

# MODULE 2

# Adapting Your Messages 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?
- What if my audiences have different needs?
- How do I reach my audience?

Module Summary

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

- LO1** The audiences who may evaluate your business messages
- LO2** The variables of the communication process
- LO3** The importance of adapting your message to your audience
- LO4** Audience analysis

### Skills to

- LO5** Analyze your audience when composing messages
- LO6** Begin to shape the content, organization, and form of your messages to meet audience needs





## Employability Skills 2000+ Checklist

Module content builds these Conference Board of Canada Employability Skills 2000+

**Communicate**

**Be Adaptable**

**Think and Solve Problems**

**Learn Continuously**

**Demonstrate Positive Attitudes and Behaviours**

**Work with Others**

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 interests, and needs.

### LO1 Who is My Audience?

*Your audience may include many people.*

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

1. The **initial audience**—your supervisor or the client, for example—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**—your supervisor, or the client, or your peers—will decide whether or not to act on your message.



**FIGURE 2.1** The Audiences for a Marketing Plan

Dawn is an account executive in an ad agency.



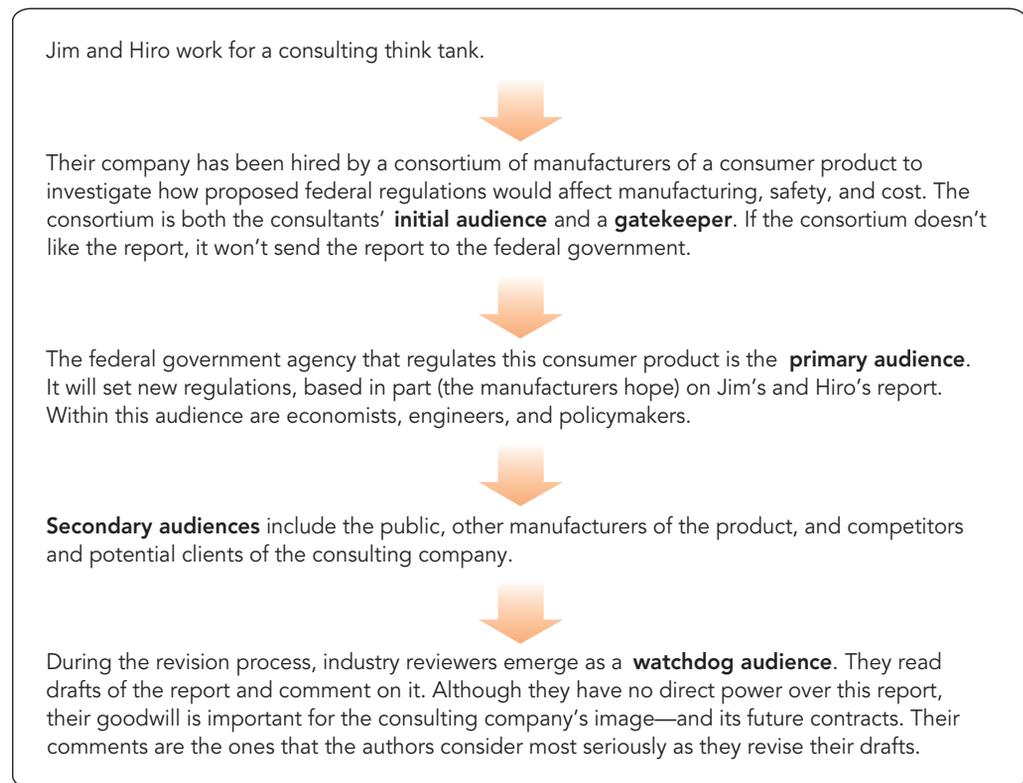
Her boss asks her to write a proposal for a marketing plan for a new product the agency's client is introducing. Her boss, who must approve the plan before it is submitted to the client, is both the **initial audience** and the **gatekeeper**.



Her **primary audience** is the executive committee of the client company, who will decide whether or not to adopt the plan.



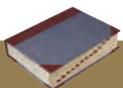
The **secondary audience** includes the marketing staff of the client company, who will be asked to comment on the plan, as well as the artists, writers, and media buyers who will carry out details of the plan if it is adopted.

**FIGURE 2.2** The Audiences for a Consulting Report

**Source:** Based on Vincent J. Brown (1994), Facing multiple audiences in engineering and R&D writing: The social context of a technical report, *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 24(1), 67-75.

