

Business Communication

Introduction/ Purpose Statement

Welcome to the TCHP home study program on business communication. The purpose of this program is to provide some basic information on communicating in a business environment. Perhaps you are new to the business end of health care, are new to your organization or position, or have never received any formal instruction in this area. Whatever your reason for picking up this book, welcome.

Target Audience

This home study was designed for professionals who are either new to communicating in a business environment or for those who want to improve their communication skills.

Content Objectives

1. Describe the importance of the subject line in an e-mail message.
2. Describe situations that are inappropriate for e-mail.
3. List the basic elements that should be present in a memo.
4. List two advantages of using a memo versus sending an e-mail.
5. List the basic elements that should be present in a letter.
6. List the basic elements that should be present in a facsimile (fax).
7. Describe a situation that is inappropriate for using a fax.
8. Differentiate between situations when it is better to talk or better to put it in writing.

Planning Committee/ Author*

***Linda Checky, BSN, RN, MBA**, Assistant Program Manager for TCHP Education Consortium.

Lynn Duane, MSN, RN, Program Manager for TCHP Education Consortium.

Sarah Linhoff, BA, RN, CNOR, Nurse Educator at Regions Hospital.

Rita Mahowald, MSN, RNBC, Director of Employee Education at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.

Betty Stenglein, MS, RN, Nursing Educator at Hennepin County Medical Center.

Content Expert/Editor

Sandra Tomascak, BA, Training Specialist in Human Resources, Regions Hospital.

Contact Hour Information

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| For completing this Home Study , you are eligible to receive: | 1.0 contact hours (calculated using the Minnesota Board of Nursing 50 minute contact hour). OR 0.83 contact hours (calculated using the WNA-CEAP criteria for certified nurses needing ANCC-approved contact hours). <i>Criteria for successful completion:</i> You must read the home study packet, complete the post-test and submit it to TCHP for processing. |
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Please see the last page of the packet before the post-test for information on submitting your post-test for contact hours.

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E-mail

Electronic mail, or e-mail, is a very popular and efficient way of communicating with others. It allows you to share information with someone down the hall, or across the world, in just a moment's time. If you are relatively new to e-mail, you may not have yet discovered that it is a double-edged sword. Because it is very easy to broadcast information to literally everyone in an organization, a ton of inappropriate e-mails are sent out. This becomes particularly irritating when you have been away from the office for a while. You can return to find 50 or more e-mails, with only 5 or so having relevance to what you do. Unfortunately, you need to sift through the 50 to find the 5.

The Basic Elements

Length

When using e-mail, keep it short and sweet. If your message is more than 3 paragraphs in length, you may want to consider another form of communication.

The Subject Line

The subject line is the first thing the recipient sees as they are sorting through their e-mail. A good subject line can make the difference between being read immediately and being read much, much later (if at all). It should be short and informative. If action is required of the recipient put it in the subject line. Examples:

“Need a Reply by Tuesday Morning” or
“Please Attend Critical Pathways Planning Group”

The First Sentence

The first sentence in the first paragraph should contain the main point of your communication, with the other paragraphs as supporting information. The exception to this rule is when you need to convey bad news. In this case, you may want to present the supporting information first, so that the recipient reads the “why” before the “what.” However, you may want to ask yourself if the telephone or a face-to-face meeting might be more appropriate for conveying bad news.

The Message

Keep the message short and to the point. It should fit on one screen if possible. If you need to include a list of items, bullet or number them. If you need to send a long message, consider attaching the file as an enclosure, using a detailed description of the enclosed file in your e-mail message. Example:

“An attachment which contains a list of scheduled code blue team members is attached to this message. Click on attachment to view this list.”

You should also include the purpose of any document you send, as well as detailed instructions regarding what the recipient is supposed to do with the document and the date that you need a response.

If you decide to attach an enclosure, you may want to make a follow-up telephone call because some systems will not allow the recipient to open an attachment.

Send messages that can be answered at the recipient's convenience. Not everyone is willing or able to check his or her computer regularly. If your message is time-sensitive, it might be wise to call the person or leave a message on their voice mail saying that an e-mail message is waiting.

Rules of Etiquette for E-mail

As with most questions of etiquette, there are some written and mostly unwritten dos and don'ts. These are things that will bother your co-workers and clients, but they will probably not tell you. Here are a few dos and don'ts.

