MODULE

2 Adapting Your Message to Your Audience

Module Outline

- Who is my audience?
- Why is audience so important?
- What do I need to know about my audience?
- How do I use audience analysis to reach my audience?
- What if my audiences have different needs?
- How do I reach my audience?

Review of Key Points

Assignments for Module 2

Polishing Your Prose: Comma Splices

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and applying the information in Module 2, you'll be able to demonstrate

Knowledge of

- The variables of the communication process
- The audiences who may evaluate your business messages
- The importance of adapting your message to your audience
- Audience analysis

Skills to

- Analyze your audience when composing messages
- Adapt the content, organization, and form of your messages to meet audience needs

The Conference Board of Canada
Insights You Can Count On

Please see the OLC to preview the key skills from the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+ covered in this module.

INSTANT REPLAY

Five Kinds of Audiences

Initial: Is first to receive the message; may assign message
Gatekeeper: Has the power to stop the message before it gets to primary audience
Primary: Decides whether to accept recommendations; acts on message
Secondary: Comments on message or implements recommendations
Watchdog: Has political, social, or economic power; may base future actions on evaluation of message

Audience analysis is fundamental to the success of any message: to capture and hold an audience's attention and to motivate readers and listeners, you must shape your message to meet the audience's goals, interests, and needs.

Who is my audience?

Your audience may include more people than you might think.

In an organizational setting, a message may have five audiences.[1]

1. The **initial audience** receives the message first and routes it to other audiences. Sometimes the initial audience also tells you to write the message.
2. The **primary audience** will make the decision to act on your message.
3. The **secondary audience** may be asked to comment on your message or to implement your ideas after they've been approved. Secondary audiences can also include lawyers who may use your message—perhaps years later—as evidence of your organization's culture and practices.
4. A **gatekeeper** has the power to stop your message before it gets to the primary audience. The executive assistant who decides which personnel get to speak to the boss is a gatekeeper. Sometimes the supervisor who assigns the message is also the gatekeeper; however, sometimes the gatekeeper is higher in the organization. Occasionally, gatekeepers exist outside the organization. For example, regulatory boards are gatekeepers.
5. A **watchdog audience**, though it does not have the power to stop the message and will not act directly on it, has political, social, or economic power. The watchdog pays close attention to the transaction between you and the primary audience and may base future actions on its evaluation of your message. The media, boards of directors, and members of program advisory committees can all be watchdogs.

As Figures 2.1 and 2.2 on the next page show, one person or group can be part of two audiences. Frequently, a supervisor is both the initial audience and the gatekeeper. The initial audience can also be the primary audience who will act on the message.

Why is audience so important?

Successful messages anticipate and meet the audience's needs.

Audience focus is central to both the communication process and message analysis (PAIBOC).

Audience and the Communication Process

Understanding what your audience needs and expects, and adapting your messages accordingly, greatly enhances your chances of communicating successfully.

The communication process is the most complex of human activities, and the audience is central to that process. We communicate unceasingly. Our audiences interpret our communication symbols unceasingly. Our words, tonal quality, volume and rate of speech, our posture, stance and gait, our height and weight, our hair style and hair colour, our choice of clothing styles and colours—all the thousands of symbols that we use, intentionally and unintentionally—are perceived and translated according to our audience's perceptions, shaped by age, gender, culture, intelligence, and the experiences unique to every individual.

INSTANT REPLAY

The Communication Process

Stimulus or sender: People, animals, traffic lights, colours: every aspect of our environment can be a stimulus
Message: The meaning we make: meaning is encoded in symbols, including words, gestures, colours, apparel, people's use of space
Channel or method of message transmission: The two primary channels are light waves and airwaves; we humans rely on our five senses to transmit communication stimuli
Receiver: The audience for the message
Feedback: The response, verbal or non-verbal, to the message; feedback may be direct or indirect, immediate or delayed
Noise: The physical, emotional, or psychological static that affects every part of the communication process

FIGURE 2.1
The Audiences for a Marketing Plan

Dawn is an account executive in an ad agency.

Her boss asks her to write a proposal for a marketing plan for a new product the agency's client is introducing. Her boss, who must approve the plan before it is submitted to the client, is both the **initial audience and the gatekeeper.**

Her **primary audience** is the executive committee of the client company, who will decide whether to adopt the plan.

The **secondary audience** includes the marketing staff of the client company, who will be asked for comments on the plan, as well as the artists, writers, and media buyers who will carry out details of the plan if it is adopted.

FIGURE 2.2
The Audiences for a Consulting Report

Jim and Hiro work for a consulting think-tank.

Their company has been hired by a consortium of manufacturers of a consumer product to investigate how proposed federal regulations would affect manufacturing, safety, and cost. The consortium is both the consultants' **initial audience and a gatekeeper.** If the consortium doesn't like the report, it won't send the report to the federal government.

The federal government agency that regulates this consumer product is the **primary audience.** It will set new regulations, based in part (the manufacturers hope) on Jim and Hiro's report. Within this audience are economists, engineers, and policymakers.

Secondary audiences include the public, other manufacturers of the product, and competitors and potential clients of the consulting company.

During the revision process, industry reviewers emerge as a **watchdog audience.** They read drafts of the report and comment on it. Although they have no direct power over this report, their goodwill is important for the consulting company's image—and its future contracts. Their comments are the ones that the authors take most seriously as they revise their drafts.

Source: Based on Vincent J. Brown, "Facing Multiple Audiences in Engineering and R&D Writing: The Social Context of a Technical Report," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 24, no. 1 (1994): 67–75.

Throughout the process, both sender and receiver construct meaning together. Genuine communication occurs when both parties agree on the meaning and significance of the symbols they are exchanging.

FIGURE 2.3
Two-Person Communication

Misunderstandings can occur in any part of the communication process.

