



## Chapter Outline

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## Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Understand the impact of written communication on professional excellence
2. Understand the different indirect messages sent with written communication
3. Identify different types of written communication
4. Utilize the KEYS approach to achieve professional excellence regarding written communication

# chapter 9

## Business and Professional Writing

### George Raab found out the hard way that there can be no expectation of privacy for workplace e-mail accounts.

Raab, a former chief financial officer for the New York City Education Department, was caught using his city e-mail account to line up a future job at a private firm and to manage his real estate holdings, all while still employed by the city (Chapman & Monahan, 2011). The city Conflict of Interest Board fined Raab \$6,500 for misuse of city resources. The ensuing investigation found other issues of corruption as well. Investigators also concluded that Raab had paid a former colleague from a private firm upwards of \$375,000 to perform new-age hypnosis to boost morale in the Education Department. The findings sparked a major controversy in the city and caused major problems for the Education Department, as accusations of corruption were leveled at the entire office. Even though Raab had left his position and paid the fine, the department was still left to deal with a public relations disaster.

While most people today have private e-mail accounts, many jobs in the professional workplace require that employees have another e-mail account with the company to conduct business. Also, many companies require that employees sign an agreement acknowledging that employee e-mails are the property of the company and can be investigated at any time. This can become dangerous when employees misuse workplace e-mail for personal reasons, or for anything not related to business. Even electronic messages to other coworkers that are critical of a boss or the company in

general can be damaging and possibly lead to job termination. That stories such as Raab's are still common in the news indicates that many people need to understand how to communicate with writing in a professional manner.

Writing with professional excellence is another important aspect of succeeding in the workplace. Many jobs will require that you communicate through writing as part of your day-to-day responsibilities. It is important to note that e-mail is not the only medium you are expected to be familiar with; business letters, memos, employee reviews, and proposals or reports also carry the need to write effectively. In this chapter, you will learn more about the types of written communication expected from you, as well as how to be an effective writer at work.

In this chapter, we explore the importance of *written communication* as it connects to professional excellence. All the chapters in this book have focused on human communication. We have spent a great deal of time emphasizing the importance of culture in the workplace, interpersonal relationships, team communication, leadership, and communication and technology. These topics are essential to your study of business and professional communication. Further, human relationships are essential as you enter, excel in, and survive in your career. Yet our study of business and professional communication is not complete without attention to written communication. In Chapter 4, we reviewed a number of written communication essentials, such as cover letters and résumés, in the process of *getting the job*. Now we will turn our attention to some basic principles for excellence in all types of written communication. In addition, we will cover some specific types of written communication that you are likely to encounter on the job. What types of written communication skills do you think you may use *on the job*? What can you do on the job regarding your written communication that will ensure professional excellence?

## The Importance of Written Communication

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What would you do if you were hired for a new position that required you to communicate in a variety of styles and formats? Written communication can challenge professionals entering a variety of positions, regardless of industry. We point this out because many readers of this text may have some of the same concerns as Yolanda (discussed later in this chapter). How do I select the correct format to get the message out? Is it appropriate for me to send this document via e-mail? What tone should I strive for in this message? How much detail about the new company initiative should I include in the press release? How should the memo be organized? Indeed, these questions about written communication that are emerging as you take this course may continue to present a challenge as you transition into your career or excel as a professional.

Written communication is important for the following reasons: (1) Official documents, memos, e-mail, and other forms of written communication reveal something about you as a professional; (2) important policies, requests, and organizational procedures are conveyed through written communication; (3) proposals, employee terminations, media relations,

and the like are achieved with written communication; and (4) written communication must be present in order to achieve professional excellence. To address these important topics, let's take a look at ways to strive for written communication excellence.

## Striving for Written Communication Excellence

So how do you develop excellence in written communication? In this section, we review some strategies that will help your development: message structure, message clarity, and message presentation.

### *Message Structure*

The good news is, the principles you learned for developing an excellent presentation are the same principles you need for developing excellent written communication. Excellent written communication begins with a clear general purpose, a clear specific purpose or thesis, and clear organization. Begin by asking yourself, "What is the purpose of this written communication? Am I presenting new information? Am I clarifying? Am I requesting? Am I persuading?" Once you have identified your general purpose, ask yourself, "What is the key message I want my audience to take away from this e-mail, report, or memo?" By answering this question, you will have identified your specific purpose or thesis statement. From there, you can begin organizing your message. We strongly recommend that you develop an outline before you begin writing. This outline will help you determine the organizational structure of your message. Remember this: Poor organization will lead to ineffective communication. Simply put, if the reader cannot follow your message, the reader cannot understand your message.

### *Message Clarity*

Developing clear organization is the first step to message clarity. However, clear organization alone does not guarantee that your message will be clear. To maximize message clarity, you must evaluate your audience and avoid generalities.

As with all forms of communication, excellence in written communication requires you to evaluate your audience. Ask yourself, "Who will read this written document?" In many cases, you will have both a primary audience—the person or persons the message is addressed to—and a secondary audience—other readers who may need or use this information. Keep all readers in mind as you draft your message. Consider details such as the reader's place in the organization (supervisor, employee, customer), his or her level of understanding (both educational level and experience in your industry), and the amount of interest and involvement with the topic at hand. This evaluation will help you determine if jargon can be used and if background information is needed.



Written communication and organizational skills are critical in managing large amounts of information in today's business and professional world.



## Know Yourself Writing Startup Sheet

The following startup sheet will help you gain a better understanding of your own writing. Answer each question thoughtfully, and then reflect on the results. How can this knowledge help you be a better communicator?

### Audience

1. Who is my primary reader/audience? Who else will be reading this?

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2. Did I provide the necessary information?

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3. How does the information relate to the reader/audience?

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4. How does my reader/audience feel about this information/subject?

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### Purpose

5. The purpose of this written communication is to \_\_\_\_\_ so that my audience will \_\_\_\_\_.

### Delivery

6. What's the best channel for this message? Hard copy? E-mail? Phone? In person?
7. When should I send this message?

Would you find the writing startup sheet useful in a professional setting? What types of written communication are you the most concerned about?

Source: Adapted from Lindsell-Roberts (2004, p. 24).

Message clarity is also achieved by using specific language as opposed to general language (Bly, 1999; Travers, 2012). **General language** is usually characterized as vague statements that can easily be misunderstood, whereas **specific language** makes precise references. For example, Dr. Jones could write the general statement that she has excellent patient satisfaction scores, or she could make the specific, clearer claim that 97% of her patients reported the highest level of satisfaction. During a reprimand, the manager could write, "You need to return from lunch in a timely fashion." But his message would be much clearer if he specifically wrote, "You must return from lunch by 1:00 p.m."

### *Message Presentation*

In addition to considering message structure and message clarity, you must consider message presentation. Unlike spoken communication, there is a lasting visual element to

your written communication. Message presentation refers to that visual component. Carelessly written communication will send the message that you are a careless employee or leader. With spelling and grammar check, as well as good old-fashioned proofreading, **typos** (mistakes in typing), **misspellings** (mistakes in spelling), and **grammar** errors (sentence fragments, inappropriate use of punctuation, etc.) can be corrected. Just as a typo on your résumé can lose you a job, a typo on a report can cause you to lose credibility. Misspellings, typos, and sending something to the wrong department are all roadblocks to professional excellence. As the KEYS approach has taught you, know yourself. For some of you, knowing yourself will mean realizing that you are not very good at editing your own work. Many of us who are good at editing others' work struggle to edit our own work. If that is the case, get a colleague to proofread your document before sending it out.