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 and researchers 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 supervisor or executive assistant who decides whether or not you can speak to the boss is a gatekeeper. Occasionally, gatekeepers exist outside the organization. For example, regulatory boards are gatekeepers.
5. A **watchdog audience**—the media, boards of directors, and members of program advisory committees—has political, social, or economic power. The watchdog pays close attention to the communication between you and the primary audience and may base future actions on its evaluation of your message.

As Figures 2.1 and 2.2 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.



### Language FOCUS

A **think tank** is a group of people, usually experts in their field, who work together to provide advice. People in the think tank often work for business or government to help solve a problem, such as how new laws will affect a company.

## Checkpoint

### Five Kinds of Audiences

**Initial:** Is first to receive the message; may assign message.

**Primary:** Decides whether to accept recommendations; acts on message.

**Secondary:** Comments on message or implements recommendations.

**Gatekeeper:** Has the power to stop the message before it gets to primary audience.

**Watchdog:** Has political, social, or economic power; may base future actions on evaluation of message.

## Why Is Audience So Important?

*When people know what's in it for them, they're more likely to pay attention and favourably respond to your message. Successful communicators analyze, identify, and meet the audience's needs.*

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



### LO2 Audience and the Communication Process

True communication involves an exchange of meaning. This meaning transfer is a complex process because each of us is unique and believes his or her own perceptions of reality (meaning) are true; therefore, misunderstandings can occur during any part of the process. Understanding what your audience needs and expects, and adapting your messages accordingly, greatly increase your chances of communicating successfully.

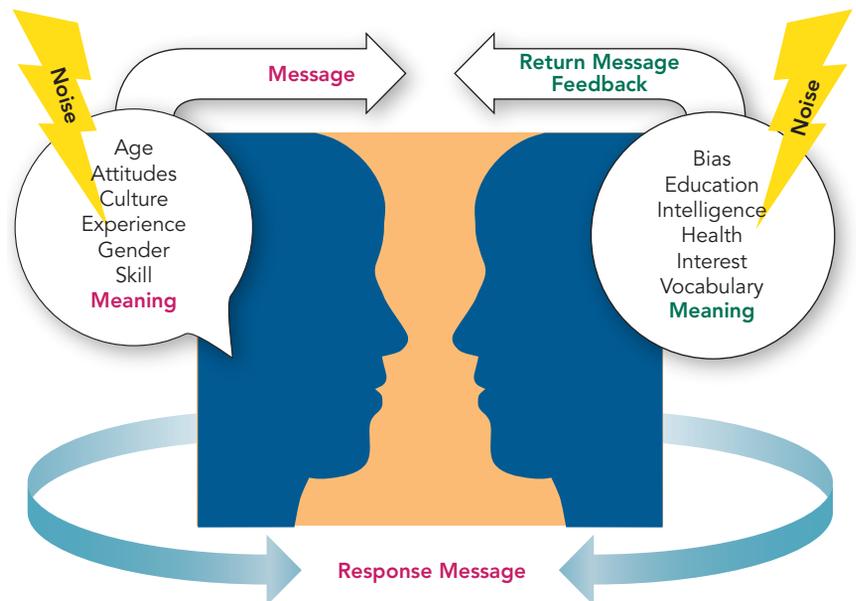


The communication process is the most complex of human activities, and audience is central to that process. We communicate unceasingly. Our audiences interpret our communication symbols unceasingly. Our words, tone, volume and rate of speech, posture, stance and gait, height and weight, hairstyle and hair colour, choice of clothing styles, materials, and colours, cell phone, iPod, and social media use—the thousands of symbols 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.

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.

For example, suppose you and your friend Mediha are having a cup of coffee together, and you realize you need help studying for the upcoming economics exam. You decide to ask Mediha. You choose to **encode** your request in symbols. What kinds of symbols will you use to convey your meaning? Why?

FIGURE 2.3 The Communication Process





Walking coach Lee Scott, president of WOW Company, uses newspaper ads, email newsletters, her company website, 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.

Once you have chosen your symbols, you must **transmit** your **message** to Mediha via a **channel**. Channels include cell phones, memos, smartphones, iPods, billboards, telephones, television, and radio, to name just a few. What channel will you use for this particular message, and why?

