial expressions, gestures, and the way in which they sit and stand.

It is important to be aware of what messages your actions as well as your words convey. Make an effort to match your nonverbal communications with your feelings and the messages you are trying to send. For example, when you sit tall in a chair and make direct eye contact you appear interested. When you lean back, slouch, or look away from a speaker, you appear disinterested, 5-9.

Greeting someone with a smile and firm handshake makes you appear happy to meet them. Using a limp handshake and staring at the floor may make you appear unconfident or disinterested. Sitting beside an individual may indicate a willingness to discuss differences and reach a solution. Standing directly in front of someone's face, practically nose to nose, may show a readiness to fight.

Speaking Skills

When you began talking as a young child, you probably learned one or more new words every day. Now that you are older, you routinely use thousands of words. However, good speaking skill requires more than knowledge of words. You must also be able to use words effectively.



5-9

What message does this nonverbal communication send?

Reflect Further

Have you ever misunderstood a nonverbal message from someone? What happened? How can communicators make sure their messages are clear?

Employers consider speaking skills so important that they cite them as one of the basic skills needed by effective workers. How good are your speaking skills? If they need improvement, you can accomplish that with practice. Follow these guidelines when you speak to others.

- *Speak clearly and distinctly.* Avoid running words together such as *whydoncha* for *why don't you*. If necessary, talk more slowly. If you have a tendency to mumble, try opening your mouth a little wider when talking. Always be sure not to talk with food or anything else in your mouth.
- *Speak to the listener.* Whether you speak to one person or more, establish eye contact. This will help hold each listener's attention and show that you are interested in the conversation, 5-10. When you speak, use words the listener will understand.
- *Speak with a friendly and courteous tone.* Try to phrase what you want to say in a positive way. When you find it necessary to use criticism, be ready to offer a constructive idea. Avoid arguing and complaining.
- *Use Standard English.* This means you should use standard grammar and pronunciation when speaking. *Bob came here yesterday* is Standard English. *Came Bob yesterday here* is not. The person who uses Standard English on the job appears more competent and better educated.
- *Talk "with" the listener, not "to" the listener.* Keep messages short and understandable. Make sure your messages are received correctly. You may want to ask questions such as "What do you think?" or "What are your feelings about this?" This gives the listener a chance to provide feedback. From the listener's comments, you will know if your messages have been understood.

Reflect Further

Which of the guidelines for improving speaking skills do you need to practice most?

5-10

Speaking directly to a person and making eye contact will help hold the listener's attention.



In the Real World

The Telephone Puzzle

Kesha dialed a business telephone number. After the telephone rang six times, she heard someone pick up the receiver. Then she heard voices in the background, but nobody spoke.

Eventually, a voice said, "Hulooo."

"Is this the Acme Company?" Kesha asked.

"Yeah," was the loud reply.

"This is Kesha Jones. I would like to speak to Gordon Brown, please."

"Watcha wan hem fir?"

"I'm calling to cancel a luncheon meeting for tomorrow that Mr. Brown is scheduled to attend at the Hilton Hotel."

"I don't know nothin' about that," came the reply.

"Would you please connect me with Mr. Brown or his assistant," Kesha said before hearing a dial tone.

The dial tone meant that her call had been disconnected. As Kesha considered how to get the urgent message to Mr. Brown, she tried to review in her mind what she might have said to trigger so much confusion during the call.

Questions to Discuss

1. If you were Kesha, what mental picture would you have of the person who answered the phone? Would this person's behavior influence your opinion of the Acme Company?
2. What do you think the person who answered the telephone at Acme Company should have said to Kesha? What should the person have done?
3. What confusion, if any, did Kesha cause?

Talking on the Phone

Using the telephone in the workplace is one of the quickest ways to communicate. A one-minute telephone call, if handled properly, can save hours or even days in communication time. If you have a job that involves a telephone, it is important to use good telephone manners. The way you communicate over the telephone can help or hurt your employer.

Here are some pointers to improve your telephone skills at work. When the telephone rings, answer it immediately. Greet the caller pleasantly and give the name of your company, your department, or your own name. Your supervisor will probably tell you what greeting to use. You may say something like "Good morning, the Acme Company, may I help you?"