To achieve professional excellence, your documents and e-mails should be typed in black ink and should be legible. In addition, your typeface must be dark enough to read. Documents with poor ink quality look unprofessional and are ineffective.

In addition to the preceding tips for written communication, we recommend using a **writing startup sheet**—a list of questions that encourage the writer to think about audience, purpose, key issues, and delivery.

## Types of Written Communication

What types of written communication will you encounter as a professional? While the various types of business letters, memos, e-mails, and the like depend on the industry you work in, it's important for you to be prepared and begin to form a toolbox from which to work as a professional. In the sections that follow, we cover the following types of written communication: business letters, employee review letters, recommendation letters, thank-you letters, memos, proposals and reports, planning documents, press releases, and e-mail.

### Business Letters

The **business letter** is

used to communicate formal matters in business, jurisprudence, or otherwise. You will use this form of correspondence when you want to write a cover letter to accompany your résumé, write a letter announcing business news to colleagues outside your company, or notify vendors of a change in your ordering procedures. (Bly, 1999, p. 21)

As you strive for professional excellence, remember that business letters, when not composed appropriately, can be ineffective and lead to miscommunication.

Have you ever received a letter that did not keep your attention? What reaction do you have when your name is misspelled in a document? Review the following examples to help you get started. To begin, we've included a basic business letter template, followed by an actual example that includes a price quote for services (see Sample 9.1).

### Sample 9.1 Business Letter With Price Quote

XYZ Corporation  
650 Wayward Avenue  
Houston, TX 73850

**(Letterhead)**

September 23, 2012 **(Date)**

ABC Global Services **(Address of the recipient)**

PO Box 32555

Tyrone, PA 16801

Dear Mr. Stobbs, **(Opening/greeting)**

XYZ proposes to furnish all necessary labor, supervision, materials, tools, and equipment for the installation of the electrical work for the above referenced project, as detailed herein, in accordance with our interpretations of the intent of the design for the Lump Sum price of **Fourteen Thousand Six Hundred Forty Nine Dollars and No Cents. . . . \$14,649.00.**

**Breakdown:**

1. Labor: \$1,068.00
2. Material: \$13,581.00

**Scope of work:**

1. Furnish and install:
  - a. Battery Monitoring System
  - b. (1) Duplex Receptacle in computer room
  - c. (1) Cat 5E cable from UPS to computer room

**Clarifications:**

1. All work to be based on straight time first shift.
2. Due to rising cost of materials and/or labor, we reserve the right to adjust this proposal if not accepted within thirty (30) days of the above date.

Respectfully yours, **(Closing)**

**Cheryl Banks**

Cheryl Banks

Project Manager

In addition to providing price quotes for services with business letters, you will also communicate with other departments and businesses. Below is a **downsizing letter** (Sample 9.2) used to inform other businesses about skilled employees available for employment due to company downsizing (e.g., layoffs, fired employees).

## Employee Reviews

Written communication is central to providing feedback to employees regarding job performance. **Employee reviews** serve as a form of written communication used in business

### Sample 9.2 Business Letter for Employee Downsizing

ABC Global Services  
PO Box 32555  
Tyrone, PA 16801

April 25, 2012

Dear Fellow Employer:

As you may know, Company ABC has announced a plan that will enhance workforce operations and safety. Part of the plan has entailed restructuring the Company ABC workforce. This transition will better the business in a competitive global market. As a result, about 400 dedicated and skilled employees will be separated and ready for employment with your company as early as January. This workforce has been successful in producing the best results in Company ABC history in areas such as productivity, quality, safety, and customer service.

These employees have extensive experience in a variety of areas and have been trained in Customer Service Excellence, Team Work Efficiency, Statistical Process Control (SPC), and Employee Motivation Programs. This is a world-class workforce. They are highly motivated, safety conscious, and have broad experience in a wide variety of disciplines.

To assist our employees in their transition to new careers, we have established a Career Resource Center at the Phoenix Community Center, which will be operational from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, for several months. If you have employment opportunities available, ***I encourage you to contact our Career Resource Center by calling 814-444-1234.*** If we are not available, please leave a voice message or send an e-mail to TurnoverTeam@CRC.com. We will be happy to assist you by sending résumés, posting job opportunities, and/or setting up interviews.

You can be assured that inquiries will be handled promptly and confidentially. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to assisting you in achieving your employment goals.

Sincerely,

**Paul Stobbs**

Paul Stobbs  
Human Resources Director

and professional settings to provide feedback to employees about how they are performing on the job. These reviews are typically filed with personnel documents. Written communication related to employee reviews must be accurate and reflect actual employee performance. Remember, this type of document should be utilized carefully to document positive performance and areas for the employee to improve. If an employee is a candidate for mandatory leave, an improvement plan, or termination, these review documents must be used to document a pattern of employee performance. Further, employee review documents serve as a method of informing employees how to improve on the job.

## Recommendation Letters

In addition to employee reviews, another type of letter that is commonplace across industries and academic disciplines is the **recommendation letter**—a form of written communication used to provide a documented reference for students and professionals.





## Your Communication Interaction Employee Review Letter

Read the passage below, and then answer the questions. As you read, think about ways the KEYS approach could help you improve **your communication interaction** (in this case, written communication in the form of an annual evaluation) if you were in Samantha's position.

[COMPANY STATIONERY]

ANNUAL FACULTY REVIEW      March 1, 2012

Dr. Colt Holcomb, Assistant Professor of Communication

To:      Personnel Annual Review File

From: Samantha Newday, Chair

Richard Blue, Assistant Chair

Department of Communication

This review is for the 2012 calendar year. As per the College personnel policy, any additions or corrections to this review may be added to the file by Dr. Holcomb.

### \*ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Dr. Holcomb earned his PhD from the University of Jackson in May 2005. His areas of specialization include communication and new media.

### \*EXPERIENCE

Dr. Holcomb has been employed as an assistant professor of Communication since August of 2006.

### \*TEACHING

Dr. Holcomb taught during the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters of 2012. Specifically, he taught COMM 5399: Race, Gender, and Class in Media; COMM 3380: Media and Technology (two sections); COMM 3340: Public Relations Techniques; COMM 3311: Nonverbal Communication; and COMM 1315: Public Speaking (five sections). He also taught two sections of COMM 3330: Techniques of Persuasion, which were stacked for graduate credit with COMM 5311. In addition, he supervised one graduate- and one undergraduate-directed individual study. Three of these courses were new preparations for Dr. Holcomb.

As indicated by his overall instructor scores, all of Dr. Holcomb's item scores were below the College goal of 4.0. His overall instructor means ranged from 3.74 to 3.87. Dr. Holcomb is dedicated to teaching but has been receiving

A letter of recommendation is needed when a college/university or employer requests one, and it's something that many, if not all, of the readers of this text will need throughout their careers. Your professors are asked to write many recommendation letters for current and past students. Your careful preparation will help your professor write the best letter

below-average scores. Dr. Holcomb focuses on student learning as he designs his courses. His inclusion of service learning in several of his courses increases his workload but enhances the student learning experience. His oral and written student evaluations demonstrate that the students enjoy this approach despite challenging assignments. He attributes the below-average instructor scores to course rigor.