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 she interprets the message, chooses a response, and encodes it. Her response is **feedback**. Feedback may be direct and immediate, or indirect and delayed. What kinds of feedback could Mediha use to answer you? What symbols could she use?

Meanwhile, **noise** influences every part of the process. Noise can be physical or psychological. You're talking to Mediha in the cafeteria; the windows are open. What are the many physical noises that could interfere with your message?

Psychological noise, including emotional, intellectual, or psychological interference, also distorts communication. What psychological noise could interfere with message transfer?

What can you do as an effective communicator, to reduce or eliminate physical and psychological noise?

**Channel overload** occurs when the channel cannot handle all the messages 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.

Some 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 the light of our perceptions, based on 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 choosing audience-appropriate symbols (words, gestures, illustrations) guarantee a more accurate meaning transfer. Moreover, choosing audience-appropriate symbols and channels means your message will attract and hold your audience's attention.



### Cultural FOCUS

Not all cultures communicate the same way. Because culture is an unconscious part of who we are, we are not always able to determine whether miscommunication occurs because of **what** we said or **how** we said it. Study other cultures and try to determine the most effective way to communicate; however, try to avoid stereotypes. For example, many women in North America prefer to be addressed as *Ms.* rather than *Mrs.* or *Miss*. But this is not always the case, so it is best to understand the common standards for a culture and also try to determine individual preferences. This understanding will help you learn to communicate effectively in another culture.

### LO3 Audience and Business Messages

Consider the PAIBOC questions introduced in Module 1. Five of the six questions relate to audience, **because successful communication is always audience-focused**. You must know and understand your audiences to identify the information that will attract and hold their attention and motivate them to comply with your message.

#### A Communication Problem for Analysis

You work in a small, not-for-profit agency that supports disadvantaged youth (ages 13 to 19) in your city. Your organization's purpose is to raise public awareness and resources (funding, housing, job training, counselling services, bursaries, scholarships, and jobs) for these young people. Your agency's mandate includes encouraging and educating these youth to 1) assume personal responsibility for their lives and career goals, and 2) give back to the community through modelling leadership skills for and mentoring others.

Your director has decided that the agency will introduce a wellness program to educate your clients about healthy living practices and to encourage them to find ways to adopt these practices. You and your team members must prepare a message—or series of messages—to explain the new wellness program to your youth clients and to build support and acceptance.

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2.9

**FIGURE 2.4** PAIBOC Questions for Analysis

- 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 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 persuaded more by scientific studies or by experts.  
Module 11 gives more information on developing reader benefits.
- 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?  
Module 10 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, 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 audience response to your message.

## LO4 LO5 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 might 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."



**TABLE 2.1** Identifying Key Audience Characteristics for Messages

Message, Medium, and Purpose	Audience	Relevant factors
Intranet and corporate blog announcing that the company will reimburse employees for tuition if they take work-related college or university courses	All employees	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attitudes toward formal education (some people find courses enjoyable; others might be intimidated)</li> <li>2. Time available (some might be too busy)</li> <li>3. Interest in being promoted or in receiving cross-training</li> <li>4. Attitude toward company (those committed to its success will be more interested in the program)</li> </ol>
Tweet, Facebook announcement offering special financing on a new or used car	Postsecondary students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Income</li> <li>2. Expectations of future income (and ability to repay loan)</li> <li>3. Interest in having a new car</li> <li>4. Attitude toward cars offered by that dealership</li> <li>5. Attitude about environmental concerns</li> <li>6. Knowledge about fuel efficiency and hybrid cars</li> <li>7. Knowledge of interest rates</li> <li>8. Access to other kinds of financing</li> </ol>
Municipal website and pamphlet describing new methods of waste sorting and collecting	Municipal homeowners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Education</li> <li>2. Attitudes about home ownership</li> <li>3. Awareness of environment</li> <li>4. Feelings about neighbourhood and community</li> </ol>

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 personality
- Their attitudes, values, and beliefs
- Their past behaviour

**Prior Knowledge** Even people in your own organization won't share all your knowledge. Many 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 might 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.
- 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)."

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

Businesses and governments use a variety of demographic data to forecast people's behaviours, and to design their strategies accordingly. For example, in his *Boom, Bust and Echo*



## EXPANDING A CRITICAL SKILL

### Understanding What Your Organization Wants

Every workplace has rules about what "counts," and the best communicators ferret these out fast. These rules make up the corporate culture (Module 3); your awareness of the norms of your organizational culture is essential to work-life success.