- Don't send courtesy copies (cc) of messages to people who don't need to see it.
- Don't send blind copies (Bcc) casually; they suggest that you are going behind someone's back.
- Don't ask for a receipt unless absolutely necessary. It implies to the recipient that you think they don't read their mail. In addition, users “in the know” may forward a copy of the message to themselves and read the copy if they don't want the receipt notification sent.
- Use the “urgent message” notation sparingly (i.e., only if it really is urgent). If used too often, it will be ignored.
- Don't print out and pass around or post an e-mail message without the writer's permission.
- Don't use all capital letters. TYPING IN ALL CAPITALS IS KNOWN AS *SHOUTING* IN E-MAIL. If

you would like to highlight an important point, use **bold** or a larger font.

- E-mail is a good way to document information.
- When entering a list of names in the “To”, “Cc”, and “Bcc” lines, alphabetize by last name. Any other method may unintentionally offend a colleague.
- Only send messages to people that really need the information. The fewer messages you send, the greater the attention they will receive.
- Limit (or omit) messages that are non-work related (things such as jokes, invitations to personal events, etc.).
- Try to make each message a positive one so that people will want to read them.
- Do not “flame” or “vent” through E-mail. If you are angry or hurt about something, do not use e-mail to send off a fiery response. If you have a problem with someone, use the phone or schedule a face-to-face meeting.
- Don’t expect an immediate reply to your e-mail. For some reason, e-mail users feel that since an immediate response is possible that it is expected. Keep in mind that not everyone is in the office daily or is able to process their e-mails in a timely fashion.
- If you send out an errant e-mail, it is probably best to call or go to the person, face-to-face, to apologize. The Outlook program in Microsoft Office does have an optional recall feature but it rarely will work the way you want it to. Instead of pulling the errant message from the receiver’s inbox, it usually sends them a second e-mail announcing that the sender wishes to recall the first message. This tends to *highlight* that message.

Appropriate or Not?

E-mail is a great way to send short messages that contain information that is not of a sensitive, emotional, political, or personal nature. It is a great way to send information without interrupting someone’s work; they can read it at their convenience. It is also a great way to broadcast messages to whole groups of people and to contact people in different time zones and countries without calling at weird hours, and the transmittal time is a fraction of what a call would be. This makes e-mail a very practical method of communicating.

E-mail is not appropriate for communication that is personal, sensitive, political, or emotional in nature; these should be handled over the phone or in person. E-mail is also not appropriate for really long messages or for documents that require a commitment or signature. For instance, it would be inappropriate use e-mail for any kind of contract, including an offer of employment. Any kind of contractual agreement should be handled in hard copy.

Lastly, e-mail may not be the best format for those of us who are challenged by grammar or spelling. Because there is often no grammar or spelling check to e-mail and a lot of us can come off looking bad. With a memo or letter, you can use grammar and spell-check and/or have someone proof it for you. At the very least, read your message over from start to finish (preferably out loud) and check your grammar and spelling before sending a message off.

✓ **Check this out:** E-mail programs usually allow you to cut and paste a message from Word. To see if you can do this, type a short note in Microsoft Word for Windows. Highlight the message and click on the scissors icon. Your message will disappear to the clipboard. Close Word and open your e-mail. Select write new message. Go to the message space and click on the icon representing “paste clipboard contents.” If all went well, your message will be pasted into your e-mail. This is handy because you can use the spelling and grammar check in Word and then paste your message into e-mail. Note: pictures will not transfer and some formatting may be lost.

Test Your Knowledge

1. Do you know when to use *its* versus *it’s*?
2. Do you know the difference between *principle* and *principal*?
3. Between *lay* and *lie*?
4. Between *to*, *two*, and *too*?
5. Between *capital* and *capitol*?
6. Between *personal* and *personnel*?

If you answered “no” to any of these questions, you need to brush up on your English skills. Read up on the subject or have a co-worker who has excellent written communication skills check your work.

Memos

Memoranda headings contain four basic pieces of information:

- 1) "To"—contains the name or names to whom the memo is written. If you use a title in the "to" line, include one in the "from" line.
- 2) "From"—person or persons who wrote the memo. Handwritten writer initials should be placed after the typed name on this line. Example:

From: Linda Checky, TCHP Assistant Program Manager/LC

This signifies that you have read the memo and approve its contents.