\*INSTITUTIONAL, COMMUNITY, AND/OR PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

In terms of professional service, Dr. Holcomb served on the editorial boards for *Communication Teacher*, *Georgia Speech Communication Journal*, and *Basic Communication Course Annual*.

\*SCHOLARLY/CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Dr. Holcomb had a productive year in terms of scholarly activity. In the area of refereed journal articles, he had three pieces in various stages of publication. His piece “Visual Communication Research” was published in *Visual Communication* during 2012. He had a second article in press in *Communication Monographs*. Finally, he was working on a revise and resubmit for an article in *Human Communication Research*.

Dr. Holcomb also remained active by presenting three papers and two panel presentations at the National Communication Association’s Annual Conference in Chicago.

Dr. Holcomb exceeded his scholarship goals for 2012. For 2013, he plans to revise and resubmit his article for *Management Communication Quarterly*.

\*SUMMARY

Dr. Holcomb’s performance is average. His teaching evaluations are below the College goal. His service to the profession is acceptable. Dr. Holcomb’s scholarship is exemplary. He is scheduled to participate in a teaching development circle to try to improve his teaching evaluation scores.

## Questions to Consider

1. Do you think this is an effective evaluation? Why or why not?
2. Is the feedback on this evaluation specific?
3. Does Samantha Newday give Dr. Holcomb clear information on future expectations or ways to improve?
4. How could the KEYS approach improve this communication interaction?

possible. You as a student must take responsibility and initiative in the letter-writing process. Although professors will vary in their preferences, Tables 9.1 and 9.2 offer some tips. See Sample 9.3 for an example of a recommendation written by a professor for a student applying for a professional position.



## Ethical Connection Andrea's Trouble With Plagiarism

Please read the passage below, and answer the questions that follow.

Andrea is a graduate assistant in her final semester at the university. She has never been an excellent writer, and her job required her to make significant contributions to an academic paper being published by the university. When Andrea found her contributions to be entirely too short, she took large sections from another article, which was already published, to meet the page requirements. While she did not simply copy and paste entire sections into her paper, she made only trivial changes to the wording and did not give proper credit to the original article's author. Andrea was incredibly surprised when she was informed the university was letting her go. When she talked with the head of her department, Dr. Jones, he said that he was familiar with the paper she got her information from and considered it plagiarism since there were no citations. Dr. Jones also informed Andrea that it would be hard for her to find employment at another university with a plagiarism charge on her record.

### Questions to Consider

1. What ethical boundaries did Andrea cross by taking research from another paper?
2. Why would a charge of plagiarism hurt Andrea's chances of finding another job at a university?
3. How could Andrea have avoided this outcome through the decisions she made about her writing?
4. Using the KEYS process, explain what steps Andrea could have taken to become a more effective writer.

## Thank-You Letters

In our consulting practice, we encourage professionals at all levels across industries to set a goal for using **thank-you letters**—written communication used to express appreciation to coworkers and clients. With the intensity of e-mail, text messages, and all the information professionals manage, it's easy to forget a simple thank you. Thank-you letters can be sent via e-mail (which is great for delivery speed), but think about how impressive it is to actually receive a handwritten note. We encourage you to keep professional thank-you cards in your work area to write letters or notes of appreciation. In addition to thank-you letters helping you achieve professional excellence on the job, they can also be used as **networking notes**—a form of thank-you letter used to remind employers of your interview and to emphasize that you're the right person for the job. In fact, employers often say that a sincere thank-you letter can give a job candidate the edge over another competing candidate. Review the example below (Sample 9.4), and set a goal to use thank-you letters both on the job and to network for new jobs or promotions.

## Memos

Other types of written communication used in professional settings are **memos**. The word *memo* is short for *memorandum* and is typically a short note or update distributed in business. Memos should be reserved for communicating information that's critically important. The memo format we recommend is provided in Sample 9.5.

**Table 9.1 Ten Reasons Letters Fail**

1. *Poor message.* The message is poorly written.
2. *Insensitive salutation.* The salutation is too impersonal. For example, avoid “Hey” or just jumping right into the message.
3. *Too much on one page.* People often try to fit too much on one page.
4. *Lack of signature.* Many people forget to sign their names on letters or to include their names in e-mail messages.
5. *Spelling errors.* Spelling errors harm your credibility.
6. *Grammatical errors.* Grammatical mistakes harm your credibility.
7. *Self-absorbed sender.* The letter is focused on the sender, leading the reader to lose interest. Try to focus on “we” instead of “me.”
8. *Poor font choice.* The reader should not be exposed to numerous font styles and colors.
9. *Tone.* The tone is not conversational.
10. *Long paragraphs.* The paragraphs are too long, leading the reader to lose focus.

Source: Lindsell-Roberts (2004, p. 4).

**Table 9.2 Tips for Obtaining a Recommendation Letter With Professional Excellence**

**A. Asking the professor to write a letter of recommendation**

**1) Ask the professor in person.**

The important words above are

- “ask”—No professor owes you a letter. You are requesting help from that person; make your statement in the form of a request. Be willing to take “no” for an answer.
- “in person”—Do not put the request under an office door or leave it in a mailbox or grab the professor in the hallway or after class. Ask the professor to write a letter when he or she will have time to discuss this with you, preferably during posted office hours.

**2) Ask if the professor would be able to write you a *favorable* letter of recommendation.**

- If the professor cannot honestly write a favorable letter, you will want to find another person who will.

**3) Ask if the professor would be able to write you a *specific* letter of recommendation.**

- If the professor does not know you well enough to be specific in his or her comments, the letter will not do you much good anyway. Ask someone else.

**B. Your responsibility: What you should do for the professor**

**1) Allow ample time for the professor to write the letter.**

- At least 2 weeks should be allowed.

(Continued)

(Continued)

**2) Provide the professor with *all* the relevant forms and instructions.**

- Put all materials in a large labeled envelope (including your name and phone number) so the materials will not get lost.
- If the organization provides a form for the letter, give the form to the professor.
- If the organization provides general instructions for preparing letters, make a copy of the instructions for the professor. Highlight the instructions.
- Make sure the professor has the *correct address, person/organization to whom the letter is addressed* (make sure all this is spelled correctly), and the *deadline* for submitting the letter. Some will want this information electronically. Check with your recommender.

**3) Type in all information you are responsible for providing.**

- *Type* your name and other information on *all* forms where needed (do not hand write—it looks tacky and unprofessional).

**4) Provide the professor with your résumé and statement of your goals.**

- *In writing*, remind the professor of your major(s) and minor(s), which classes you took from the professor, term when you took the classes, and grades received in those classes.
- Provide the professor with any information about your participation in the class, projects completed, etc. Help the professor recall your class performance in as much detail as possible.
- Remind the professor about teaching assistantships, internships, research projects, grants.
- Provide the professor with information on some of your college activities, especially leadership positions held and awards won.
- Provide the professor with a statement of your career goals and/or reasons for choosing the university/job for which you are applying.

**5) Provide the professor with an addressed envelope for each recommendation.**

- *Type* the correct address on each envelope (ask for university envelopes if they are needed; some professors will not need envelope types—just ask).

**6) Make sure the professor has sent the letter of recommendation.**

- *Politely check* with the professor *a few days before the deadline* to make sure the letter has been completed and sent. Don't be shy about this—we do forget! It is your job to make sure the letter has been sent.