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. Private-sector clients value short proposals and reports,

preferably in PowerPoint™; many governments prefer longer, more detailed paper documents.

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 the company picnic. He didn't really seem to care about the company."
- Observe. See who is praised, and who is promoted.



books, University of Toronto economics professor David Foot uses his analysis of Canada's changing population demographics to identify economic and social trends. This audience analysis affects decisions about every part of our lives, from social policy and urban design to store lighting and aisle width.

Foot's forecasts proved accurate. Canada's census results reflect an increasing number of foreign-born and aging workers: immigrants account for over 20 percent, and people 55 years and older for 15 percent of today's workers. Many Boomers intend to keep on working, and those who leave paid work will do so for self-employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

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. If you were explaining a change in your company's pension plan, for example, you would expect older workers to pay much closer attention than younger workers. And you would need to shape your explanation to appeal to both audiences.

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 animal care and house-sitting to running errands—thrives because it provides time for busy people. And in the hospitality, real estate, accounting, financial, and personal services industries, businesses that cater to specific populations and ethnic groups flourish.

Business and nonprofit 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** 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.<sup>2</sup> Another popular assessment tool, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, uses four dimensions (introvert–extrovert, sensing–intuitive, thinking–feeling, judging–perceiving) to identify personality preferences:<sup>3</sup>

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 systematically 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.”



### Cultural FOCUS

North Americans place value in understanding personality **types**. Many companies use assessments such as the Myers-Briggs to help decide whether an employee will fit in with the corporate culture. Many such personality assessment tools are available online.

4. **Judging–perceiving:** The degree of certainty someone needs. Judging types like organization, and prefer to finish one task before starting another. Perceptive types like possibilities, like to keep their options open, and may interrupt their work on one task to start another.

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.<sup>4</sup>

**Values and Beliefs** 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-based 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

**TABLE 2.2** Using "Type" Analysis for 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 systematically. 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 making a decision, or finishing a project.
A judging type	Present your request quickly.	Judging types are comfortable making quick decisions. They like to settle so they can move on to something else.

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Discourse communities create meaning and connection through verbal and non-verbal symbols, including uniforms, safety wear, food choices, use of space, observances of religion, time, and levels of courtesy and formality.

customers. Ranked as Canada’s “best-managed brand,” based on customer service, Tim Hortons continues to expand in Canada and internationally.<sup>5</sup>

Canadian Tire, another national top brand, also remains competitive in a very crowded market through audience analysis. Although still selling automotive and home repair products and services, Canadian Tire has expanded its lines of gardening, landscaping, lighting, and decorating products in response to Canadians’ increasing investment (both emotional and financial) in their homes. And the company catalogue—in print since 1928—is now only online, “an environmentally responsible” move that also appeals to an increasing consumer base.<sup>6</sup>

Marketers also use **geodemographic data** to analyze and appeal to audiences according to where they live and what they buy. Postal-code clusters identify current and potential customers based on two assumptions: 1) people are what they buy, and 2) birds of a feather flock together. In other words, “Our shopping habits are shaped by environment and our desire to belong.”<sup>7</sup>

Analyzing Canadians’ shopping habits is a \$550 million industry, and technological innovation continues to refine research methods. 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.<sup>8</sup>

**Past Behaviour** Experts in human behaviour believe that we can analyze and predict people’s future actions based on their past behaviours: the more recent the behaviour, the more accurate the prediction. On this premise, employers are using behavioural-based interviews (“Tell me about a situation in which you ran into conflict. What happened and how did you deal with it?”) to assess a candidate’s potential.<sup>9</sup> (See Module 27 on interviewing skills.)

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## Analyzing People in Organizations

Audience reaction is also strongly influenced by the perceptions and expectations of the groups to which they belong. These groups are **personal, social, religious, political, and class associations**. These groups are known as discourse communities because their members create their affiliation, rules, and norms through accepted verbal and non-verbal symbols (discourse).

These groups include family, peers, professional associations, clubs, and the workplace—all communities with which members of your audience identify. Members communicate through symbols (language, non-verbals) that may or may not be exclusive to their group, but which identify them as members of that group. For example, the uniform of a sports team symbolizes association, and the team’s name reflects the culture and values members hold. 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.

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2.1

### Checkpoint

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.