When talking, hold the phone about one inch from your lips and speak directly into the transmitter. Speak clearly and say each word distinctly. Do not eat, drink, or chew gum while speaking on the phone. Always be courteous to the caller even if it is a wrong number.

Be sure to keep a message pad or paper and pen close to the telephone so you can write down messages. When taking a message, record the following:

- date
- time of the call
- name of the caller
- name of the person who should receive the message
- message

Thinking It Through

How should you end a business call? Why?

Reflect Further

How do you feel about speaking in front of others? Do you feel calmer when you're well prepared?

Thinking It Through

Do you know anyone who doesn't get nervous before speaking? What is their secret?

After writing down the message, read it back to the caller to make sure you recorded the information correctly. If you are not sure how to spell a person's name or a company's name, ask the caller to spell it for you. It is important for you to copy down the message exactly.

When calling a person, plan your call in advance. For example, if you are placing an order for company supplies, be sure you have all the facts you need in front of you. Know what you want to say and how you want to say it.

When any business call comes to a close, end the conversation pleasantly. If you made the call, thank the person for his or her assistance or cooperation. If you received the call, you may want to thank the person for calling. Remember, the impressions you make on others will influence the impressions they will have of you and your company.

Speaking to a Group

At school you have probably spoken in front of a group. You have probably given oral reports in some of your classes. Perhaps you have spoken in front of a club or participated in a public speaking contest.

Practically all occupations require some form of public speaking. As an employee, you may be asked to guide a tour group through your department. You may be asked to make a sales pitch to a group of buyers or speak at a meeting. You will probably be asked on many occasions to explain your ideas to a group of coworkers. Regardless of the type of work you do, having the ability to speak in front of a group will help you be a better communicator on and off the job.

Most people are afraid to speak in front of a group because they are afraid they might say or do something foolish. That becomes less of a problem when you speak on a familiar topic. You may be thinking you do not know much about anything, but you do. You are an expert on yourself. You could talk confidently about where you live, where you go to school, where you work, and what your interests and hobbies are. You are the expert on what you do at your training station—the tasks you perform and the skills you learn. Knowing your subject is half the work in public speaking. The other half is preparing your presentation.

When preparing your speech, outline the main thoughts you want to convey to your audience. Try to limit yourself to five main points or less. Then organize your points in a logical order. For example, suppose you will speak about refinishing furniture, a hobby of yours. You decide there are three main points to include:

- different types of finishes to use
- a step-by-step explanation of how to refinish furniture
- materials and equipment needed for refinishing

After reviewing these, you decide the most logical point to mention first is a step-by-step explanation. Next, you decide you want to describe the material and equipment needed. This leaves the discussion of finishes last. Therefore, you decide to organize the points as follows:

1. a step-by-step explanation of how to refinish furniture
2. materials and equipment needed for refinishing
3. different types of finishes to use

Now you have a speech, but how do you deliver it? Here is one easy rule to follow—tell them what you plan to tell them; tell them; then tell them what you told them. This simply means identify your main points, discuss them, then summarize them.

When you begin with an overview of your plans, catching the audience's attention is important. You may want to tell a funny story related to your subject or one that will lead into your subject. You may also want to tell a personal experience related to the subject. Then go through your points one by one. Finally, summarize the points.

Before giving your speech, practice! Practicing will help you know what you want to say and when. See 5-11. You will also want to practice timing to make sure your speech is not too long or short. If you are not given a time limit, then limit yourself. It is best not to speak longer than twenty minutes. This will allow some time for answering questions from the audience.

When delivering your speech, avoid reading from your notes. Use note cards instead. You should speak to your audience, not read to them. As you speak, project your voice so everyone can hear you clearly. It is also important to look at the people to whom you are talking. Making eye contact will help you hold your audience's attention.

Your appearance when making a presentation is also important. Dress appropriately for the occasion and the audience. If speaking to classmates in your English class at school, dress as you would for school. If speaking to a group of employers about your cooperative work experience, dress more formally. Always make sure you look clean and neat.

Remember, when you give a speech, you are simply sharing a message with others. Give it with confidence and enthusiasm. Also, before giving your speech, look back at the communication model and be sure you are sending and encoding exactly what you want the audience to receive.