**7) Follow up the recommendation with a thank-you letter to the professor.**

- Letters of recommendation take time, thought, and effort. Let the recommender know you appreciate the effort made on your behalf.

**C. Do students get copies of the letters of recommendation?**

**1) Each professor will have a policy on giving students copies of the recommendations.**

- You may ask the professor what the policy is if you desire a copy.

**2) Some professors will be willing to discuss their recommendations with you after they are written.**

- If you wish, you may ask the professor if he or she would be willing to discuss the recommendations with you.

Source: Table adapted and reproduced with permission of © Dawn O. Braithwaite, updated 2002, Communication Studies, Department University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Earlier version published in *Association for School, College and University Staffing Annual*, Addison, IL, 1989.

### Sample 9.3 Recommendation Letter

Matt Hicks, General Manager  
Clear Channel of Dallas  
501 Tupper Lane, Dallas, TX 78915

Dear Mr. Hicks,

I am writing to recommend to you Brad White as a member of your professional staff. I have known Brad as a student in numerous courses at Coastal Wave College. I also have knowledge of his work ethic and dedication to internships in our department as well as in part-time professional work. I would like to note that I choose not to inflate letters of recommendation but rather reflect my honest evaluation of the applicant. With that, I honestly believe Brad would make a good addition to your team.

Brad's work as an undergraduate student has been solid and I believe reflects the type of progress one should make when applying for professional positions. In fact, I have seen Brad's work from a video-production project and public relations campaign, as well as in community relations. His work is simply outstanding, which is proven by his status as an honors graduate. There are only a few students in each class that hold this status. Beyond his proven abilities in the classroom, Brad is the type of person who will go the extra mile in any professional position. He has proven this with both his academic and professional experiences. If you have additional questions, please feel free to call me at 587-222-1234.

Sincerely,

**Molly Duncan**

Molly Duncan, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Communication  
Coastal Wave College  
Phone: 907-123-4567

As you can see, the four major elements of the basic memo are “date,” “to,” “from,” and “re” (regarding what topic). Remember to be careful with memos in terms of frequency and topic. Frequent memos will come to be expected, leaving important information ignored. Employees may also respond negatively to the topics addressed and the tone of a memo. To illustrate our point regarding topic and tone in business memos, review the case study of Yolanda's use of memos (in Step Back and Reflect on page 217) to see what can go wrong with memos if used inappropriately.

Memos can also be used to communicate **process directives**—descriptions of new policies/procedures and changes to those that are already in place. Process directives are distributed to the employees or departments the



Saying thank you is something that is often neglected in our fast-paced society. Those who give attention to expressing appreciation in the form of electronic and handwritten notes tend to have a professional edge over others.



## Evaluate the Professional Context **Bonnie Needs a Recommendation Letter**

Read the following passage about Bonnie, and then answer the questions. As you read, focus on **evaluating the professional context**.

Bonnie found out about a new scholarship, and she needed to fill out the application as soon as possible. The only problem was that she found out about it at the last minute, and a recommendation letter from a professor on campus was required. She had taken Dr. Chang for several courses, so she felt it was okay to ask for a recommendation letter. Bonnie had so many things going on and didn't have time to make an appointment or call, so she dropped by during Dr. Chang's office hours. The following interaction took place regarding the letter:

**Bonnie:** Hi, Dr. Chang! I'm really in a bind. I need you to write me a recommendation letter today. I figured that since your office hours were from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., you would have time to get it done before your next class. I'm really in hurry, and I figured I could count on you.

**Dr. Chang:** Bonnie, I actually have an appointment with another student about a project, and she's about to come in any minute.

**Bonnie:** Oh, that's okay. I'll just wait outside until you're done with the other student. If you can get it done by 2:45 p.m. that will work for me.

**Dr. Chang:** Unfortunately, I will not be able to get to the letter today. I really need more of a notice. I am more than happy to help but would need some specific information about the scholarship and where to send the letter.

Bonnie was not happy about Dr. Chang's response. What was she supposed to do? While we all have busy schedules and encounter sudden deadlines that are out of our control, requesting a recommendation letter has to be done with professional excellence at the core. Clearly, Bonnie was not successful in her approach to getting a letter from Dr. Chang.

### Questions to Consider

1. Did Bonnie act appropriately given the professional context?
2. Was Dr. Chang's behavior professional? Why or why not?
3. What can you learn from Bonnie's experience?
4. How could the KEYS process help Bonnie improve her communication skills?

#### Sample 9.4 Thank-You Letter: On the Job

Dear Yolanda,

Thank you for all your hard work on the communication audit. Things have been really challenging during this past quarter, and I just wanted to take a moment to express my appreciation for your work ethic and commitment to Company ABC.

Warmest regards,  
Virginia

Source: Lindsell-Roberts (2004).

### Sample 9.5 Basic Memo

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**TO:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**FROM:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**RE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Source: Bly (1999).



## Step Back and Reflect The Attitude Memo

Read the following passage, and answer the questions that follow.

*Shannon:* Did you see that memo from Yolanda?  
*Joel:* No, what's going on?  
*Shannon:* She sent another memo about team attitude. The team is getting really annoyed.  
*Joel:* Has anyone responded?  
*Shannon:* No, but I heard that several employees have been complaining.

Based on this brief conversation between Shannon and Joel, it seems that Yolanda has done some damage using written communication. Yolanda is the assistant director of communication at Company ABC. Attitude and having fun are really important to Yolanda, so she decided to communicate her standards of performance with the following memo.

**Date:** October 20, 2012  
**TO:** Communication Team  
**FROM:** Yolanda Smith  
**RE:** Team Attitude

I expect my team to showcase a positive attitude when working on projects. If you all have any questions about attitude, see me in my office.

Yolanda sent out memos like this once a week. Her goal was to have a highly cohesive team, and she wanted to be respected. However, things were not going very well. Her team seemed to get more and more negative and unmotivated as each week passed.

### Step Back and Reflect

1. What went wrong with Yolanda's memo?
2. How would you respond if you received a memo like this at your job? How could Yolanda's memo be improved?
3. How could she benefit from the KEYS process related to her written communication?



directive impacts and are filed as official documents of organizational policy. Yolanda has the task of writing a process directive for Company ABC. Her process directive is to be placed inside a memo and distributed as an internal communication announcement to let everyone know about a new company newsletter. The executive team wants to make sure that everyone in the organization is informed about the newsletter. The goal is for employees to feel a sense of community in the workplace by being informed about Company ABC activities. In addition to the employees knowing about the newsletter, Yolanda includes specific information in the process directive regarding to whom information for the newsletter should be sent, as well as deadlines for submitting information (see Sample 9.6).

### Sample 9.6 Process Directive Memo

[COMPANY LOGO]  
PROCESS DIRECTIVE 126

**Date:** November 16, 2012  
**TO:** All Company ABC Employees  
**FROM:** Yolanda Smith  
**RE:** Company ABC Quarterly Newsletter, Process Directive 126

*Objective:* To communicate important information from the Executive Team to the employees of Company ABC, as well as to the community. The primary goals of the Company ABC Quarterly Newsletter are to

- provide a newsletter to distribute information, both internally and externally, about plant operations and employee news in a QUARTERLY format;
- recognize employee social activities, retirements, and accomplishments;
- communicate information from the Lead Team, Gain Sharing, Safety, Employee Social activities, etc.;
- share the Company ABC Values with employee families and community leaders;
- establish a positive impression of the business in the community and enhance the workplace culture.