Suppose you and your friend Mediha are having a cup of coffee together, and you realize that you need help studying for the upcoming economics exam. You decide to ask Mediha for her help. You choose to **encode** your request in words. Words, of course, are not the only symbols we use to convey ideas. Thousands and thousands of other messages are embedded in our nonverbal symbols — our surroundings, and our own personal style, for example.

Once you have chosen your words, you must **transmit** your **message** to Mediha via a **channel**. Channels include face-to-face, memos, Blackberries, iPods, billboards, telephones, television, and radio, just to name a few.

Mediha must **perceive** the message in order to **receive** it. That is, Mediha must have the physical ability to hear your request. Then she **decodes** your words: she makes meaning from your symbols. Then Mediha interprets the message, chooses a response, and encodes it. Her response is **feedback**. Feedback may be direct and immediate, or indirect and delayed; feedback also consists of both verbal and nonverbal symbols.

Meanwhile, **noise** influences every part of the process. Noise can be physical or psychological. While you're talking to Mediha, the noise in the cafeteria could drown out your words. Or someone could start talking to Mediha just as you make your request. That noise could distort your message to Mediha just as the noise of lawnmowers in spring could interfere with your classroom concentration.

Psychological noise includes emotional, intellectual, or psychological dissonance: it could include disliking a speaker, being concerned about something other than the message, having preconceived notions about an issue, or harbouring prejudices about the message or the messenger.

For example, Mediha has already studied extensively for the exam, and feels that you have not worked hard enough; Mediha feels overwhelmed by her part-time job; Mediha is worried about her uncle, who is ill; Mediha herself is not feeling well. In any of these possibilities, psychological noise will influence her decision, and her message back to you.

Channel overload occurs when the channel cannot handle all the messages that are being sent. Two people may be speaking to you simultaneously, or a small business may have only two phone lines so no one else can get through when both lines are in use.

Information overload occurs when more messages are transmitted than the human receiver can handle. Because of technology, information overload seems to be a constant modern complaint. Some receivers process information on a "first-come, first-served" basis. Some may try to select the most important messages and ignore others. A third way is to depend on abstracts or summaries prepared by other people. None of these ways is completely satisfactory.

At every stage, both Mediha and you can misperceive, misinterpret, choose badly, encode poorly, or choose inappropriate channels. Miscommunication also frequently occurs because every individual makes meaning using **different frames of reference**. We always interpret messages in light of our personal experiences, our cultures and subcultures, and the time in which we live.

Successful communication depends on identifying and establishing common ground between you and your audience. Choose information that your audience needs and will find interesting. Encode your message in words and other symbols the audience will understand. Transmit the message along channels that your audience pays attention to.

Correctly identifying your audience and then choosing audience-appropriate symbols (words, gestures, illustrations) guarantees a more accurate meaning transfer.

Walking coach Lee Scott, president of WOW Company, uses newspaper ads, email newsletters, her company Web site, and word of mouth to attract clients from all over Ontario. WOW's walkers—men and women of all cultures, ages, and incomes—have finished first in charity events around the world.

Audience and Business Messages

Consider the PAIBOC questions introduced in Module 1. Five of the six questions relate to audience:

P What are your **purposes** in communicating?

Your purposes come from you and your organization. Your audience determines how you achieve those purposes.

A Who is your **audience**? What audience characteristics are relevant to this particular message?

These questions ask directly about your audience.

I What **information** must your message include?

The information you need to give depends on your audience. You need to add relevant facts when the topic is new to your audience. If your audience has heard something but may have forgotten it, protect readers' egos by saying "As you know," or putting the information in a subordinate clause: "Because we had delivery problems last quarter,..." If your audience is familiar with specific facts, concentrate more on clarifying new information.

B What reasons or reader **benefits** can you use to support your position?

Regardless of your own needs, a good reason or benefit depends on your audience's perception. For some audiences, personal experience counts as a good reason. Other audiences are more persuaded by scientific studies or by experts. For some people, saving money is a good benefit of growing vegetables. Other people may care more about avoiding chemicals, growing varieties that aren't available in grocery stores, or working outside in the fresh air than about costs or convenience. Module 8 gives more information on developing reader benefits.

FYI

Audience analysis helps writers avoid adding to the information overload we struggle with daily:

- Every issue of *The New York Times* contains more information than someone in the 17th century would have read in a lifetime.
- There is enough scientific information written every year to keep a person busy reading day and night for 460 years.
- In the past 30 years we have produced more information than in the previous 5000.
- The amount of recorded scientific knowledge is doubling approximately every 15 to 20 years.
- More than 1000 books are published around the world every day.
- Every day seven million new documents are published on the Web, where there are already more than 550 billion.
- The world produces between one and two exabytes of unique content per year, which is roughly 250 megabytes for every man, woman, and child on earth.

Source: Gerry McGovern and Rob Norton, *Content Critical*, (Great Britain; FT Prentice Hall, 2002), pp. 4 & 5.

O What **objections** can you expect your readers to have? What elements of your message will your audience perceive as negative? How can you arrange the message to overcome audience objections or de-emphasize negative elements?

Different audiences have different attitudes. One audience may object to a price increase. Another audience may see price changes as routine but be bothered by time constraints. Module 13 on persuasion gives more information on overcoming objections.

C How will the **context** affect reader response? Consider your relationship to the reader, the reader's values and expectations, recent organizational history and current morale, the economy, the time of year, the place and time of day, and any special circumstances surrounding the message exchange.

People, information, and organizations exist in a context. How well your audience knows you, how they feel about you and your organization, how well the economy is doing, even what's been in the news recently: all influence their response to your message.

What do I need to know about my audience?

You need to know everything that's relevant to what you're writing or talking about.

Almost everything about your audience is relevant to some message, but for any particular message, only a few facts about your audience will be relevant. These facts will vary depending on each communication situation (see Table 2.1).

In general, you need to use empathy and critical-thinking tools. **Empathy** is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes, to feel with that person. Empathy requires being audience-centred because the audience is not just like you.

Critical thinking involves gathering as much information as you can about someone or something and then making decisions based on that information.