- 3) "Date"—shows the date when memo was written. Sometimes the date is placed at the top; sometimes it is placed within the headings.
- 4) "Subject" or "Re"—describes the main idea of the memo. Keep it simple and informative. If action is required of the recipient, you may want to note it in the subject line. Example:

Subject: Room Reservations—Due December 15

The subject line can be in all capitals or in upper and lower case with each word capitalized.

Here are some examples of memo formats:

| Format #1 | Format #2 | Format #3 |
|-----------|---------------|----------------------------|
| TO: | March 2, **** | To: From: |
| FROM: | To: | Department: Department: |
| DATE: | From: | |
| SUBJECT: | Re: | Subject: |

Many organizations adopt a standard format for memos. Check with your organization to see if there is a preferred format.

One detail to pay attention to is lining up the left-hand side of the information that follows the to, from, date, and subject lines.

| Right Way | Wrong Way |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| To: Linda Checky | To: Linda Checky |
| From: Karen Poor | From: Karen Poor |
| Date: June 2, **** | Date: June 2, **** |
| Subject: Program Dates | Subject: Program Dates |

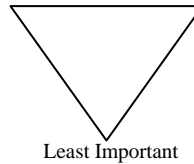
↑ Line up information that follows the colons

The First Sentence

In most instances, the first sentence in the first paragraph should contain the main point of your communication. Think of your memo, as a whole, as well as each individual paragraph, as an inverted triangle. The most important information should be at the base of the triangle.

Figure 1: Writing Like an Inverted Triangle

Most Important



When you write like an inverted triangle, the most important information will come first in the memo or paragraph. Less important details will follow the main ideas.

The Message

The body of a memo explains the main idea in more detail. Choose clear, familiar words. Do not use a long word or phrase if a short one will do. For instance:

| Instead of: | Use: |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| I am of the opinion that... | I think |
| Due to the fact that... | Because |
| Subsequent | Later |
| Reiterate | Repeat |
| Endeavor | Try |
| Under the circumstances | Therefore |
| At the present time | Now |

If you use abbreviations, acronyms, or highly technical terms, be sure to write it out or define it in parentheses following the word the first time it's used.

Examples:

- ◆ BP (blood pressure)
- ◆ JCAHO (Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals Organization)
- ◆ Gastrostomy tube (a tube that is surgically placed in the stomach to deliver feedings)

The Conclusion

The last paragraph ends the memo and should tell the reader what action they should take, what results you expect, or gives thanks to the reader.

Rules of Etiquette for Memos

There are rules of etiquette in any interaction. Here are a few dos and don'ts for memoranda:

- Keep it brief and to the point.
- Give all addresses, telephone and facsimile numbers, or other details that the reader will need.
- Be selective about who really needs to receive your memo.
- Try to keep your message positive so that people will want to read your memos.
- Tailor your memo to the person or persons you are writing to.
- Don't write a memo when you're angry.
- Keep a copy of your memo to refer to later.
- Always proofread your memo before sending it out. Read your message aloud when proofing. This will increase your chances of catching those errors that are not detected by the spelling and grammar check on the computer.
- Review and revise mailing lists at least once a year.

Appropriate or Not?

There are many advantages to writing in hard copy. Writing is an excellent way to create a permanent record of your ideas. Writing a memo allows you to communicate the same information to many people and provides them with a reference sheet of your ideas. Writing also helps you think. When you put your ideas on paper, they become clearer to you and thus, clearer to your reader. It is also a natural human tendency for people to pay more attention to something "in black and white."

Writing can also provide you with a paper trail that may be useful later on. Your assertions that communication occurred will be stronger if you can produce copies of the notice that was sent. Therefore, writing a memo is an excellent way to communicate **within your organization**. Memos are generally not used outside of your own organization. Writing to people external to your organization is usually done in letter form.

Letters

Letters are an important method of communication, especially between organizations and to individuals external to your organization. Letters can also be used internally to communicate. Some examples of standard letters include: an offer of employment, a resignation, a letter of recommendation or commendation, registration or reservation confirmations, letter of inquiry, etc.

Since a letter is often your first contact with another organization or person, you need to take special care with writing style, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. A single error can create a negative impression of you and your organization.

The Basic Elements

Length

Letters should fit on one page, if possible. Text should be single-spaced with double spacing between paragraphs. If you are not able to fit it on one page, try to hold it to a maximum of two pages. Remember that the longer your letter is, the less likely it is to be read. It is better to keep the letter brief and directed with reference made to enclosed supporting materials.

