

Managing Business Communication • part 3

Communication tools

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Describe** steps for preparing a written message.
- **Describe** techniques to make a written message more effective.
- **List** ways to use the telephone most effectively.
- **Describe** processes for planning and conducting meetings.
- **Explain** how to plan, organize and deliver a presentation.

This final article in a three-part series discusses how to effectively use selected communication tools, including business writing, the telephone, business meetings and business presentations.

John P. Bentley, R.Ph., M.B.A., Ph.D., assistant professor, pharmacy administration, School of Pharmacy, The University of Mississippi, University, MS; and Martha Reeves, Ph.D., visiting assistant professor, marketing and management program, Duke University, Durham, NC, served as consultants for this article for the Certified Medical Representatives Institute Inc.

Business writing requires careful attention to organization, tone, grammar, choice of language and graphics, directness, and readability. The following steps will help you prepare your written communication so that it achieves the desired result.

Defining the purpose. As for all modes of communication, the first and most important step is to define the purpose for the

communication – why is it being written and what is it going to accomplish?

Focusing on the audience. Next, an analysis is critical in order to learn as much as possible about the audience to whom the message will be transmitted. Knowing the audience’s background and the recipient’s level of knowledge in advance helps the writer include the proper amount of detail.

Organizing. Now the writer can begin the process of dividing a large topic into smaller units and arranging the smaller units into an effective sequence. Organizing also requires grouping related ideas and differentiating between the key point or central idea and the minor points.

Outlining. In this step, the central idea and minor points are arranged in the most effective sequence for the audience. One outlining approach is to use a computer to type in all the ideas to be included, then cut and paste these ideas into related groups, and finally order the groups in a way that supports the central idea.

Another frequently used method of outlining is mind mapping. To mind map, the author writes down the purpose or main idea of the message in the middle of a page and circles it. Then, possible points to add are written down and linked to the main idea or to another point by a line. The points that are directly linked to the main idea will become the major headings, and each heading is circled. The points connected to major headings will be subpoints and look like spokes on a wheel.

Writing the first draft. The writer should concentrate on recording all the points identified in the planning stage in narrative format quickly and efficiently without editing each paragraph. Not expecting perfection for the first draft will help keep creativity flowing. Writing the easiest parts first and then going back to write the more difficult sections saves time in the long run and builds confidence.

Revising and proofreading. The document should be revised for content, style and correctness. To do this, the writer may need to delete or add information in order to ensure that the document delivers the intended message, contains vivid images, and is clearly and concisely written.

Effective writing techniques

The writer of business communications is expected to use correct sentence structure, rely on active voice and emphasize important points. For example, instead of writing, “reports are transferred electronically” (passive voice), write, “our healthcare representatives transfer reports electronically.” It will be helpful to vary sentence length and structure, using both simple and complex sentences.

Paragraph length should also be varied to create interest. Typically, one sentence in each paragraph presents the main idea; this sentence is referred to as the topic sentence. In well-written business documents, the first paragraph of a message introduces the topic, additional paragraphs elaborate on the topic and a final paragraph ties all

REPS: RECEIVE CREDIT AND RECOGNITION

Continuing Education in **Pharmaceutical Representative** aims to provide reps with information to help them meet the needs of the people they serve and to contribute to reps’ personal and professional development. Every third issue includes a self-assessment quiz covering the previous three Continuing Education articles. The quiz for this article appears in this issue. Reps who correctly complete the quiz and return it to the CMR Institute with a nominal handling fee will receive a completion recognition form showing that they have successfully completed the three-part educational series and earned .25 CEU (2.5 contact hours). The CMR Institute also will send a letter of recognition to reps’ managers upon completion of a quarterly series. A Certificate of Achievement will be awarded to any representative who successfully completes four quizzes or has obtained 1.0 CEU.

Note: The Continuing Education quizzes are not part of CMR Institute’s certification program and do not count as credits toward the CMR® designation.

About the CMR Institute:

The Certified Medical Representatives Institute is an independent non-profit educational organization established in 1966 to provide a source of professional development and certification for pharmaceutical representatives. The Institute provides an up-to-date, approved continuing education curriculum designed to expand and enhance internal company training and development in a cost-effective manner. The curriculum concentrates on providing a general knowledge base and avoids such areas as selling skills and specific product education.

© 2004 The Certified Medical Representatives Institute Inc., Roanoke, VA 24014. All rights reserved. No part of this article may be reproduced by any method or in any form without written permission from the CMR Institute. Reprints of this article are available from the CMR Institute. Request Continuing Education article BC-3.

the information together.