You need to use your research and your knowledge about people and about organizations to predict likely responses.

Analyzing Individuals and Members of Groups

When you write or speak to people in your own organization, and in other organizations you work with, you may be able to analyze your audience as individuals. You may already know your audience; it will usually be easy to get additional information by talking to members of your audience, talking to people who know your audience, and observing your audience.

In other organizational situations, however, you'll analyze your audience as members of a group: "taxpayers who must be notified that they owe more income tax," "customers living in the northeast end of the city," or "employees with small children."

FYI

North American Boomers (people born between 1946 and 1957) represent the most significant demographic in history. Because of their numbers (and expectations), Boomers will continue to wield enormous economic clout. By 2012, when Canadian Boomers start to turn 65, these 14 million seniors will influence every aspect of the market, from financial services, real estate, and retail, to health care and funeral industries.

Source: Charles Davies, "The New Golden Age," *National Post Business*, January 2003, 45–51.

TABLE 2.1
Identifying Key Audience Characteristics for Messages

Message or Purpose	Audience	Relevant factors
Memo announcing that the company will reimburse employees for tuition if they take work-related college or university courses	All employees	1. Attitudes toward education (some people find courses enjoyable; others may be intimidated) 2. Time available (some may be too busy) 3. Interest in being promoted or in receiving cross-training 4. Attitude toward company (those committed to its success will be more interested in the program)
Letter offering special financing on a new or used car	Post-secondary students	1. Income 2. Expectations of future income (and ability to repay loan) 3. Interest in having a new car 4. Attitude toward cars offered by that dealership 5. Knowledge of interest rates 6. Access to other kinds of financing
Letter containing a meeting agenda and saying that you can bring your child along	Client	1. How well the client knows you 2. How much the client likes you 3. How important the agenda items are to the client 4. How the client feels about children 5. Physical space for meeting (room for the child to play)

SEE THE OLC!

Strategis: Canada's Business and Consumer Site

Since audience analysis is central to the success of your message, you'll need to consider the following pertinent information about your audience:

- Their knowledge about your topic
- Their demographic factors, such as age, gender, education, income, class, marital status, number of children, home ownership, location
- Their attitudes, values, and beliefs
- Their personality
- Their past behaviour

Prior Knowledge

Even people in your own organization won't share all your knowledge. Salespeople in the automotive industry, for example, don't know the technical language of their service mechanics.

Most of the time, you won't know exactly what your audience knows. Moreover, even if you've told readers before, they may not remember the old information when they read the new message. In any case, avoid mind-numbing details. If, however, you want to remind readers of *relevant facts* tactfully,

- Preface statements with "As you know," "As you may know," "As we've discussed," or a similar phrase.

EXPANDING A CRITICAL SKILL

Understanding What Your Organization Wants

Michelle wondered whether her boss was sexist. Everyone else who had joined the organization when she did had been promoted. Her boss never seemed to have anything good to say about her or her work.

Michelle didn't realize that, in her boss's eyes, she wasn't doing good work. Michelle was proud of her reports; she thought she was the best writer in the office. But her boss valued punctuality, and Michelle's reports were always late.

Just as every sport has rules about scoring, so too do workplaces have rules about what "counts." Even in the same industry, different organizations and different supervisors may care about different things. One boss circles misspelled words and posts the offending message on a bulletin board for everyone to see. Other people are more tolerant of errors. One company values original ideas, while another workplace tells employees just to do what they're told. One supervisor likes technology and always buys the latest hardware and software; another is technophobic and has to be persuaded to get needed upgrades.

Succeeding in an organization depends first on understanding what "counts" at your organization. To find out what counts in your organization,

- Ask your boss, "What parts of my job are most important? What's the biggest thing I could do to improve my work?"
- Listen to the stories colleagues tell about people who have succeeded and those who have failed. When you see patterns, check for confirmation: "So his real problem was that he didn't socialize with co-workers?" This gives your colleagues a chance to provide feedback: "Well, it was more than never coming to happy hour. He didn't really seem to care about the company."
- Observe. See who is praised, who is promoted.

- Always spell out acronyms the first time you use them: "Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP)."
- Provide brief definitions in the text: "the principal (the money you have invested)."
- Put information readers should know in a subordinate clause: "Because the renovation is behind schedule,…"

Demographic Factors

SEE THE OLC!
A Service That Knows Its Audience

Demographic characteristics can be objectively quantified, or measured, and include age, gender, religion, education level, income, location, and so on.

Sometimes demographic information is irrelevant; sometimes it's important. Does age matter? Almost always, since people's perspectives and priorities change as they grow older. For example, if you were explaining a change in your company's pension plan, you would expect older workers to pay much closer attention than younger workers. And you would need to shape your explanation to appeal to that older audience.

Demographic data has certainly determined the sharp increase in small business start-ups devoted to personal services. For example, the North American concierge industry—providing services from housesitting to running errands—is thriving because it offers time to busy Boomers.

SEE THE OLC!
Statistics Canada

Business and non-profit organizations get demographic data by surveying their customers, clients, and donors; by using Statistics Canada data; or by purchasing demographic data from marketing companies. For many messages, simply identifying subsets of your audience is enough. For example, a school board trying to win support for a tax increase knows that not everyone living in the district will have children in school. It isn't necessary to know the exact percentages to realize that successful messages need to contain appeals not only to parents but also to voters who won't directly benefit from the improvements that the tax increase will fund.

Personality

SEE THE OLC!
Identify Your Myers-Briggs Type

Understanding and adapting to your primary audience's personality can also help make your message more effective.