For example, the Internet hosts thousands and thousands of discourse communities, where the audience might, potentially, be the whole world. Social websites such as BallHype, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, IndianPad, and Free IQ are their own discourse communities with their own set of rules; each reflects the values, norms, and expectations of its users. On Twitter, for example, you may use only 140 characters per message. This limitation defines the kind of discourse, conversation, or meaning members can exchange. And violating the conventions can get you plenty of negative feedback.

Consider your discourse communities: perhaps you wear jeans to signify your membership in the student community; your hairstyle or piercing indicates your membership in a subculture; your iPod holds music that reflects your affiliation to another group. When you go for a job interview, you might get a haircut and put on more formal clothes to reflect the norms of the organization's discourse community that 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 decor and furnishings 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 text, 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?

An organization's **culture** is expressed through its values, attitudes, and philosophies. Once established, **organizational** or **corporate** culture can shape members' attitudes and behaviours, and become very difficult to change. 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).

## Checkpoint

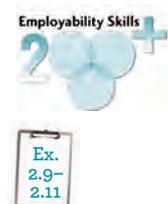
An organization's **culture** is its values, attitudes, and philosophies. **Organizational culture** (or **corporate culture**, as it is also called) is revealed verbally in the organization's myths, stories, and heroes, and non-verbally in the allocation of space, money, and power.

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?



In response to traditional expectations, some people invent their own. University of Manitoba student Jesse Hamonic did not appreciate the red tape he had to go through to volunteer for a local charity. So he started his own charities. Student Harvest relies on university students across Canada for donations and volunteer work. Hamonic has started two other not-for-profits dependent on student volunteers and is in the process of establishing his fourth charity organization, one that will use high school volunteers.



- 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 websites can offer some clues about what those cultures value, and how they want to project their brand. Royal Bank’s standing as Canada’s oldest bank is reflected in its corporate website colours: conservative dark blue and gold. TD Canada Trust’s green and white site—implying a fresh approach—offers photos of young, happy people, apparently delighted by the products and services the bank provides.<sup>10</sup>

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. (See Unit 6.) 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.<sup>11</sup>

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 subculture’s perspective while undermining the other’s point of view.

You can learn about organizational culture by paying attention to communication clues and cues. In particular, read the organizational publications (newsletters and blogs), 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 Breweries story, for example, is that the quality of its beer is the result of family recipes handed down through five generations—even though that family no longer owns the company. And McCain Foods continues to present itself as a “family business” culture, despite its founding brothers’ feuding, its 20,000 employees, and its multinational, global presence. Meanwhile, Google’s cultural story boasts of a “fun and inspiring workspace” where free meals, “healthy, yummy, and made with love,” casual dress, “shoreline running trails...and plenty of snacks...get you through the day.”<sup>12</sup>

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

## LO6 How Do I Use Audience Analysis?

**Use audience analysis to plan strategy, organization, style, document design, and visuals.**



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. Always revise your message with your audience in mind.



### Strategy

- Choose appeals and reader benefits that work for the specific audience (Module 11).
- 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 8–13 show you how to emphasize positive aspects, decide how much information to include, and overcome obstacles).

## Organization

- Analyze your audience’s reaction to the meaning of the message. When your message is positive, you can make your point right away. However, many business messages cause negative reader reaction: messages demanding payment, attempting to sell a product or service, or informing readers of a rate increase or of changes that may inconvenience them. When you must persuade a reluctant reader, and when your audience would see the message negatively, organize the message to break the news gradually (Modules 8–10).
- Anticipate and meet the audience’s expectations of format: make the organizational pattern clear to the audience. (Modules 6 and 16–18 show you how to use headings and overviews. Module 23 shows how to use overviews and signposts in oral presentations.)

## Style

Many North Americans value “saving” time, and boast of multi-tasking and of their busyness. Because we’ve been trained by technology, we expect immediate gratification. Therefore, most business audiences today expect messages that are short and clear.

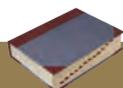
- Strive for clarity and accessibility: use simple words, a mixture of sentence lengths (average today: 14 words), and short paragraphs with topic sentences (refer to the Revising and Editing Resources at the end of this book).
- Use natural, conversational, personable, tactful language: avoid negative, defensive, arrogant, and “red-flag” words—*unfortunately*, *fundamentalist*, *crazy*, *incompetent*, *dishonest*—that may generate a negative reaction.
- Use the language that appeals to your audience. In parts of Canada, including Quebec and some areas of Ontario, Manitoba, and New Brunswick, bilingual messages in English and in French, with French first, are the norm.
- Use natural, conversational language.