5-11

Practicing your speech is especially important when visual aids are part of the presentation.

Reflect Further

What do you need to do to deliver better speeches in the future?

Communication Technology

The way people communicate in the workplace has changed due to technology. Few employers can afford to let their employees take extra

time to prepare handwritten letters, memos, directions, and instructions. All forms of communication have become electronic in nature because of the speed provided and time saved.

Manufacturing, construction, service, entertainment, and all other types of businesses are dependent on a variety of communication tools. Employees are using electronic communications on a daily and hourly basis. The communication equipment in use includes, telephones, headsets, and many other tools. (You will learn about *e-mail*, or electronic mail, in Chapter 7, “Technology and You”)

Using Voice Mail

When you leave messages, be sure to

- speak clearly and say each word carefully.
- give your name and telephone number twice, at the beginning and the end.
- keep your message brief, but explain the reason for your call.
- give the date and time of your message (even though many voice-mail systems do that automatically).
- let the person know the best time to reach you.

5-12

These tips will help you use voice mail effectively.

be ready to quickly cover the key facts before leaving a voice mail message. Follow the guidelines in 5-12.

Voice Mail

One common phone feature that you will be expected to handle is voice mail. **Voice mail** allows callers to leave recorded messages. Some of your work may involve directions left for you in your voice mail. Keeping messages short and to the point is important when using a voice mail system. Sometimes you are not warned that your call will be disconnected after a certain number of seconds. The best advice is to



5-13

Telephone access anytime anywhere is the reason for increasing dependence on cellular phones in the workplace.

You may be issued a cellular phone in your job. Make sure your recorded greeting is professional. Your employer may provide you with a specific format for your greeting. It is very important you understand exactly how your employer expects you to use this phone. Some employers will allow personal calls on a company cellular phone, but others will not. Some employers will allow personal calls only if you pay for those calls. It is also important to discuss with your

Cellular Phones

The etiquette used when recording voice mail messages also applies to using a cellular phone. A **cellular phone** is a type of wireless phone. In most cases involving a cellular call, both parties are charged for the call. Consequently, the person receiving your call will want you to deliver it as quickly as possible. Before making a cellular call, take a few moments to gather your thoughts so you can deliver your message fast and courteously.

Cellular phones are a common communication tool and are used more often than traditional phones by many people. Cellular phones have the advantages of being easy to carry and the convenience of providing an instant communication link wherever you are, 5-13. Within a few seconds after a communication is sent, it is received.

employer the types of calls that may be made with these phones because cellular calls are not always private. In many instances, your calls may be overheard and recorded by others.

Walkie-Talkies

Similar to a cellular phone but limited to short-distance calling, a **walkie-talkie** is also a very common communication tool on a job. Walkie-talkies aid communications between workers separated by a distance of a couple miles or less.

Walkie-talkies can be used to help a crane operator position a load accurately and safely with directions from an assistant standing beyond hearing range. They may also be used by surveyors in the field, construction workers on a skyscraper, and factory workers in different departments. These short-range communication devices are very important in search-and-rescue missions as well as in military applications.

Headsets

Many employees use headsets as part of their job. One example is the headset worn by employees in fast-food establishments. One employee on a headset may be listening to the orders being taken at the drive-in window by a coworker speaking into a headset. (Doing more than one job at a time is called **multitasking**.) Headsets allow employees to hear related tasks being done by others.

Many employees working at computer terminals are also required to wear headsets. See 5-14. Some firemen driving a fire truck wear a headset that allows them to keep in contact with the fire station while in route to an emergency. Using a headset should not be a concern since your employer will provide the necessary training.

Teleconferencing and Videoconferencing

Flying people to meetings in other cities can be very costly for an employer. However, technology can link people together in various locations to hold a productive meeting. Participants can be as near as the next office or as far as another country. There are two ways that employees separated by distances can meet: through teleconferencing and videoconferencing.

Using a phone to conduct a meeting with participants in different locations is **teleconferencing**. Through the use of speakerphones in each location, everyone can contribute comments while hearing what the others are saying. During a teleconference, it is important to speak loudly and clearly. Also, it is helpful when people identify themselves each time they speak so everyone knows *who* is saying *what*. Teleconferencing is a widely used business tool.