Personality and learning style assessment instruments can provide you with useful insights into your own and others' behaviours. In his bestsellers *Secrets of Powerful Presentations* and *Leadership from Within*, business consultant Peter Urs Bender says that knowing your audience is key to communication success. Bender describes four personality types, and offers a free online assessment for readers to identify their type.[2] Another popular assessment tool, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, uses four dimensions (introvert–extrovert, sensing–intuitive, thinking–feeling, judging–perceiving) to identify personality preferences[3]:

1. **Introvert–extrovert**: the source of one's energy. Introverts get their energy from within; extroverts are energized by interacting with other people.
2. **Sensing–intuitive**: how someone gathers information. Sensing types gather information step by step through their senses. Intuitive types see relationships among ideas.
3. **Thinking–feeling**: how someone makes decisions. Thinking types use objective logic to reach decisions. Feeling types make decisions that feel "right."
4. **Judging–perceiving:** the degree of certainty someone needs. Judging types like closure. Perceptive types like possibilities.

SEE THE OLC!
View Sample Geodemographic Clusters

Table 2.2 suggests how you can use this information to adapt a message to your audience.

You'll be most persuasive if you play to your audience's strengths. Indeed, many of the general principles of business communications reflect the types most common among managers. Putting the main point up front satisfies the needs of judging types, and some 75 percent of managers are judging. Giving logical reasons satisfies the needs of the nearly 80 percent of managers who are thinking types.[4]

Values and Beliefs

SEE THE OLC!
What Psychographic Group Do You Belong To?

Psychographic characteristics are qualitative rather than quantitative and include values, beliefs, goals, and lifestyles. Knowing what your audience finds important allows you to organize information in a way that seems natural to your audience and to choose appeals that audience members will find persuasive.

Looking at values enables a company to identify customer segments. The Canadian-born Tim Hortons chain introduced a more diverse menu (croissants, muffins, soup, and sandwiches) to attract new fast-food clients and to appeal to its original, increasingly weight-conscious customers. Ranked as Canada's "best-managed brand," based on customer service, Tim Hortons continues to expand in Canada and internationally.[5]

Eresearcher Mary Modahl's survey of 250 000 households found that online buying depends on psychographics: the consumer's attitude toward technology along a continuum from "profoundly suspicious" to "eagerly accepting."

TABLE 2.2
Using Myers-Briggs Types in Persuasive Messages

If your audience is	Use this strategy	For this reason
An introvert	Write a memo and let the reader think about your proposal before responding.	Introverts prefer to think before they speak. Written documents give them the time they need to think through a proposal carefully.
An extrovert	Try out your idea orally, in an informal setting.	Extroverts like to think on their feet. They are energized by people; they'd rather talk than write.
A sensing type	Present your reasoning step by step. Get all your facts exactly right.	Sensing types usually reach conclusions step by step. They want to know why something is important, but they trust their own experience more than someone else's say-so. They're good at facts and expect others to be, too.
An intuitive type	Present the big picture first. Stress the innovative, creative aspects of your proposal.	Intuitive types like solving problems and being creative. They can be impatient with details.
A thinking type	Use logic, not emotion, to persuade. Show that your proposal is fair, even if some people may be hurt by it.	Thinking types make decisions based on logic and abstract principles. They are often uncomfortable with emotion.
A feeling type	Show that your proposal meets the emotional needs of people as well as the dollars-and-cents needs of the organization.	Feeling types are very aware of other people and their feelings. They are sympathetic and like harmony.
A perceiving type	Show that you've considered all the alternatives. Ask for a decision by a specific date.	Perceiving types want to be sure they've considered all the options. They may postpone coming to closure.
A judging type	Present your request quickly.	Judging types are comfortable making quick decisions. They like to come to closure so they can move on to something else.

Source: Based on Isabel Briggs Myers, "Effects of Each Preference in Work Situations," *Introduction to Type* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1962, 1980).

Ford Motor Company's ebusiness transformation strategy depends on direct contact with consumers. Ford has partnered with Teletech, the consumer-marketing firm, to identify consumer preferences and trends as part of its business-to-consumer brand value enhancement. The company also sponsors interactive automotive sections on teen Web sites to cultivate and build relationships with future car buyers.[6]

Geodemographic data analyze audiences according to their location and spending habits. Postal code clusters identify current and potential customers based on two truisms: 1) people are what they buy, and 2) birds of a feather flock together: "…our shopping habits are shaped by environment and our desire to belong."

Every time we use credit cards or give our postal codes at the checkout, we provide data miners like Tony Lea, vice-president of Environics Analytics, with a snapshot of ourselves and our values. Lea uses that information to tell businesses how to find and reach their target markets. "He advises banks where to locate new branches, he knows which grocery stores should stock thin-crust pizza and he can design direct mail to [consumers'] tastes." Lea has even successfully advised a federal political party on how to appeal to undecided voters in specific neighbourhoods.

Matching consumers' buying habits with their environment demonstrates that culture influences shopping attitudes and choices: "When Environics ran its numbers, it produced 15 clusters that were distinctly Québecois … Quebeckers shop differently than English-speaking Canada. Québec cities appear as almost uniform groupings, keen on good wine, fine restaurants, and high fashion. One study found that Quebéckers and New Yorkers together outclassed the rest of the continent in fashion-consciousness."

Home Depot store.

Analyzing Canadians' shopping habits is "… a $550 million industry," and technological innovation continues to refine research methods. *Neuromarketing* uses MRI scans to "chart how the emotional side of the brain reacts …" in consumer product testing and purchasing decisions. *Commercial ethnography* films consumers as they shop, to "brainstorm new products and test designs." International marketing firms use "global ethnography" to study the impact of culture on consumerism. And researchers increasingly take advantage of the speed and convenience of the Internet to analyze audiences through online surveys and focus groups.[7]

Past Behaviour

SEE THE OLC!

Analyze Your Attitude Toward Technology

Human resource managers maintain that you can analyze and predict people's future actions based on their past behaviours; the more recent the behaviour, the more accurate the prediction.

Analyzing People in Organizations

Audience reaction is also strongly influenced by the perceptions and expectations of the groups to which they belong. These groups, or **discourse communities**, include family, peers, professional associations, clubs, and the workplace—all communities with which your audience identifies. Discourse communities are groups whose members create the affiliation, the rules and the norms, through discourse, or dialogue. Members communicate through symbols (language, nonverbals) that may or may not be exclusive to their group, but which identify them as members of that group.