## Document Design

- Use headings, bulleted lists, and a mix of paragraph lengths to 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

- Carefully consider the difference between cartoons and photos of “high art.” Photos and visuals can make a document look more informal or more formal.
- Use bias-free photographs. Unintentional cultural, gender, religious, and economic assumptions can offend readers and cost you business.



### Language FOCUS

**Multi-tasking** means working on many tasks at the same time. For example, a manager might be overseeing two or three projects, completing a report for a project, and planning an upcoming meeting all at the same time. How often do you study, use the Internet, and listen to music all at once? This is considered multi-tasking as well.

- Choose photographs and illustrations that project positive cultural meanings for your audience. Middle Eastern readers, for example, find pictures of bare-legged and bare-armed women offensive and may 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.

## LO6 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 paragraph or topic sentence—for reader orientation.
- In the body of the document, provide enough evidence to prove your point.

## 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. (See Modules 8–10.)
  - 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.



Best Buy and Future Shop have the same parent company and offer similar products. Their customer demographic, however, differs. Future Shop is designed to attract the more upscale customer.

## Level of Language

- Contemporary business communication uses conversational, semiformal language. Use *I* and *you*, and address your reader by name. Do research, however, to discover if your reader prefers a title: *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Dr.*
- 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 (refer to the Revising and Editing Resources at the end of this book).

- 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.

## LO3 LO6 How Do I Reach My Audience?

### Effective messages make use of multiple channels.

Communication channels include verbal and non-verbal symbols (in-person, electronic, speaking, gesturing, writing, colour, use of space and time). These vary in

- Transmission speed
- Transmission accuracy
- Cost
- Efficiency
- The number of people reached
- Audience impact
- Positive influence

Your purpose, the audience, and the situation—known as the *communication context*—determine which and how many channels you choose (refer to the PAIBOC questions in Figure 2.4). However, given the potential for miscommunication, the more channels you use, the better.

## The Advantages of Writing

A written message is primarily for the record. Writing 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

## The Disadvantages of Writing

Writing, however, often requires more time than speaking face-to-face. Furthermore, once you mail the letter, or hit “send,” your documents, including your email messages, are permanent and potentially available to everyone.

When you do decide to write, use the channel that best meets the expectations and needs of your audience. Text messaging may work for family and friends. Email messages are appropriate for routine business messages to people you already know. Paper may be better for someone to whom you’re writing for the first time.

## The Advantages of Oral Communication

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 channels and more formal channels, whether they’re oral or written.



## The Disadvantages of Oral Communication

Meaning and morale can be jeopardized, however, when people choose efficiency and formality over real communication. For example, some organizations regularly use “town hall meetings”—large-auditorium gatherings—to tell employees about new strategies, policies and procedures, and/or new initiatives. The manager employs only one channel (voice), and even when the presentation includes slides, the message is often all one-way: top-down. In this “command and control” corporate culture, employees often feel too intimidated or too disaffected to provide feedback. True communication does not occur.

## Use Multiple Channels

When sending and receiving both oral and written messages, you maximize success when you

1. Adapt the message to the specific audience.
2. Show the audience members how they benefit from the idea, policy, service, or product (Module 11).
3. Anticipate and overcome any objections the audience may have.
4. Adopt a good attitude and use positive emphasis (Modules 12–13).
5. Use visuals to clarify or emphasize material (Module 19).
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.<sup>13</sup>

The bigger your audience, the more complicated channel choice becomes, because few channels reach everyone. When possible, use multiple channels. Always 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. Or, in the case of town hall meetings, make sure everyone has a chance to preview the announcements (via email and bulletin boards), and generate feedback through focus groups or team meetings.

## MODULE SUMMARY

- Communication is the transfer of meaning: both sender and receiver, using multiple symbols, reach agreement on the meaning intended.
- The communication process includes a **sender**, **receiver**, **message**, **channel(s)**, and **noise**. True communication is transactional: both parties provide **feedback** for meaning clarification. Noise is ever-present; any physical, emotional, or psychological interference affects meaning exchange.
- Audience focus is the key to communication success. Empathy and critical thinking are crucial to valid audience analysis. Analyzing your audience’s needs and expectations lets you shape messages accordingly, with positive results.
- Business messages may include five audiences: the **initial audience** first receives the message, or tells you to send the message; the decision maker, or **primary audience**, makes the decision or acts on the basis of your message; the **secondary audience** may comment on your message, or implement your ideas after they’ve been approved; the **gatekeeper** manages your message flow—this person has the power to stop your message before it reaches the primary audience; the **watchdog audience** has the political, social, or economic power to evaluate your message.