*Frequency:* The Company ABC Newsletter has been designed and approved to be distributed electronically, mailed to the employees' homes, and mailed to community leaders in a QUARTERLY format.

*Process:* The Lead Team and Business Unit Managers will contribute information to Virginia Wolf to prepare for distribution quarterly.

*Newsletter Contact:* Virginia Wolf will collect information for each section of the newsletter. Members of the Executive Team should

- send information to Virginia Wolf to prepare for distribution each quarter;
- pay attention to activities, such as social clubs and activities, to be included;
- support internal and external distribution of the newsletter;
- respond to calls for information to be included in the newsletter.

*Directive:* Company ABC provides access to the Newsletter in both electronic and printed formats. Members of the Executive Team and all Company ABC employees should support the distribution of the newsletter to institutionalize effective communication, enhance workplace culture, and build positive impressions of the business in the community.

Clearly, Yolanda’s memo included specific information about the goals and processes of the Company ABC Newsletter. With so many changes and new initiatives flying around in an organization, effective written communication is a must. What if Company ABC started a newsletter without informing the frontline employees and those in management about what to expect?

## Proposals and Reports

In addition to memos, **proposals** are also utilized in many business and professional settings to propose products and services to potential clients. The sample provided below is a short proposal that describes the major components of a **workforce communication assessment**—an inventory or evaluation of the communication practices of an organization (also known as a communication audit). The proposal in Sample 9.7 describes what the client can expect from the communication assessment. Notice how the proposal includes an objective and description of each component of the assessment (e.g., survey, focus groups, recommendations, project completion, project hours).

Now that you have a basic understanding of how a short business proposal looks, let’s review **reports**—written communication used to summarize research or assessment

### Sample 9.7 Proposal for Services

#### WORKFORCE COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

##### COMPANY ABC

Prepared By  
[INSERT NAME]

#### WORKFORCE COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

##### PART I: SURVEY

*OBJECTIVE:* Evaluate communication preferences of Company ABC workforce

*DESCRIPTION:*

1. Survey Planning with Company ABC Leadership Team
2. Workforce Communication Survey will be designed
3. Company ABC survey will
  - ✓ focus on communication effectiveness (best way to get the message out),
  - ✓ identify what is ineffective (communication channels that don’t work),
  - ✓ include areas in which the Leadership Team is interested,
  - ✓ evaluate important factors related to employees’ on-the-job experience (satisfaction, morale, managerial support, communication expectations),
  - ✓ be reviewed and approved by Leadership Team.
4. Workforce will be surveyed
5. Information from survey will be prepared and presented to Leadership Team

(Continued)

(Continued)

### **PART II: FOCUS GROUPS**

*OBJECTIVE:* Collect specific preferences about how to communicate effective messages at Company ABC

*DESCRIPTION:*

1. Focus Group Planning with Company ABC Leadership Team
2. Workforce Focus Groups will be designed
3. Company ABC Focus Groups will
  - ✓ collect specific information about employee communication needs,
  - ✓ identify specific ways to communicate effective messages at Company ABC,
  - ✓ include questions in which the Leadership Team is interested,
  - ✓ explore specific factors related to employees' on-the-job experience (satisfaction, morale, managerial support, communication expectations).
4. Focus Groups will be conducted
5. Information from Focus Groups will be prepared and presented to Leadership Team

### **PART III: RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the information collected from the surveys and focus groups, recommendations will be made to the Company ABC Leadership Team. Information will be provided about how Company ABC can communicate effectively during reorganization and as it moves forward.

**PROJECT COMPLETION:** Early January 2013

**PROJECT HOURS:** Not to exceed contract

findings to inform managers about important issues related to business (e.g., customer service, employee satisfaction, employee morale). Remember that reports are used to summarize both **quantitative data** (characterized by numbers, percentages, statistics, and surveys) and **qualitative data** (characterized by actual words, phrases, responses to open-ended questions, and interviews). The report provided in Sample 9.8 is an example of what could be presented at the completion of a workforce communication assessment. As you see, this sample focuses on reporting focus-group data.

This focus-group report with recommendations, as well as other forms of research about businesses and organizations, can lead to changes in business strategies. Once an executive leadership team has had time to review recommendations made by a particular department or outside consulting firm, it's not uncommon to begin planning for the future of the organization. The next section explores the role of planning documents as forms of written communication.

## Planning Documents

Once the organization knows its strengths and weaknesses, business leaders often engage in **strategic planning**—the development of a plan that emphasizes goals, initiatives, strategies, and targets utilized to help employees strive for a shared vision and commitment to the

core values in an organization. What do planning documents look like? Virginia has asked Yolanda to put together an **internal communication plan** (a plan that focuses on communication taking place inside the daily operations of any given business) and an **external communication plan** (a plan that focuses on communicating information about the organization or business to citizens or employee families outside any given business). **Planning documents** are forms of written communication usually presented with maps and other visual designs to lay out a broader vision of where the company is going and what specific strategies will be utilized in the near future. Since Yolanda was struggling with her written communication on the job, she asked Virginia to help her come up with some basic planning documents for both the internal and external communication plan at Company ABC. The two samples provided (Samples 9.9 and 9.10) are good starting points to help employees understand components in both the internal and external communication plans at Company ABC.

## Press Releases

When an organization or business wants to make an announcement to the community, it uses **press releases**—forms of written communication used to send messages and make announcements to a variety of media organizations, including newspapers, radio, television news, and Internet



Written communication entails paying special attention to confidential records and information privacy.

### Sample 9.8 Focus Group Report and Recommendations

(REMINDER: Reports like the one in this sample usually include an appropriate title page, table of contents, and bibliography.)

**Private and Confidential**

Prepared for Company ABC by Strategic Communication Concepts, March 2012

**Company ABC: Focus Group Report and Recommendations**

*Yolanda Smith,*

*Director of Communications*

### DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

- Number of Focus Groups: 10
- Number of Focus Group Participants: 99
- Length of Focus Group Interviews: 62–87 minutes

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

## OVERVIEW

The report that follows includes major themes and specific responses to the current communication, morale, safety, and benefits at Company ABC. Hourly, salaried, and executive leadership employees participated in focus group forums in which they discussed major topics connected to communication at Company ABC (communication about change, workforce preferences on how to communicate/get the message out, morale, safety, and benefits). In order to articulate a clear sense of the focus group responses, the report is organized as follows: (1) *overall reaction and tone*, (2) *communication*, (3) *safety*, and (4) *benefits/rewards and recognition*. In addition, the report includes recommendations regarding communication methods and strategies to support the future of Company ABC.

### Thematic Analysis of Data

#### *Overall Reaction and Tone*

The overall reaction and tone in the focus group discussions were extremely negative. Focus group participants all expressed dissatisfaction, low morale, and uncertainty about their jobs at Company ABC. The participants specified that they feel “in the dark” and that all they hear are rumors about people getting fired, big layoffs, and contract negotiations. Lack of communication, job uncertainty, and poor working conditions were central themes in all 10 groups. The participants noted that this is the worst they have ever seen Company ABC in terms of morale. Themes of job uncertainty, low morale, and poor communication were consistent across all groups. The themes are summarized with the following comments:

- “We are completely in the dark about what is going on around here.”
- [Insert other responses or comments.]

#### *Communication*

All 10 focus groups provided insight into specifics and/or priorities for improving communication. In doing so, they addressed what is not currently working and what they would like to see in terms of improvement.