INSTANT REPLAY

Discourse Community

A **discourse community** is a group of people who share assumptions about what channels, formats, and styles to use, what topics to discuss and how to discuss them, and what constitutes evidence.

Therefore, a discourse community is a group of people who share assumptions about their particular culture and values: what to wear; how to behave; what topics to discuss and how to discuss them; what channels; formats, and styles to use; and what constitutes evidence. Each person is part of several discourse communities, which may or may not overlap.

Consider your own discourse communities: perhaps you wear jeans to signify your membership in the student community; your hairstyle or piercing indicates your membership in a sub-culture; your iPod holds music that reflects your affiliation to another group. When you go for a job interview, you might cut your hair and put on more formal clothes to display the norms of the organizational culture you want to join.

When analyzing an organization's discourse community, consider both non-verbal and verbal clues:

- What does the physical environment say about who and what are valued? What departments and services are front and centre? Where is the reception area located? What messages do the furnishings and decor send? How are visitors welcomed? Is the company mission statement prominent? What does the office space layout indicate about the organization's values? Where are the library, training rooms, gymnasium, and cafeteria located? How well are they resourced?
- Where do the managers work? Do bosses dress differently from other employees?
- How are employees treated? How are new hires oriented? How is employee performance recognized? What's featured in the company newsletter? How do people in the organization get important information?
- How do people in the organization communicate? What channels, formats, and styles are preferred for communication? Do they write a paper memo, send an email, or walk down the hall to talk to someone? How formal or informal are people expected to be—in their dress, on the telephone, in meetings?
- What do people talk about? What is not discussed?
- What kind of and how much evidence is needed to be convincing? Is personal evidence convincing? Do people need to supply statistics and formal research to be convincing?

Some symbols may no longer serve an obvious purpose as in this photo of children dressed up for Halloween.

An organization's **culture** is expressed through its values, attitudes, and philosophies. **Organizational** or **corporate** culture reveals itself verbally in the organization's myths, stories, and heroes, and non-verbally in the allocation of space, money, and power (Module 3).

The following questions will help you analyze an organization's culture:

- What are the organization's goals? making money? serving customers and clients? advancing knowledge? contributing to the community?
- What does the organization value? diversity or homogeneity? independence or being a team player? creativity or following orders?
- How do people get ahead? Are rewards based on seniority, education, being well-liked, making technical discoveries, or serving customers? Are rewards available to only a few top people, or is everyone expected to succeed?
- How formal are behaviour, language, and dress?
- What behavioural expectations predominate? How do employees treat one another? Do employees speak in "I," "we," or "them and us" language? How do employees get organizational information?

Two companies in the same business may express very different cultures. Their company Web sites can offer some clues to those cultures. Royal Bank's standing as Canada's oldest bank is reflected in its corporate Web site: conservative dark-blue and gold colours and a few, metaphoric pictures. TD-Canada Trust's green and white Web site—implying a fresh approach—offers photos of young, happy people, apparently delighted by the products and services the bank provides.[8]

INSTANT REPLAY

Organizational Culture

An organization's **culture** is its values, attitudes, and philosophies. **Organizational culture** (or **corporate culture**, as it is also called) is revealed verbally in the organization's myths, stories, and heroes, and non-verbally in the allocation of space, money, and power.

Many companies describe their cultures as part of the section on employment. Job candidates who research the corporate culture to identify how their skills match with the company have a significant advantage in an interview. Researcher Jennifer Chatman found that new hires who "fit" a company's culture were more likely to stay with the job, be more productive, and be more satisfied than those who did not fit the culture.[9]

Organizations also contain several subcultures. For example, manufacturing and marketing may represent different subcultures in the same organization: workers may dress differently and espouse different values. In a union environment, management and union representatives traditionally employ adversarial language to advance their own sub-culture's perspective while undermining the other's point of view.

You can learn about organizational culture by paying attention to communication clues and cues. For example, observe people and listen to their stories. Every discourse community and every culture creates and perpetuates meaning and membership through the stories their members share. The Sleeman's Brewery story, for example, is that the quality of its beer is the result of family recipes handed down through five generations. And McCain Foods continues to present itself as a "family business" culture, despite its 20 000 employees and multinational, global presence.

Conscious awareness of an organization's spoken and unspoken messages can provide you with important information on its values and norms.

How do I use audience analysis to reach my audience?

Use it to plan strategy, organization, style, document design, and visuals.

SEE THE OLC!

Analyze the Corporate Cultures of Grocery Gateway and the Royal Bank

Take the time to analyze your audience; then adapt your strategy, style, and organizational pattern to your audience's needs. For paper or electronic documents, you can also adapt the document's design and the photos or illustrations you choose. For the best results, revise your message with your audience in mind.

Strategy

- Choose appeals and reader benefits that work for the specific audience (◁▶ Module 8).
- Use details and language that reflect your knowledge of, and respect for, the specific audience, the organizational culture, and the discourse community.
- Make it easy for the audience to respond positively.
- Include only necessary information.
- Anticipate and overcome objections (◁▶ Modules 7, 10, and 12 show you how to emphasize positive aspects, decide how much information to include, and overcome obstacles).

Organization

- It's usually better to get to the point right away. The major exceptions are
  - When you must persuade a reluctant reader
  - When your audience would see the message as bad news and you want to break the news gradually

- Anticipate and meet the audience's expectations of format: make the organizational pattern clear to the audience. (Modules 9, 23, and 24 show you how to use headings and overviews. Module 20 shows how to use overviews and signposts in oral presentations.)

Style

SEE THE OLC!