Thinking It Through

What types of communication technology do you use now and for what purpose(s)?



5-14

Workers quickly adjust to wearing headsets while working at a terminal.

Thinking It Through

What topics may be best suited to videoconferencing? What topics probably would be better discussed through teleconferencing?

Thinking It Through

Think of a time an informal communication was misunderstood. How could this have been prevented?

5-15

Videoconferencing is becoming more widely used for a large variety of purposes.

Videoconferencing involves two or more people communicating through a video and voice linkup, 5-15. Some basic videoconferencing guidelines are important for a high-quality conference. How will you feel if your caller refuses to turn on the camera? How alert will you appear on screen if your caller is boring you with a long and aimless conversation? How do you think the dress and other physical features seen on the video screen will affect the conversation? There are many professional and social questions associated with use of this technology.

Informal Communication Channels

Informal communications are sometimes more informative than formal communications in the workplace. On the other hand, sometimes these communications are merely gossip. It will be up to you to distinguish the useful from the useless information.

Informal communications may be defined as unscheduled communication with coworkers that occur by chance inside and outside the workplace. Informal communications may relate to your job, coworkers, or employer. Sometimes it may relate to your employer's reputation in the industry or the local community. Informal communications are common during travel between home and work, shift changes, or breaks.



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Commuting

Regularly traveling back and forth to work is called **commuting**. When you make that trip with coworkers, it is an opportunity to share information about work. The trip can be very frustrating in some places due to heavy traffic and crowds. For many other people, however, the trip to work is a pleasant time when friendships are made. Very open conversation may take place related to both work and family.

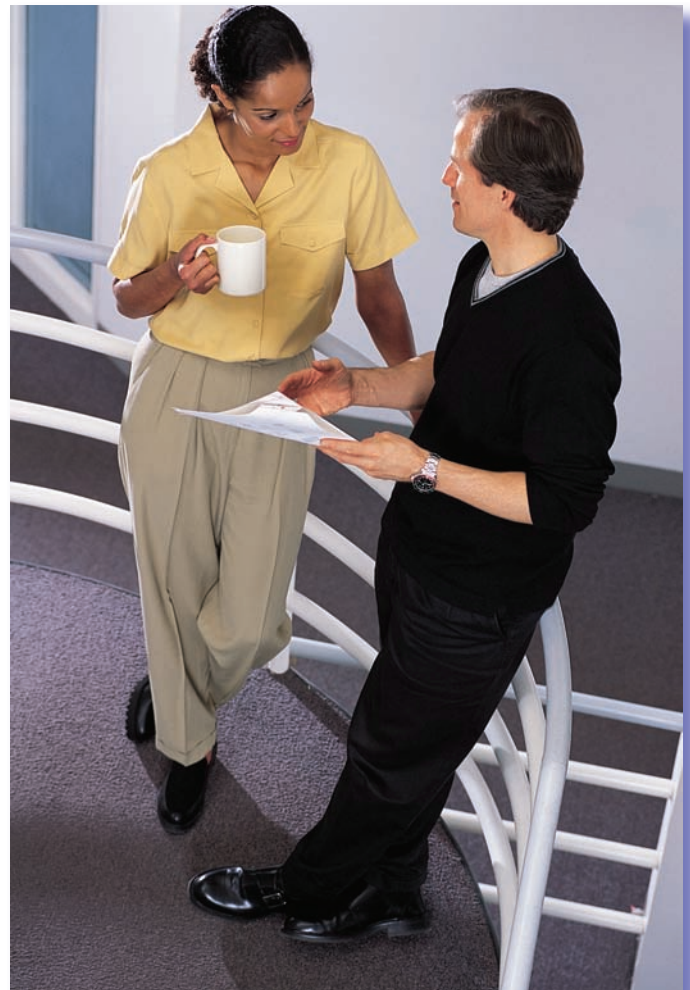
Shift Changes

When you are on a job where informal communications take place during shift changes, it is important to listen carefully. The person working at the job before your shift begins may have information about events on the previous shift that may affect you. While these communications may take place during an informal discussion, the details may be critical for you to know. Listen carefully, ask key questions, and think about how the information told to you may affect your job performance.