Format

While there are many potential variations, there exists a standard business format for letters. Use the standard business format if your organization does not have a preferred format of its own. The sample letter on the right shows all the possible items that may be used in a letter, but not all items are necessary or even desirable.

Style

You want to pay attention to issues of style because you are trying to look your best in a letter. For instance, if your organization has more than one style of letterhead, be sure that your envelope matches the letterhead you used for your letter. Try to balance your letter on the sheet of paper using margins and spacing. For short letters, you may wish to use 1.25" margins and to double-space your text so that it does not appear to be top-heavy on the page. For longer letters, you may wish to use one-inch margins and single-space paragraphs, using a double space between paragraphs.

Initialing

Use upper-case initials for the writer and lower case initials for the typist.

Enclosures

Indicate “Enclosures” or “Attachments” on the line below the writer/typist initials.

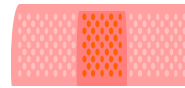
Copies To (cc)

List the people who will receive a copy of this letter after “cc.”

Post-scripts (P.S.)

Don’t use a postscript unless it is used to call attention to a certain item or, perhaps, to make your letter seem less formal. Use sparingly.

Sample Letter



American Bandage Corporation
1001 Owie Avenue, Broken Knee, MN 55000

April 10, 2007 (date line)

Anna Phyllaxis
Vice President of Marketing
The Good Drug Company
550 Pills Drive
Medication, MN 55555

} **Inside Address**

Attention: Avoid using an attention line, instead address letter to the individual

Reference: This line can take the place of repetitious, statistical information such as job numbers, dates of previous meetings, etc.

Subject: A specific, precise way to indicate the subject of your letter. Capitalize each word in the subject line. Example: “Subject: “Joint Marketing Venture”

Dear Ms. Phyllaxis: **(Salutation)**

Thank you for your interest in the American Bandage Corporation. Your idea of marketing Good Drug antibiotic ointment through free samples in our boxes of bandages is a good one. Please come to our next marketing meeting to discuss the details of this joint venture. Our next meeting is scheduled for:

Monday, March 2
9:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Conference Room, American Bandage

If you are not able to attend this meeting, please call me at 610-0000 to re-schedule. Please bring with you the specific terms of the agreement for our attorney to review.

I look forward to working with you on this project.

Sincerely, **(Closing)**

Linda Checky
Marketing Director

LC/ss **(Initialing)**
Cc: J. Joy **(Copies To)**

Although the preceding sample letter contained all the elements that could be used in a letter, this next section will give some details about the elements that are typically found in most letters.

Date

All letters should contain the date that the letter was written. In general, the date line is placed at the top of the letter about two to four lines down from the letterhead. The date line is flush left as are all items in the letter if a modern block format is used. If a modified block format is used, the date line and the closing are indented to the middle of the page. The standard format for the date line is to spell out the month and use numbers for the date and year.

Inside Address

This is the name and address of the person and/or group you are writing to. Whenever possible, address your letters to a specific individual. Put the individual's name on the first line of the inside address, followed by their title, department, and company name and address, each on subsequent lines.

Salutation

Some letters, particularly if they are computer generated, will eliminate the salutation and closing altogether. Most business letters, however, do include a salutation. Make your salutation personal and in agreement to the gender and number of people indicated on the first line of your inside address. The salutation is always followed by a colon in business correspondence and by a comma in personal correspondence. If you are unsure of the gender of the person, use their full name. Examples:

Dear Aduab Menonie:

Dear E. M. Forester:

Message

Your message will be contained in the body of the letter. Generally you will use an opening and closing paragraph. The opening paragraph should contain the point of your letter. The closing paragraph may contain a brief summary and/or thank you. Use white space, bulleting, and numbering to draw attention to important details.

Closing

The closing should reflect your relationship with the person you are writing to. "Sincerely" works well for most business purposes. The closing is followed by a comma. If the closing is more than one word, only the first word is capitalized.

Signature

Allow enough room to comfortably sign your letter and then place your name, typed, along with your title below your signature. You may put your company's name below your title, if you wish. Sign every letter you write. It signifies that you have read the letter and approve of its contents. If you are not available, it is permissible for someone else to sign for you and place their initials next to your signature.

Rules of Etiquette for Letters

There are a few dos and don'ts you will want to observe when writing letters.