Visually appealing documents are more likely to be read, and increase comprehension by focusing the reader on important points. These documents use numbered or bulleted lists, intentional white space, headings, tables, graphs, and art.

The telephone

The telephone offers the advantage of using tone of voice to express enthusiasm and the ability to determine the other parties' reaction to messages via vocal cues such as pauses, interruptions, pitch and rate of speaking.

While the telephone offers extensive benefits to an organization when used appropriately, it can be an annoyance when used improperly without consideration for other people. The following suggestions are helpful for using this communication tool most effectively.

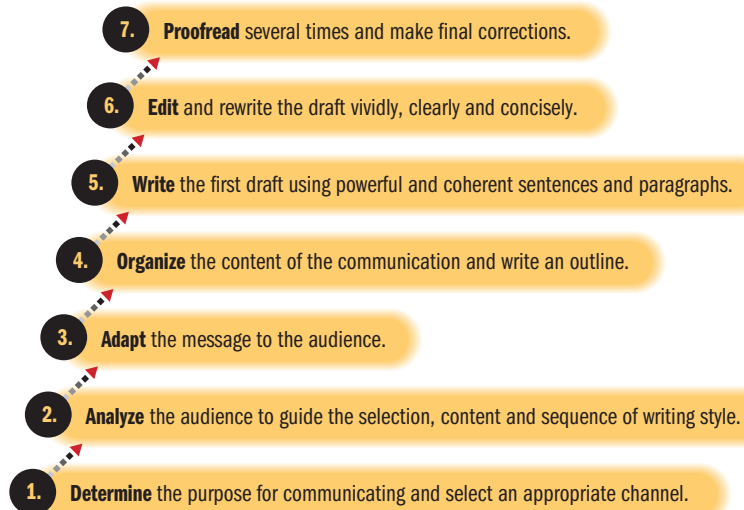
Tips for business calls:

- Provide identification (name and company) when initiating a call and when answering a call.
- Ask if it is a convenient time for the receiver to take the call; if not, ask when it would be convenient.
- Use a friendly tone and good manners, and smile when speaking, as this is reflected in your voice.
- Keep brief customer profiles handy, with business history and details such as hobbies and interests; use these to personalize your calls.
- When completing the call, summarize whatever action will be taken as a result of the call.
- Express thanks for the receiver's time.

Tips for leaving voice mail messages:

- Organize the message in advance to avoid mistakes and hesitation.
- State the name of the person for whom you are leaving the message if there is another person sharing the same voice mailbox.
- Begin the message with your name and phone number.
- Keep the message short, state the reason for the call, and speak slowly and clearly.
- Repeat the phone number at the end of the message.

Written business communications*



*Adapted from Lehman

Business meetings

To ensure that meetings achieve their intended purpose and are worth the time, effort and expenses they incur, managers should plan each meeting carefully. The *planning process* should include:

Validating the need for a meeting.

Ask questions such as: Would a memo or an e-mail be more efficient? Are the key individuals available for the meeting? Could the matter be handled as well by one person rather than many?

Determining the purpose and goals.

If the meeting is essential, the next step is to define the purpose of the meeting and determine what goals the meeting is expected to achieve. The meeting goals need to be result-oriented, specific and realistic.

Selecting attendees. Most importantly, when selecting attendees, managers need to consider which individuals are in a position to contribute to the purpose and goals of the meeting. Next, they should consider how individuals differ in status within the organization in knowledge about the issue, in communication skills and in personal relationships.

Arranging logistics. In order to ensure a successful meeting and make attendees as comfortable as possible, the manager will need to carefully arrange logistics such as time, location, room layout, seating arrange-

ments, types of audiovisual equipment and other equipment necessary.

Preparing the agenda. The manager should develop an agenda and decide in what order the topics will be covered. Effective managers distribute the agenda to meeting participants several days before the meeting so they can offer their input, such as adding additional topics. A carefully planned and well-written agenda contains the following:

- Time, place and length of the meeting.
- A list of attendees.
- Background information, such as the significance of the meeting.
- A list of topics to be discussed, organized according to when each topic will be addressed, who will address each topic and the time frame for each topic.
- The purpose and goals of the meeting.
- Pre-meeting work that must be accomplished in order to prepare for the meeting.

In addition, for each topic of the meeting, the agenda should describe the goal of discussion. For example, the agenda should note whether an agenda item is for discussion or if a decision needs to be reached. In some cases, an agenda item may consist of a simple announcement.