Work Breaks

Work breaks may involve informal conversations at a water cooler, in a break room, or while in route to or from breaks. Depending on the size of the business, you may take breaks with many people or just one or two, 5-16. Informal communications at work are necessary and should be enjoyable.

During informal communications, it is important to keep in mind you are still “on the clock” and responsible to your employer. At times it is tempting to discuss other employees, your superiors, and topics related to both work and social situations. Remember, some people do not keep confidences, and anything you say may be passed on to anyone else. It is best to confine your discussions to subjects that relate to your employment and are harmless social conversations.



5-16

Work breaks are opportunities to relax and become better acquainted with your coworkers.

Summary

Communication is important to success on the job. The four basic communication skills include listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Developing nonverbal skills can also improve success on the job.

Listening skills involve understanding what you hear. When speaking to others, talk clearly and distinctly. Always use Standard English. Keep messages short and talk “with” the listener.

Reading skills are improved by learning to read with a purpose. Look over the material first, then read carefully to understand the meaning.

Written business communications include letters, memos, and reports. Reports may be written for use inside or outside the company. Sometimes a specific format is used.

When speaking to a group, select a topic you know. Limit your speech to five or fewer main points and practice before giving it.

Many new tools are being used to speed and improve communications in the workplace. Employees must learn to use them efficiently and ethically. It is important to use informal channels carefully and only for reasons that are positive.

Facts in Review

1. Why is it important to understand the model of the complete communication process?
2. What are four reasons why people fail to listen?
3. What is the difference between reading and comprehension?
4. Why are computer application skills so important?
5. What are the eight standard parts of a business letter?
6. What are the three main reasons for writing business letters?
7. Name four examples of letters expressing good-news or neutral messages.
8. What steps in writing a good-news letter differ from writing a bad-news letter?
9. Why is it important to word bad-news letters carefully?
10. What are the ways people communicate nonverbally?
11. Name five guidelines that are important to follow when speaking to others.
12. What is the proper way to handle a business call?
13. What information should you write down when taking a telephone message?
14. What is an easy rule to follow to help you deliver a good speech?
15. Why should you practice before giving a speech?
16. List four important communication tools in the workplace and the main reason for each one's use.
17. Give three examples of occasions for informal work-related communications to occur between workers.
18. What are some hazards of informal communications?

Developing Your Academic Skills

1. **Speech.** Prepare a speech and deliver it during class. Critique classmates' speeches for grammar and pronunciation. Give specific examples when incorrect grammar or pronunciation made a message unclear. What might be the reactions to these mistakes in the business world?
2. **English.** Practice writing different types of business letters. Exchange your letters with a partner and check for proper format, spelling errors, and content.

Information Technology Applications

1. Have you ever used technology to communicate and received a message that was vague or misleading? Why was the message unclear? Why is it important to speak clearly and use proper grammar when using technology to communicate?
2. As a class, debate the usefulness of videoconferencing as a business tool. Research videoconferencing to prepare for the debate. If possible, visit a business with videoconferencing technology to see how it works before the debate.

Applying Your Knowledge and Skills

1. **Leadership and Teamwork.** Practice your listening and speaking skills by having a conversation with another classmate about any topic. When one person is speaking, the other listens. Neither person may respond to any statement without first summarizing what the other person has said. Incorrect summaries must be clarified before the conversation continues.
2. **Employability and Career Development.** Demonstrate the correct way to do the following:
 - A. answer the telephone at work
 - B. take a telephone message
 - C. place a telephone order
3. **Communications.** Prepare a three- to five-minute speech on how to give a speech. Present it to the class.
4. **Academic Foundations.** Interview two coworkers. Ask for specific examples of how they use reading skills on the job. Make a list of the types of materials they must read. Give a brief report to the class.

Developing Workplace Skills

Work with two classmates to practice the speaking and listening skills needed for good telephone communications. One person will create a detailed business message, tape it on a recorder, and play it back for the others to silently write a telephone message. Then the written messages should be read and compared to the taped message. Determine what important details, if any, were left out. Analyze why these errors may have occurred.