Canadian and American Niche Groups

- Strive for clarity and accessibility: use simple words, a mixture of sentence lengths, and short paragraphs with topic sentences (Modules 14 and 15).
- Use natural, conversational, personable, tactful language: avoid negative, defensive, arrogant, and "red-flag" words—*unfortunately*, *fundamentalist*, *liberal*, *crazy*, *incompetent*, *dishonest*—that may generate a negative reaction.
- Use the language that appeals to your audience. In parts of Canada, including Québec and some areas of Manitoba and New Brunswick, bilingual messages in English and in French, with French first, are the norm.
- Use conversational language.

Document Design

- Use telegraphing: bulleted lists, headings, and a mix of paragraph lengths create white space.
- Choose the format, footnotes, and visuals expected by the organizational culture or the discourse community. (Module 5 discusses effective document design.)

Photographs and Visuals

- Photos and visuals can make a document look more informal or more formal. Carefully consider the difference between cartoons and photos of "high art."
- Use bias-free photographs. Unintentional cultural, gender, religious, and economic assumptions can offend readers and lose business.
- Choose photographs and illustrations that project positive cultural meanings for your audience. Middle-Eastern readers, for example, find pictures of barelegged and bare-armed women offensive and may also object to pictures of clean-shaven men.
- Do your research and audience analysis: some cultures (e.g., France and Japan) use evocative photographs that bear little direct relationship to the text. North American audiences expect photos to relate to the text.

What if my audiences have different needs?

Focus on gatekeepers and decision makers.

When the members of your audience share the same interests and the same level of knowledge, you can use these principles for individual readers or for members of homogenous groups. But sometimes, different members of the audience have different needs.

When you are writing or speaking to pluralistic audiences, meet the needs of gatekeepers and primary audiences first.

Content and Choice of Details

- Always provide an overview—the introductory or topic sentence—for reader orientation.
- In the body of the document, provide enough evidence to prove your point.

Best Buy and Future Shop share the same parent company and offer similar products. Their customer demographic, however, differs. Future Shop is designed to attract a more up-scale customer.

Organization

- Organize your message based on the primary audience's attitudes toward it: give good news up front; provide the explanation before you deliver the bad news.
- Organize documents to make reading easy: provide a table of contents for documents more than five pages long so that your readers can turn to the portions that interest them.
- Use headings as signposts: use headings to tell readers what they're about to read and to connect ideas throughout your document. This strategy reinforces your credibility through unity and coherence. If the primary audience doesn't need details that other audiences will want, provide those details in attachments or appendices.

Level of Language

- Contemporary business communication uses conversational, semi-formal language. Use "I" and "you," and address your reader by name. Do research, however, to discover your reader's title preference (for example, Mr., Ms.).
- When both internal and external audiences will read the document, use a slightly more formal style and the third person; avoid "I."
- Use a more formal style when you write to international audiences.

Technical Terms and Theory

- Know what your reader knows; then provide only the necessary information. Use technical terms only if these will increase reader comprehension (◁▷ Module 15).
- Put background information and theory under separate headings. Readers can use the headings to read or skip these sections, as their knowledge dictates.
- If primary audiences will have more knowledge than other audiences, provide a glossary of terms. Early in the document, let readers know that the glossary exists.

How do I reach my audience?

Effective messages make use of multiple channels.

Communication channels vary in
- transmission speed
- transmission accuracy

FYI

Be prudent when you publish: your audience could be anyone because your every e-mail leaves a retrievable record.

An employee types an e-mail and hits send. A copy is often maintained on the employee's desktop computer.

The message travels to the company's e-mail server before it is sent on. A copy is cached—possibly for many months—as set by corporate policy.

The server's cached files are backed up, usually on tape, where a copy of the e-mail is preserved. Although tape archives are more difficult to search, they are also never completely overwritten or deleted.

The e-mail is sent from the company server to the Internet, and directed to the recipient. Along the way, the e-mail may go through ISP servers where there's a small risk that a footprint or copy of the e-mail may remain, thanks to anti-spam or anti-virus programs' queues.

The e-mail arrives at the recipient's e-mail server; a copy is kept according to IT policy.

Again, a copy of the e-mail is backed up, either on tape, or possibly by an automated archiving system on a separate in-house server. It could also be outsourced to a third-party server to be stored for up to seven years.

The e-mail is delivered to the recipient. Unlimited copies may be saved or forwarded elsewhere.

Source: Andrew Wahl, "How to Track an Email," *Canadian Business*, June 20–July 17, 2005, http://www.canadianbusiness.com/managing/career/article.isp?content=20060111_123404_4184, retrieved October 23, 2006.

- cost
- efficiency
- audience impact

Your purpose, the audience, and the situation—*known as the communication context*—will all determine which and how many channels you choose (refer to the PAIBOC questions on page 13):

A written message makes it easier to do several things:

- Present many specific details of a law, policy, or procedure
- Present extensive or complex financial data
- Minimize undesirable emotions

Writing, however, often requires more time than speaking face-to-face. Furthermore, once you mail the letter, or hit Send, writing is "for the record." Your documents, including your e-mail messages, are permanent and potentially available to everyone.

When you do decide to write, use the channel that best meets the expectations of your audience. Email messages are appropriate for routine messages to people you already know. Paper is usually better for someone to whom you're writing for the first time.

Speaking is easier and more efficient when you need to do any of the following:

- Answer questions, resolve conflicts, and build consensus
- Use emotion to help persuade the audience
- Provoke an immediate action or response
- Focus the audience's attention on specific points
- Modify a proposal that may not be acceptable in its original form

Scheduled meetings and oral presentations are more formal than phone calls or stopping someone in the hall. Important messages should use more formal channels, whether they're oral or written.

Oral and written messages have many similarities. In both, you should do six things:

1. Adapt the message to the specific audience.
2. Show the audience members how they benefit from the idea, policy, service, or product (Module 8).
3. Overcome any objections the audience may have.
4. Use a good attitude and positive emphasis (Modules 6 and 7).
5. Use visuals to clarify or emphasize material (Module 25).
6. Specify exactly what the audience should do.