- You need to know everything about your audience that's relevant to your purposes for communicating. Use demographic factors, personality characteristics, values and beliefs, past behaviours, and your own observations and experiences to analyze your audience.
- Audience reaction is also strongly influenced by the perceptions and expectations of the groups to which they belong. These groups, or **discourse communities**, create group norms through verbal and non-verbal symbols. Each of us belongs to a number of very different discourse communities (family, religious affiliation, Facebook, varsity team).
- When you want to understand people in organizations, you need to observe the organizational, or **corporate culture**. People create their corporate culture—values, attitudes, and philosophies—and express these through discourse—their stories and behaviours.
- Channel choice is shaped by the organizational culture. However, effective messages use multiple channels, and encourage feedback.

## ASSIGNMENTS FOR MODULE 2

### Questions for Critical Thinking

- 2.1** Who might be the audiences for your Facebook comments?
- 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? How do you use technology 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. Cheechoo 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. Small business owners
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 Persuading Your Organization to Adopt Flextime

Flextime is a system that allows employees to set their own starting and stopping times. It is especially appealing to organizations that have a hard time keeping good employees or cannot easily raise salaries, and companies with the philosophy of giving workers as much independence as possible. Most employees prefer flextime. However, in some organizations, the system creates conflict 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
7. The business where you work part-time

## 2.7 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
- 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 difficult 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 not-for-profit charity organization.
3. You want to persuade students to adopt "green habits," including carpooling, taking the bus rather than driving, avoiding products that are packaged or sold in plastic or Styrofoam, and eating locally.
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.

## 2.8 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 concerns?
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 concerns?

3. Analyze your customers or clients:
  - What attitudes do they have toward the organization and its products or services?
  - How are their attitudes affected by education, age, or other factors?
  - What are their major concerns?

**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.

## 2.9 Analyzing a Discourse Community

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

- Family
- Peers
- YouTube, Facebook, or any social media site to which you belong
- Work teams
- Work blogs
- Wikipedia
- 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.

## 2.10 Analyzing Corporate Culture on the Web

Use three organizations' websites and/or blogs to analyze their corporate cultures.

1. What assumptions can you make about the corporate culture, based on your analysis of these media?
2. What inconsistencies do you find?
3. What aspects of each culture do you like best? What, if anything, do you not like? What questions do you have about the organizational culture that the web pages or blogs don't answer?

**As your instructor directs,**

- a. Share your results orally with a small group of students.
- b. Present your results orally 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 an Organization's Culture

Interview several people about the culture of their organization. (This exercise provides a great opportunity to become known in a company where you would like to work. See Module 24.)

Possible organizations are

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

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

1. Tell me about someone in this organization whom 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 orally 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, or independent clauses, with only a comma.

**Incorrect:** We shipped the order on Tuesday, it arrived on Wednesday.

Comma splices are 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:

- If the ideas in the sentences are closely related, use a semicolon: We shipped the order on Tuesday; it arrived on Wednesday.
- Add a coordinating conjunction (*and, yet, but, or, for, nor*): We shipped the order on Tuesday, and it arrived on Wednesday.
- Make the incorrect sentence into two correct ones: We shipped the order on Tuesday. It arrived on Wednesday.
- Make one of the clauses subordinate, or dependent on the other for meaning: Since 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, Chum called him later to ask how things had gone.
5. Katy 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 Polsun to set up an appointment for the four of us tomorrow.
8. You know, many countries forbid talking on your cellphone while driving, Canadian provinces are adopting legislation to do the same, even non-handheld devices are going to be banned.
9. I like to make oral presentations, they're fun.
10. Sunil is our most experienced employee, he joined the department in 2009.

Check your answers to the odd-numbered exercises in the Polishing Your Prose Answer Key.



Practise and learn online with Connect. Connect allows you to practise important skills at your own pace and on your own schedule, with 24/7 online access to an eBook, practise quizzes, interactives, videos, study tools, and additional resources.