- Do **not** use your organization's letterhead for personal correspondence.
- Always check with your Human Resources department before agreeing to write a letter detailing employee performance to another organization. This includes letters of reference. Litigation has occurred over this type of correspondence. Likewise, if you receive a call about an employee's performance, simply refer them to the Human Resources department of your organization. The only information the Human Resources department will give out without a signed, written release from the employee is the dates of their employment and their job title. **Never** answer the question that is often asked, "Is this employee eligible for rehire?" Although it is probably safe to give glowing reviews about a great employee, the most consistent policy is to refer all such inquiries to the Human Resources department.
- Always double-check the spelling and title of the person to whom you are writing.
- Always proofread your letters before signing them.
- Get to the point quickly and concisely. Don't make the person hunt for the purpose of your letter.
- Write the way you speak. It should be brief, clear, positive, and convey personal warmth.
- Do not use abbreviations, acronyms, technical or overly inflated language. Use simple words and medium to short sentences whenever possible.
- If there are several enclosures, use a bigger envelope. Don't try to stuff it all in a business-sized envelope. It may get caught in the postal equipment and rip if it is too fat.
- If you want a reply, consider including a self-

addressed, postage-paid envelope. At the very least, make sure that your address and telephone number are included.

- If confidential information is enclosed, mark it “confidential.” Otherwise, the receptionist, secretary, or a colleague may open the letter. Better yet, mail confidential information to your recipient’s home. This is less likely to result in curiosity or suspicion on the part of the secretary or receptionist.

Facsimiles

Many businesses find that they must have a facsimile or “fax” machine in order to remain competitive. The fax machine makes it possible to send copies of your document to other departments, across town, or across the globe in a matter of minutes. The fax machine can be a blessing when time is of the essence. It allows you to receive and send information in minutes rather than days. Please note, however, that this does *not* mean that it is okay to leave work to the last possible minute simply because you can fax it. It also does not mean that you should expect an immediate reply from an organization just because they have a fax machine.

The Basic Elements

Date

Even though the fax machine will date and time stamp incoming messages, you may still want to put the date that you prepared the fax on the coversheet. This could be important if it is a time sensitive document and someone else is faxing it for you. It could also be important for your own files, since your copy will not have a date stamp on it.

Addressing Information

Be sure to include the name, company, department, and fax number of whom you want to receive the fax. This information should be on the coversheet or transmittal memo. Don’t skip any of this information unless you know that the recipient’s fax machine is on their desk. Organizations often will share a fax machine and there are numerous incoming messages that go to different departments.

The “from” information should include your name, company/department, fax and telephone numbers. Your telephone number is important because the receiver of your fax may need to call you if the document comes out

garbled or is short a page or two. If the fax is being sent to an organization different than your own, also include your street address.

Number of Pages

Always write in the number of pages to your document. If you have a coversheet, this also counts (i.e., if you have a coversheet plus a two page document, your # of pages is 3). This is how the recipient will know that they got the whole document. It is helpful to know how many pages of text your fax can hold in its memory. If you are getting close to the maximum the fax can handle at one time, break your document into batches and process a batch at a time. Wait a few minutes between batches for your document to be printed on the other end. Make it clear on the coversheet how many pages are included in this batch and how many batches will be sent.

Rules of Etiquette for the FAX

Here are a few dos and don’ts to guide you:

- Consider the recipient of your fax; will they need to use this document in a meeting or other way? If so, it is likely that they will need to re-type it because the faxed copy is never as clear as the original. If this is the case, the recipient may prefer that you send it through the mail or receive it as an e-mail attachment.
- Don’t fax documents at the end of the day, or worse yet after hours, on the day that they are due. The late arrival of your document may mean that someone will need to stay late to process it or that your recipient will, in turn, miss a deadline.
- Don’t put the transmittal memo sticker in the middle of the document. If the sticker in any way covers up information, use a coversheet instead.
- It is not appropriate, in most instances, to fax personal or private information. If you absolutely *must* do it, be sure to use a coversheet marked “confidential” and follow your document with a blank sheet of paper. This provides a cover before and after the confidential information.
- When faxing, keep in mind that documents that are on colored paper or have color in them will not fax well. Also, copies and faxes will come out less clear with each successive copy. In circumstances such as these, you may want to make a follow-up telephone call to be sure your fax is readable.