*Communication About Change.* All 10 groups were clearly confused about the direction of Company ABC, as well as organizational changes.

- “They tell us that change is coming, but we don’t know what that is. They intentionally keep us in the dark.”
- [Insert other comments.]

*Methods of Communication.* All 10 groups noted methods of communication available but not used, such as e-mail, technical tools, electronic message boards, bulletin boards, and memos. This theme was summarized with the following comments:

- “People do not use e-mail. There are over 1,100 employees here; only about 450 use e-mail.”
- [Insert other comments.]

Overall, there was an agreement in all 10 groups that there are communication methods (mechanisms) available at the plant that work but are simply not being used. Information is not current.

#### *Safety*

All 10 focus groups expressed major concerns about safety procedures and poor working conditions.

*Safety Procedures and Workplace Conditions.* In all 10 groups, discussions about safety focused on poor workplace conditions at Company ABC as demonstrated by the following comments:

- “This place gives lip service to safety. They do not care about safety. The only thing they are interested in is production.”
- [Insert other comments.]

### *Benefits/Rewards and Recognition*

Throughout the discussions, all 10 focus groups expressed major dissatisfaction with benefits and a lack of reward/recognition at Company ABC. All 10 groups discussed a need for increased wages and more reward/recognition. Of the 10 groups, 8 specifically discussed the need for more clarity when it comes to gain-sharing goals.

*Benefits and Pay.* All the focus groups made comments about their dissatisfaction with the benefits and pay at Company ABC.

- “We used to make a good living around here. Our health insurance has gone up, our copays are higher, and the company has done nothing to offset our costs.”
- [Insert other comments.]

*Gain Sharing.* All 10 focus groups expressed major dissatisfaction with gain sharing.

- “They lie to us about gain sharing.”
- [Insert other comments.]

*Rewards and Recognition.* Of the 10 focus groups, 9 expressed major concerns with the current reward and recognition of Company ABC employees. Interestingly, one focus group argued about reward and recognition. Several participants believed that a paycheck should be enough incentive. The individuals who disagreed with the majority contended that reward and recognition are never good enough for people and that someone will always complain. However, the majority of focus group participants emphasized that reward and recognition need to be improved.

- “The newsletter used to let us know who retired and who was new to the plant. They don’t inform us about accomplishments or what’s going on. We are never recognized and are not appreciated.”
- [Insert other comments.]

## Recommendations

### **1. Bulletin Board Locations**

\*All locked bulletin boards need to be cleaned up. All old announcements need to be removed. There needs to be a date and posting system in place. All messages approved for distribution should be monitored. After a designated period of time, messages/postings should be removed.

\*Insert other recommendations.

### **2. Terminate Wide Distribution of Company ABC Daily Report**

### **3. Replace Company ABC Daily With Company ABC Monthly Newsletter**

\*Company ABC must revive a monthly newsletter that is both distributed at work and mailed home so the employees and families are exposed to the message. The newsletter should be made available at designated locations at the plant.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

(Continued)

(Continued)

**4. Revive Use of Electronic Message Boards**

\*Company ABC must revive use of Electronic Message Boards.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

**5. Emphasize Traditional Face-to-Face Communication**

\*There must be designated communication and team time.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

**6. Train Leaders as Information Facilitators**

\*Team leads, managers, or those designated as leaders at Company ABC must be trained in effective oral communication and meeting facilitation.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

**7. Town Hall Meetings Hosted by Executive Team**

\*After the Journey to Excellence plan moves forward, host town hall meetings about Company ABC.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

**8. Craft a Message and Disseminate to Community**

\*Advertise positive message about Company ABC to external audience.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

**9. Utilize Professional Communication and Marketing Consultants**

\*Administration should continue to seek outside professional communication/transition experts (e.g., Strategic Communication Concepts, The Turnover Team) for technical assistance and advice.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

**10. Develop Employee Orientation Program**

\*As Company ABC makes the transition, develop employee orientation program that can be first used with all current employees who are onboard with the transition. The orientation should be required for everyone who is going to stay and, of course, all new employees.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

**11. Employee Development Series**

\*As Company ABC makes the transition, develop employee education series on topics that support the Company ABC Values.

\*[Insert other recommendations.]

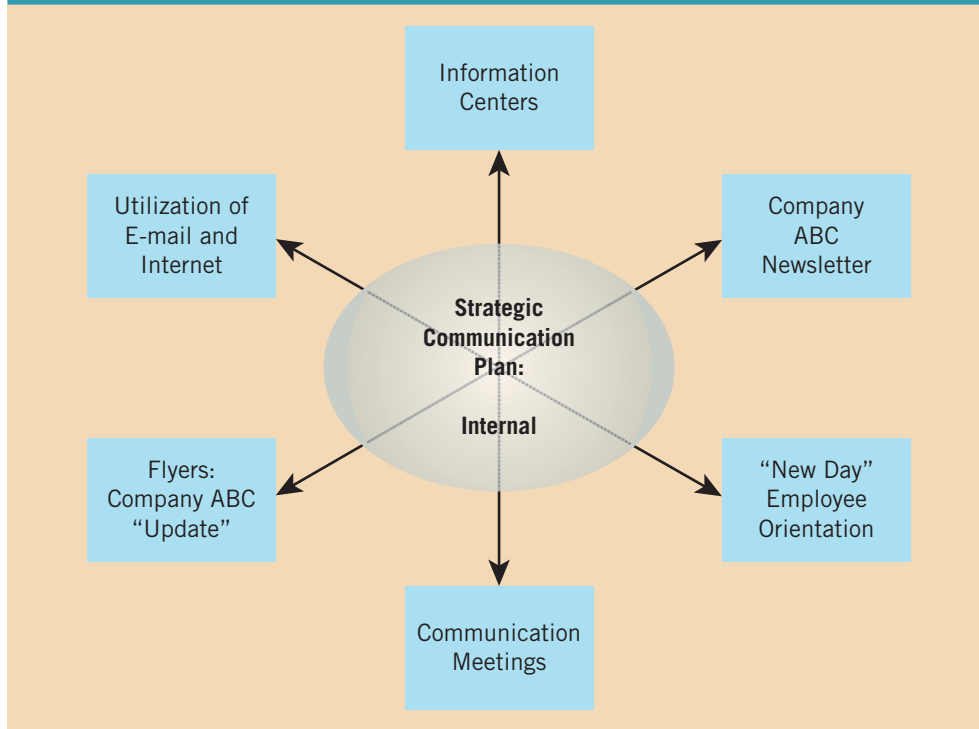
**Appendix A  
Focus Group Participants**