Even when everyone in an organization has access to the same channels, different discourse communities often prefer different channels. When a university updated its employee benefits manual, the computer scientists and librarians wanted the information online. Faculty wanted to be able to read the information on paper. Maintenance workers and carpenters wanted to get answers on voicemail.[10]

The bigger your audience, the more complicated channel choice becomes, because few channels reach everyone. When possible, use multiple channels. Also use multiple channels for very important messages. For example, talk to key players about a written document before the meeting where the document will be discussed.

Employability Skills 2000+

The Conference Board of Canada
Insights You Can Count On

Please see the OLC to preview the key skills from the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+ covered in this module.

Review of Key Points

1. What five audiences may your message reach? Give a specific example of each.
2. Describe the communication process. Explain why even simple communications can fail.
3. What is a discourse community? Identify three separate discourse communities you belong to. Identify two symbols (verbal or nonverbal) that differentiate each of your discourse communities.
4. What is organizational culture? Identify three symbols (verbal or nonverbal) that your college/university uses to reflect its culture.
5. What are three ways you can analyze your audience?
6. What is a channel?
7. What are three ways you can adapt your messages to your audience?

Assignments for Module 2

Questions for Critical Thinking

2.1 What are your options if your boss' criteria for a document are different from those of the primary audience?

2.2 Emphasizing the importance of audience, salespeople often say, "The customer is king," or "The customer is always right," or "The customer is in control." To what extent do you feel in control as a customer, a citizen, or a student? What could you do to increase your feelings of control?

2.3 If you are employed, which aspects of your organization's culture match your own values? Describe the culture you would most like to work in.

Exercises and Problems

2.4 Identifying Audiences

In each of the following situations, label the audiences as initial, gatekeeper, primary, secondary, or watchdog.

1. Russell is seeking venture capital so that he can expand his business of offering soccer camps to youngsters. He's met an investment banker whose clients regularly hear presentations from businesspeople seeking capital. The investment banker decides who will get a slot on the program, based on a comprehensive audit of each company's records and business plan.
2. Maria is marketing auto loans. She knows that many car buyers choose one of the financing options presented by the car dealership, so she wants to persuade dealers to include her financial institution in the options they offer.
3. Paul works for the mayor's office in a big city. As part of a citywide cost-cutting measure, a panel has recommended requiring employees who work more than 40 hours in a week to take compensatory time off rather than be paid overtime. The only exceptions will be the police and fire departments. The mayor asks Paul to prepare a proposal for the city council, which will vote on whether to implement the change. Before they vote, council members will hear from (1) citizens, who will have

an opportunity to read the proposal and communicate their opinions to the city council; (2) mayors' offices in other cities, who may be asked about their experiences; (3) union representatives, who may be concerned about the reduction in income that will result if the proposal is implemented; (4) department heads, whose ability to schedule work might be limited if the proposal passes; and (5) panel members and government lobbying groups. Council members come up for re-election in six months.

2.5 Choosing a Channel to Reach a Specific Audience

Suppose that your business, government agency, or non-profit group has a product, service, or program targeted for each of the following audiences. What would be the best channel(s) to reach people in that group in your city? Would that channel reach all group members?

1. Renters
2. Sikh owners of small businesses
3. People who use wheelchairs
4. Teenagers who work part-time while attending school
5. Competitive athletes
6. Parents whose children play soccer
7. People willing to work part-time
8. Financial planners
9. Hunters
10. New immigrants

2.6 Introducing a Wellness Program

Assume your organization has decided to implement a wellness program that will give modest rebates to employees who adopt healthful practices (see Problem 11.11 on page 198). As director of human resources, you explain the program and build support for it. Pick a specific organization that you know something about and answer the following questions about it.

1. What percentage of employees currently (a) smoke? (b) drink heavily? (c) are overweight? (d) don't exercise? (e) have high blood pressure? (f) have high cholesterol?
2. Why don't people already follow healthful lifestyles?
3. Do company vending machines, cafeteria, or other facilities make it easy for employees to get low-fat snacks and meals?
4. How much exercise do people get on the job? What work-related injuries are most common?
5. What exactly do people do on the job? Will being healthier help them work more efficiently? deal better with stress? have more confidence interacting with clients and customers?
6. What aspects of health and fitness would employees like to know more about? What topics might seem boring or stale?

2.7 Persuading an Organization to Adopt Flextime

Flextime is a system that allows employees to set their own starting and stopping times.

Flextime is especially appealing to organizations that have a hard time keeping good employees or that cannot easily raise salaries. It is also appealing to companies with the philosophy of giving workers as much independence as possible. Most employees prefer flextime. However, in some organizations, flextime creates conflicts between workers who get the schedules they want and those who have to work traditional hours to cover the phones. Some firms are afraid that the quality of work may suffer if employees and supervisors aren't on the job at the same time. Record keeping may be more complicated.

Identify the major argument that you could use to persuade each of the following organizations to use flextime and the major objection you anticipate. Which of the organizations would be fairly easy to convince? Which would be harder to persuade?

1. A large, successful insurance company
2. A branch bank
3. A small catering service
4. The admissions office on your campus
5. A church, synagogue, temple, or mosque with a staff of two clergy, a director of music, two secretaries, and a custodian
6. A government agency

2.8 Analyzing the Other Students in Your College or University

Analyze the students in your college or university. (If your college or university is large, analyze the students in your program of study.) Is there a "typical" student? If all students are quite different, how are they different? Consider the following kinds of information in your analysis:

Demographic Data

Age (Average; high and low)

Gender (What proportion are men? What proportion are women?)

Ethnic background (What groups are represented? How many of each?)

Languages

Marital status

Number of children

Parents' income/personal or family income

Going to school full- or part-time

Outside jobs (What kinds? How many hours a week?)

Membership in campus organizations

Religious affiliations

Political preferences

Proportion going on for further education after graduation

Psychographics

What values, beliefs, goals, and lifestyles do students have? Which are common? Which are less common?

What's the relationship between the students' values and their choice of major or program?

What do students hope to gain from the classes they're taking? What motivates them to do their best work in class?