- Don't advertise over the fax unless the recipient has requested the information. Remember that you are using *their* paper and ink to print out *your* message.
- Don't assume that everyone will accept a fax if it is contractual or legal in nature. Some businesses will accept signed faxes, others will not. If your document is one that requires a notary public, witness, or proof of your identity, expect that a fax will not be acceptable.
- If the fax is urgent, either make a follow-up phone call to be sure the document was received, or put a notation on your coversheet that says, "**Urgent: Please call (your number) to confirm receipt of this document.**" Occasionally, documents may come out totally unreadable on the other end. Therefore, if you do not receive a confirmation call, follow-up with a phone call yourself.
- Either wait or check back for a confirmation on your fax to be sure that it went through. If you don't get a confirmation, you will need to resend it.
- You want to control how the information is presented. Offer to draft a document, contract, or agreement. That way, you know what's in it.
- When details could be misunderstood or will need to be referred to later. Examples: price lists, dates/times/locations, maps, agendas, meeting minutes, etc.
- You are documenting something such as disciplinary actions, accidents, errors, etc. If you feel that documentation of a conversation is required, title the paper "Memo to File" and record the subject, date and time of the conversation and who was involved, including yourself. Do not add personal opinions or observations that could be misconstrued or cannot be proven. Documented conversations can be used in court, so make them professional.
- It is an infrequent event. Examples include a first international shipment, bulk mailing, trauma conference, etc. This saves a lot of energy when it comes time to do it again. It also becomes a valuable reference in case the task is passed on to another.
- You want to cover yourself. If there is a possibility of a future misunderstanding, put it in writing. Examples include: room reservations, problem resolution, use of space agreements, etc.
- You want to have control over your message. You can write and edit until your communication says exactly what you want it to say.
- You want to think it over. Writing gives both readers and writers the time to think; there is less pressure to react immediately.
- You need to deliver the same message to a number of people. Writing can save you time and energy in this situation.
- You need action. A written communication has a better chance of being acted on than a spoken one. This can be particularly effective if you have had difficulty reaching the person over the telephone.
- If you are sending your "written" document in electronic form, you may want to consider password protecting the document so that details are not changed. When in doubt, send a piece of paper; then it will be immediately evident if anything in the document has been re-written.

When to Do What

One of the most puzzling questions that plague those new to business communication is deciphering which type of communication is the most appropriate to use in a given circumstance. You may wonder whether to write a memo or simply talk to the person. Some of this comes with experience and some of this comes with understanding a few basic rules of thumb.



Put it in writing when:

- Legal or other formal documentation is required. Example: A written warning to put in an employee's personnel file.
- A hard copy will eventually be required. Examples: Policies, guidelines, procedures, etc. You may as well start the ball rolling by producing a first draft. Be sure to mark all your documents clearly as a **draft**. Some companies will even use a watermark that says "draft." If you don't mark it as a draft, it may come back to haunt you. People may take your draft, copy it many times and distribute it as gospel.



You should probably talk, rather than write when:

- The message is complex, long, sensitive, personal, political, emotional, or easily misunderstood.
- The person reading your message may be angered.
- You've already written two or more memos/letters on the same subject.
- The reader will be totally unfamiliar with the language or subject matter.
- You don't want/need a written record of your interaction and a telephone call would be faster.
- The information is time-sensitive. You don't write a memo about "Subject: Building on Fire," you yell it out. Do the same thing for a crisis situation.
- You want to convey your caring or concern. Written communication cannot express the dimension added by your voice, face, and body language.
- The subject has a creative aspect which will be enhanced by personal interaction. You can't brainstorm by memo.
- There is some kind of compromise, course of action, or agreement that must be reached. The give and take involved in negotiation makes a face-to-face meeting the most appropriate. However, be sure to follow-up your conversation in writing by sending a copy of your understanding to the other person. Ask for a written commitment to the agreement once it is reached.
- Establishment or maintenance of personal rapport is essential in this circumstance (i.e., you can't network by memo either).

Cell Phones, PDAs, and Texting, Oh My!

Imagine you are teaching a small group of people how to order supplies on the computer and several students are busy surfing the internet and reading e-mail while you are talking. When it comes time to enter the orders they are not keeping up with the rest of the class and several students seem distracted by what they are doing.

Someone's pager goes off, another's cell phone goes off. People are circling the back of the room talking on their cell phones. Very distracting—very rude.