	<b>Salaried</b>	<b>Hourly</b>	<b>Executive</b>
<b>Total</b>	41	58	3

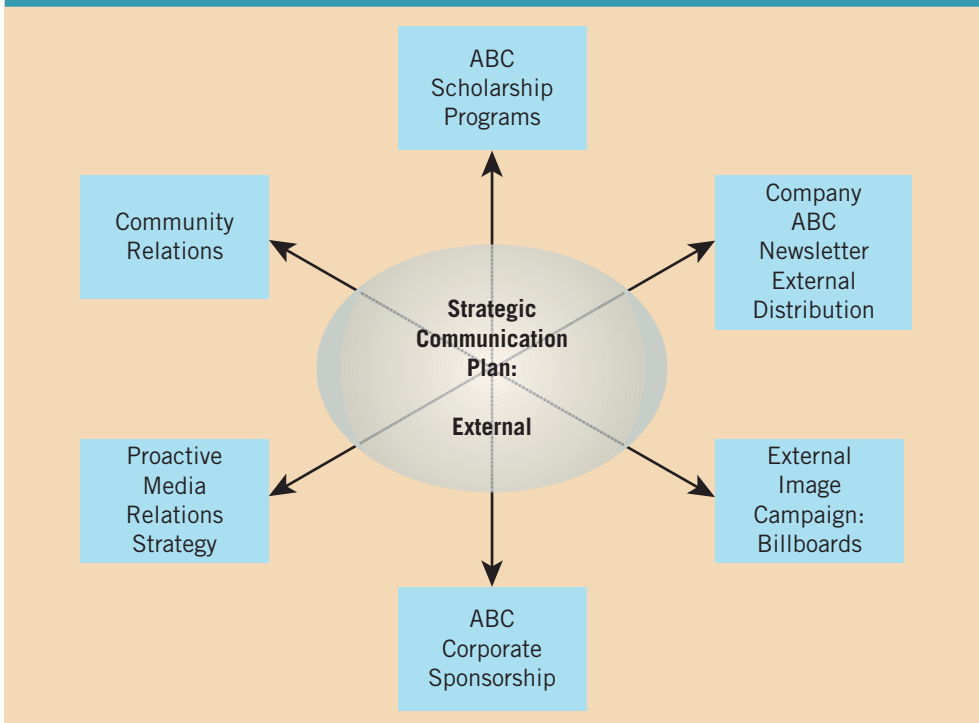
**Total = 99 participants**

**Executive Leadership representatives = 3 participants**

Sample 9.9 Strategic Communication Plan, Internal



Sample 9.10 Strategic Communication Plan, External







Graphs, charts, and maps are integral to writing with communication excellence.

reporters. Company ABC is experiencing change on a number of levels. While the company is laying off a number of frontline employees, highly qualified managers and team leaders are being hired to encourage company efficiency and improved customer service. Company ABC is also investing millions of dollars in a remodeling project that makes the workplace cleaner and safer. The task is to make the changes taking place at Company ABC sound positive even though many employees are getting laid off. Read the sample press release (Sample 9.11), and grade Yolanda's effort. What changes or edits, if any, could improve the press release? What words did you identify that are vague?

### Sample 9.11 Sample Press Release

#### Company ABC Announces Modernization Plan

Company ABC said today that it is commencing a plan of optimization and modernization. The plan will feature an extensive overhaul and optimization of the company's workforce to improve productivity and coordinated capital investments to modernize key processes and safety in the plant. Both will be accomplished while keeping the plant at full production.

The workforce structure at Company ABC has been essentially unchanged since it was built in the early 1970s. The company underwent its last major expansion in the late 1980s and since has received major upgrades only to certain areas. As a result, the company will address all areas of operations to foster high-quality production in a safe working environment and excellence in customer service.

In an effort to improve productivity in a globally competitive market, an assessment of the plant started in 2008. An assessment team was formed to examine and evaluate every task performed in the company. The evaluation revealed a tremendous amount of underutilized potential in our employees. The Management of Company ABC developed an optimization plan to improve operation safety, productivity, and customer service. The optimization plan will entail reductions, reassignment, and realignments at all levels. A transition plan that offers employees educational and business opportunities has been put into place.

Part of the optimization plan includes an influx of new investment capital to modernize equipment that will improve processing efficiency, energy efficiency, product quality, safety, and customer service.

Our ultimate goal is to secure the long-term potential of this business and to become a serious competitor in the global market.

Contact Information:

Yolanda Smith

Media and Community Relations Coordinator

ABC Company

215-999-0000

### Sample 9.12 Proactive Media Writing

#### Company ABC in Compliance With Mercury Vapor Regulations

In recognition of a recent study released on the link between mercury exposure and cancer, Company ABC emphasizes its commitment to operations and community safety with assurance of state and federal environmental compliance. Company ABC understands the importance of medical and environmental research that helps educate company operations that are safe for its workforce and community. While the recent study raises some important discussion points for future research, the study does not substantiate any links between environmental pollutants and autism. Further, the amounts of mercury vapors released from the plant are minimal according to state and federal environmental regulations.

Realizing that some concern has been raised by one study, here is some information about the role of mercury in our operations at Company ABC. Mercury is a naturally occurring metallic element found throughout the crust of the earth in concentrations averaging about 0.5 ppm (1/2 of 1 part per million, equivalent to about 1/2 a teacup in a railroad tank car). Normally, it is found compounded with sulfur as the mineral cinnabar. In the pure or metallic form, it is a silver liquid at ordinary temperatures and for centuries was called “quicksilver.” It has long been used in making pharmaceuticals, in the mining industry, and to treat fur and hides. The most common exposure most people have to mercury is in dental fillings, called amalgams, which are about 50% mercury.

Bauxite, like most soils, contains trace amounts of mercury in amounts ranging up to about 1/2 part per million. Each year, Company ABC processes about 3.8 million tons (about 7.7 billion pounds) of bauxite. Most of the mercury contained in the bauxite, typically 1,200 to 1,400 pounds per year, leaves the plant combined with the plant’s main solid waste stream, bauxite residue, in the same solid mineral form in which it arrived. The residue is stored in large surface impoundments. The plant has permits that actually allow it to emit up to about 60 pounds per year into the air, but favorable plant chemistry stabilizes nearly all the material as a solid. Typically only 4 to 7 pounds per year are released into the atmosphere either as metallic mercury vapor or as an oxide.

Company ABC continues to modernize the plant to improve processing efficiency, energy efficiency, product quality, safety, and respect for the environment.

Our ultimate goal is to secure the long-term potential of this business and to become a serious competitor in the global market.

For more information, please contact:

Yolanda Smith  
Media and Community Relations Coordinator  
ABC Company  
215-999-0000

## Proactive Media Writing

Obviously, press releases cover topics beyond workforce layoffs, bankruptcies, and corporate scandals. There are a number of positive things that organizations announce in press releases (e.g., scholarship programs, donations, community events). Industries that impact the environment and community safety (e.g., petrochemical facilities, oil refineries) are often held to standards set by the federal government. If you work for an organization that has the potential to harm people or the environment, it’s critical to be ready to respond to news that can put your company in a negative light.

In addition to Yolanda writing the press release about the Company ABC Modernization and Optimization Plan, she also needed to focus on **proactive media writing**—a form of written



Working from home can be valuable during difficult times, but think about the advantages and disadvantages of checking e-mail from your home computer—technology tends to blend our personal and professional lives in many ways.

communication similar to a press release that emphasizes an organization's commitment to safety and compliance. There are certainly other components to a proactive media strategy. For example, oil refineries may choose to post billboards with images of their employees helping kids in the community. Put simply, if citizens in the community maintain a positive image of an organization, they will not immediately think of the potential harms brought on by the industry. Therefore, using written communication as a proactive media strategy helps the organization prepare for negative news that tarnishes the organization's reputation at the local, state, national, and perhaps even global levels. Read the sample proactive media release (Sample 9.12), and grade Yolanda's effort. Do you think she does a good job at damage control? Remember, written communication can make or break the image and overall success of a company, regardless of industry.