Additional Information

What are students' attitudes toward current campus problems? current political problems?

What is the job market like for students in your school or major? Will students find it easy to get jobs after graduation? How much will they be making? Where will they be working?

After you answer these questions, identify the factors that would be most relevant in each of the following situations:

1. You want to persuade students to participate in an internship program.
2. You want to persuade students to join a campus organization.
3. You want to find out whether there are enough parking spaces on campus.
4. You want to know whether the campus placement office is providing adequate services to students.
5. You want to hire students to staff a business that you're starting.

2.9 Analyzing People in Your Organization

1. Analyze your supervisor:
   - Does he or she like short or long explanations?
   - Does he or she want to hear about all the problems in a unit or only the major ones?
   - How important are punctuality and deadlines?
   - How well informed about a project does he or she want to be?
   - Is he or she more approachable in the morning or the afternoon?
   - What are your supervisor's major hassles?

2. Analyze other workers in your organization:
   - Is work "just a job" or do most people really care about the organization's goals?
   - How do workers feel about clients or customers?
   - What are your co-workers' major hassles?
3. Analyze your customers or clients:
   - What attitudes do they have toward the organization and its products or services?
   - How is the way they read affected by education, age, or other factors?
   - What are their major hassles?

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a memo to your instructor summarizing your analysis.
b. Discuss your analysis with a small group of students.
c. Present your analysis orally to the class.
d. Combine your information with classmates' information to present a collaborative report comparing and contrasting your audiences at work.

2.10 Analyzing a Discourse Community

Analyze the way one of your discourse communities uses language. Possible groups include

- Family
- Peers
- Work teams
- Sports teams
- Associations, organizations, and other service or social groups
- Churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques
- Geographic or ethnic group

Questions to ask include the following:

- What specialized terms might not be known to outsiders?
- What topics do members talk or write about? What topics are considered unimportant or improper?
- What channels do members use to convey messages?
- What forms of language do members use to build goodwill? to demonstrate competence or superiority?
- What strategies or kinds of proof are convincing to members?
- What formats, conventions, or rules do members expect messages to follow?

As your instructor directs,

a. Share your results orally with a small group of students.
b. Present your results in an oral presentation to the class.
c. Present your results in a memo to your instructor.
d. Share your results in an email message to the class.
e. Share your results with a small group of students and write a joint memo reporting the similarities and differences you found.

2.11 Analyzing Corporate Culture on the Web

Analyze three organizations' Web descriptions of their corporate cultures.

1. Do all three discuss the same aspects of corporate culture?
2. Are the statements about each organization's culture consistent with the rest of its Web pages? with what you know about each organization?
3. What aspects of each culture do you like best? What, if anything, do you not like? What questions do you have about the organizations' culture that the Web pages don't answer?

As your instructor directs,

a. Share your results orally with a small group of students.
b. Present your results in an oral presentation to the class.
c. Present your results in a memo to your instructor.
d. Share your results in an email message to the class.
e. Share your results with a small group of students and write a joint memo reporting the similarities and differences you found.

2.12 Analyzing an Organization's Culture

Interview several people about the culture of their organization. Possible organizations include

- Work teams
- Sports teams
- Associations, organizations, and other service or social groups
- Churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques
- Geographic or ethnic group
- Groups of friends

Questions to ask include those in this module and the following:

1. Tell me about someone in this organization you admire. Why is he or she successful?
2. Tell me about someone who failed in this organization. What did he or she do wrong?
3. What ceremonies and rituals does this organization have? Why are they important?
4. Why would someone join this group rather than joining a competitor?

As your instructor directs,

a. Share your results orally with a small group of students.
b. Present your results in an oral presentation to the class.
c. Present your results in a memo to your instructor.
d. Share your results in an email message to the class.
e. Share your results with a small group of students and write a joint memo reporting the similarities and differences you found.

Polishing Your Prose

Comma Splices

In filmmaking, editors splice, or connect, two segments of film to create one segment. A comma splice occurs when writers try to create one sentence by connecting two sentences with only a comma.

Correct:	We shipped the order on Tuesday. It arrived on Wednesday.
Incorrect:	We shipped the order on Tuesday, it arrived on Wednesday. (comma splice)

Comma splices are almost always inappropriate in business communication. (Poetry and fiction sometimes use comma splices to speed up action or simulate dialect; some sales letters and advertisements use comma splices for the same effect, though not always successfully.)

You can fix a comma splice in four ways:

1. If the ideas in the sentences are closely related, use a semicolon:
   We shipped the order on Tuesday; it arrived on Wednesday.
2. Add a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *yet*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*):
   We shipped the order on Tuesday, and it arrived on Wednesday.
3. Make the incorrect sentence into two correct ones:
   We shipped the order on Tuesday. It arrived on Wednesday.
4. Subordinate one of the clauses:
   Because we shipped the order on Tuesday, it arrived on Wednesday.

Exercises

Fix the comma splices in the following sentences.

1. The conference call came at 1 P.M., we took it immediately.
2. We interviewed two people for the accounting position, we made a job offer to one.
3. Janelle drafted her problem-solving report, she sent a copy to each committee member for review.
4. The director of purchasing went to our Main Street warehouse to inspect the inventory, Chuck called him later to ask how things had gone.

5. Katya called the hotel in Montreal for a reservation, the desk staff booked a room for her immediately.
6. Mr. Margulies gave an audiovisual presentation at our September sales meeting in Whistler, it went very well.
7. I'll have Tina call the main office, you ask Brian to set up an appointment for the four of us tomorrow.
8. Working weekends is tough, it's part of life in the business world today.
9. I like to make oral presentations, they're fun.
10. Sunil is our most experienced employee, he joined the department in 1992.

Check your answers to the odd-numbered exercises on page 571.

Online Learning Centre

Visit the Online Learning Centre at www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/locker to access module quizzes, a searchable glossary, résumé and letter templates, additional business writing samples, CBC videos, and other learning and study tools.