The following process may help meetings run smoothly and productively:

Opening the meeting. The meeting

leader might open the meeting by stating the purpose and goals of the meeting and providing an overview of the agenda. All meetings should begin on time despite the absence of some participants, unless it is necessary to wait for a high-level member or someone whose input is critical to the issue at hand.

Meeting rules. Rules must be in place to permit the orderly transaction of business at meetings. In order to avoid disruptions and chaos, everyone must be made aware of the rules and be required to follow them.

Closing the meeting. To conclude the meeting, the manager should summarize what the group accomplished at the meeting, discuss the next steps or future actions, acknowledge the group's contributions, and give credit to individuals who have made special contributions.

Follow-up. If an official record of what occurred at the meeting (minutes of the meeting) is prepared, it may be sent to key individuals who did not attend the meeting but have an interest in the outcome, as well as to those who attended the meeting. The manager should follow up with attendees to see if they are fulfilling the responsibilities they were assigned at the meeting.

Business presentations

Effective presentations made by managers increase sales opportunities, communicate vital information and assist in training initiatives.

When planning a presentation, it is important to focus on the following areas:

Purpose. A well-thought-out purpose helps the speaker know what to include and which points to emphasize during the presentation. Possible purposes include:

- Motivating the audience to do something at a specific time.
- Updating the audience on a project or event.
- Explaining how to use a new piece of equipment or system.
- Convincing the audience to purchase something or accept an idea.

Audience. Effective speakers consider the effect the message will have on the audience and anticipate their questions and reactions. An audience analysis should include:

the size of the audience (the larger the audience, the more formal the presentation), demographic characteristics and familiarity with the topic.

Timing. In most cases, early or mid-morning presentations are preferred over later times when people may be tired and anxious to leave.

Delivery method. Speaking from notes or an outline is the most common and effective approach for business presentations (note: be sure to number cards or pages in case they are dropped). Reading from a prepared speech is not usually recommended, since the same effect can be made by duplicating the speech and distributing it to the audience.

The simplest way to begin organizing the presentation is to separate the points and notes into three categories: the opening, the body and the closing.

The opening. The opening must be strong to capture the attention of the audience, give them a reason to listen and establish credibility. The opening should also set the tone for the topic, introduce the thesis and preview the presentation. Effective presentations might open with a personal story that makes a business point. The speaker might want to begin with a question, project into the future, use a quotation, relate an amusing anecdote or give a startling fact.

The body. The body should contain the key points and subpoints, organized in a logical sequence that allows the audience to know where the presentation is going. All of the key points should directly relate to and develop the thesis. A presentation should contain no more than three major points.

When organizing and writing, the presenter should include transitions, which are words or sentences that connect the segments of the presentation. Transitions tell the audience how these parts are related and what to expect to hear next. Transitions should occur between the introduction and the body, between the major points within the body, and between the body and the conclusion.

The closing. A strong ending is essential, as it is the last opportunity to achieve the objective. The closing should provide a summary of the key points of the pres-

entation and appeal to the positive, leaving the audience with a sense of anticipation (looking ahead rather than back).

An effective delivery requires attention to how the presenter looks and sounds, and what words are used. Speakers should learn to accept that they may be anxious in delivering a presentation. To control anxiety:

- Rehearse the presentation several times aloud (in front of an audience if possible) to become more familiar with the content.
- Avoid stimulants, including caffeine, for a few hours before speaking.
- Take several deep breaths while waiting for the presentation to begin.
- Visualize success.

In summary, speakers whose presentations include five key elements – a strong start, one theme, good examples, conversational language and a strong ending – will accomplish their goals. PR

The next series will focus on nutrition.

ARTICLE SUMMARY

- Effective business writing requires careful planning.
 - Steps for preparing a written message include: defining the purpose, focusing on the needs of the audience, organizing, outlining, writing the message, revising and proofreading.
 - Effective writing techniques will make the message more effective.
- The telephone offers the advantage of using tone of voice and vocal cues.
- The process of planning a business meeting includes validating the need for a meeting, determining its purpose and goals, selecting attendees, arranging logistics, and preparing an agenda.
- The process of conducting a business meeting includes opening the meeting, adhering to rules, closing the meeting, and following up afterward.
- Planning for a business presentation includes determining its purpose, analyzing the audience, choosing optimal timing and deciding on a delivery method.
 - The simplest way to begin organizing the presentation is to separate the points and notes into the opening, the body and the closing.
 - An effective delivery requires attention to how the presenter looks and sounds, and what words are used.