## E-mail

People working in businesses and professional organizations increasingly rely on their e-mail systems to communicate with colleagues and accomplish their work (Khan & Khan, 2012; Kibby, 2005; Shipley & Schwalbe, 2008; Thompson, 2008). Given how prevalent e-mail usage is and will continue to be in business and professional communication, we can't emphasize enough how important it is to strive for written communication and professional excellence when using e-mail.

Indeed, written communication is just as important when composing e-mail messages as it is with the other forms reviewed in this chapter. In the next chapter, you will learn about other e-mail concerns such as privacy, surveillance, electronic aggression, and the like as you strive for written communication and professional excellence. Table 9.3 provides a list of tips for writing e-mail with professional excellence.

**Table 9.3 Tips for Writing E-mail With Professional Excellence**

- ✓ Avoid using ALL CAPS.
- ✓ Avoid the use of graphics, colored backgrounds, and drawings.
- ✓ Avoid the use of emoticons and acronyms.
- ✓ Respond to e-mail in a timely fashion.
- ✓ Don't be informal.
- ✓ Send only work-related e-mails (not personal e-mails) on the company computer.
- ✓ Don't use e-mail to replace important face-to-face conversations and phone calls.
- ✓ Always proofread your e-mail messages and use spell-check.
- ✓ Don't send e-mail that you wrote while you were upset, mad, or intoxicated.
- ✓ Send only e-mails that you are comfortable with everyone seeing (e-mails are not private).

Source: Bly (1999, pp. 27–29).

## KEYS to Excellence in Written Communication

Remember George Raab, who did not exercise professional excellence while employed for the City of New York? It is critical that you know how to use professional excellence in writing, not only through electronic communication but in traditional writing as well.

When examining the first key, *know yourself*, determine if you want to achieve professional excellence, and know that part of that entails improving your written communication. Examine your strengths and weaknesses related to all aspects of your written communication. Set a goal to improve your written communication skills, and realize that you need members of your team to edit your writing.





The next key, *evaluate the professional context*, is essential for you to become more audience centered and aware of how you are coming across to other people in your writing. Become more mindful of how your written communication sounds demanding and/or negative.

The third key, *your communication interaction occurs*, makes you a more professional communicator in that you can make better choices when using written communication. Start to think before sending out memos and e-mails, and be much more mindful that your passion to perform and motivate can impact your written communication. When there is a need for a company announcement via written communication, be careful to think about the best way to get the message out. If there is a need for written communication, engage in careful planning and editing of the written message. As the message is sent, also communicate with members of your staff face-to-face to make sure they understood.

When you use written communication, engage in the fourth key, *step back and reflect*. Become more reflective of written communication, and realize how it could be misunderstood and send the wrong signal. Ask yourself some of the following questions as you step back and think about your written communication: Was my memo response appropriate? Did my questions in the letter sound negative? Did my team think it was rude when I passed out the process directives printed in red? Should I use all caps in my e-mail message? Is sending a memo about attitude and productivity to everyone inappropriate? The fourth phase also makes you more thoughtful about all aspects of your written communication, not just when you send out a memo or write a letter. Your evaluation and reflection can result in positive changes that other people can notice.



Be aware of how your written communication may come across depending on the topic. Sometimes waiting, picking up the phone, or meeting face-to-face might be more effective than written communication.

-  **K**now Yourself
-  **E**valuate the Professional Context
-  **Y**our Communication Interaction Occurs
-  **S**tep Back and Reflect

## Executive Summary

Now that you have finished reading this chapter, you can do the following:

Understand the impact of written communication on professional excellence:

- Official documents, memos, e-mail, and other forms of written communication reveal something about you as a professional (p. 204).
- Important policies, requests, and organizational procedures are conveyed through written communication (p. 204).
- Proposals, employee terminations, media relations, and the like are achieved with written communication (p. 204).
- Written communication must be present to achieve professional excellence (p. 205).

Understand the different indirect messages sent with written communication:

- With spelling and grammar check, as well as good old-fashioned proofreading, *typos* (mistakes in typing), *misspellings* (mistakes in spelling), and *grammar* errors (sentence fragments, inappropriate use of punctuation, etc.) can be corrected. Just as a typo on your résumé can lose you a job, a typo on a report can cause you to lose credibility. Misspellings, typos, and sending something to the wrong department are all roadblocks to professional excellence (p. 207).

Identify different types of written communication:

- The *business letter* is used to communicate formal matters in business, jurisprudence, or otherwise. You will use this form of correspondence when you want to write a cover letter to accompany your résumé, write a letter announcing business news to colleagues outside your company, or notify vendors of a change in your ordering procedures (p. 207).
- *Employee reviews* serve as a form of written communication used in business and professional settings to provide feedback to employees about how they are performing on the job (p. 208).

- The *recommendation letter* is a form of written communication used to provide a documented reference for students and professionals (p. 209).
- *Thank-you letters* are written communication used to express appreciation to coworkers and clients (p. 212).
- *Proposals* are also utilized in many business and professional settings to propose products and services to potential clients (p. 219).
- *Reports* are written communication used to summarize research or assessment findings to inform managers about important issues related to business (p. 220).
- *Press releases* are forms of written communication used to send messages and make announcements to a variety of media organizations, including newspapers, radio, television news, and Internet reporters (p. 221).

Utilize the KEYS approach to achieve professional excellence regarding written communication:

- *Know yourself.* Determine that you want to achieve professional excellence, and know that part of that entails improving your written communication. Examine your strengths and weaknesses related to all aspects of your written communication (p. 229).
- *Evaluate the professional context.* This is essential for you to become more audience centered and aware of how you are coming across to other people in your writing. Become more mindful of how your written communication is sounding demanding and negative (p. 229).
- *Your communication interaction occurs.* Make yourself a more professional communicator in that you make better choices when using written communication (p. 229).
- *Step back and reflect.* Become more reflective of written communication and how it could be misunderstood and send the wrong signal (p. 229).

## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss an example of a time when you were offended by written communication. How did you respond? Did you use written communication for your response, or did you respond in person?
2. Are there other forms of written communication not covered in this chapter that you have concerns about? As a professional, what steps would you take if you were asked to use written communication with which you were not familiar? Would you delegate the task to someone else? Would you be honest that you were not comfortable with the project?
3. What steps do you or will you take on the job that will help you strive for professional excellence with written communication? What strategies do you have, if any, that work for you?
4. Take a moment to reflect on your experiences with written communication. Have you ever been caught in an e-mail or letter exchange that crossed the line from professional to uncivil? What can organizations do to prevent uncivil written communication?
5. Some scholars are concerned about the negative impact of text messaging and other forms of technology on written communication. Do you share this concern? Do you think technology encourages you to be less professional in your written communication? Why or why not?

## Terms to Remember

business letter (p. 207)	misspellings (p. 207)	recommendation letter (p. 209)
downsizing letter (p. 208)	networking notes (p. 212)	reports (p. 219)
employee reviews (p. 208)	planning documents (p. 221)	specific language (p. 206)
external communication plan (p. 221)	press releases (p. 221)	strategic planning (p. 220)
general language (p. 206)	proactive media writing (p. 227)	thank-you letters (p. 212)
grammar (p. 207)	process directives (p. 215)	typos (p. 207)
internal communication plan (p. 221)	proposals (p. 219)	workforce communication assessment (p. 219)
memo (p. 212)	qualitative data (p. 220)	writing startup sheet (p. 207)
	quantitative data (p. 220)	

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