There are so many wonderful ways to stay connected these days that etiquette has become much more complicated. All the wonderful gadgets we carry keep us accessible but can be an annoyance to those around us. While these gadgets help keep us in the loop, they are a distraction to us, co-workers, and clients. If you are attending a class or meeting, turn your phone and pager off, if possible. If you cannot turn it off, then turn it to silent mode (vibrate) and have it immediately accessible to stop the buzzing right away. Only check e-mail, phone messages or your PDA during break time from classes or meetings. Leave the room for phone conversations.

The basic rule of thumb is when you are face to face with someone, be totally there with them. Don't have your attention pulled away from your interaction/listening by checking your gadgets—or worse yet, talking or typing while the other person is trying to talk. If you must accept a call, apologize and briefly respond to the interruption. Go into another room, if possible. Keep these interruptions to a minimum. If you are meeting with someone to talk about sensitive matters, turn everything off so you won't be interrupted.

It may be that there is a certain level of tolerance for use of these devices in your workplace, even in meetings. If so, be very careful about it. It could be that it's okay for the boss to do it but not you. When in doubt, ask what is acceptable. If you are going to a meeting or class, let your co-workers know that you will be unable to answer pages immediately. You may want to check to see if someone else can take those calls for you while you are away. You can also talk with co-workers about pages and develop a way to signify that the call must be answered immediately (such as dial in their number followed by *911).

Conclusion

Failing to recognize the proper use, rules, and etiquette of e-mail, letters, memos, and facsimiles can seriously impede your career movement, as well as diminish your credibility. This home study program was designed to help you understand the guidelines for business communication to help you get a leg up in the health care field.

Directions for Submitting Your Post Test for Contact Hours

To obtain a certificate of completion for this home study program, please complete the post-test on the next page.

HCMC, MVAMC & Regions Hospital Employees

If you are an employee of HCMC, MVAMC, or Regions Hospital, simply send the post-test to TCHP for processing.

Paid Participants

If you are not an employee of one of the TCHP hospitals, please send the post-test to TCHP with a check for \$5.00. Please make check payable to **Regions Hospital** and mail to:

TCHP Education Consortium
Capitol Office Building
525 Park Street, Suite 120
St. Paul, MN 55103

Your post-test will be returned to you with the certificate of completion.

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Business Communication Post-Test

Name _____

Date Completed _____

HCMC, MVAMC, or Regions Hospital employees:

Hospital _____ Unit _____

Paid Participants: _____
Street address

_____ City State Zipcode

- 1) Typing in all capitals is known as what in e-mail?
 - a) Bolding
 - b) Shouting
 - c) Cursing
- 2) The first sentence in the first paragraph of your memo should contain the main point of your communication.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 3) The last paragraph should tell the reader what action they should take, the results you expect, or gives thanks to the reader.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 4) Memos are often sent to people external to your organization.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 5) Your signature on a letter indicates that you have read the letter and approve of its contents.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 6) You should sign every letter that you write.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 7) The opening paragraph should contain the main point of your letter.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 8) Fax documents on white paper with a cover sheet.
 - a) Appropriate use of fax
 - b) Inappropriate use of fax

Match the following situations to the most appropriate communication (not all of the letters are used):

- a) Telephone call
 - b) Face-to-face meeting
 - c) Memo
 - d) Letter
 - e) Fax
 - f) E-mail
 - g) Draft
- 9) You just received notice that your sterile equipment supplier is on strike.
 - 10) Your organization has a clinic that would like a copy of the education schedule as soon as possible.
 - 11) The security department just called regarding a new procedure they would like everyone to follow when they need to enter the building after hours.
 - 12) You need to lay off an employee.



Evaluation: Business Communication

We'd appreciate it if you could take a moment to complete the evaluation for this program. Thank you!

1. Who do you work for? _____
2. How did you hear about this program?
 - brochure
 - co-worker
 - education department/clinical educator
 - TCHP website
 - Other _____

3. Were the objectives met?

| Objective | Was the objective met? | |
|--|------------------------|----|
| Describe the importance of the subject line in an e-mail message. | Yes | No |
| Describe situations that are inappropriate for e-mail. | Yes | No |
| List the basic elements that should be present in a memo. | Yes | No |
| List two advantages of using a memo versus sending an e-mail. | Yes | No |
| List the basic elements that should be present in a letter | Yes | No |
| List the basic elements that should be present in a facsimile (fax). | Yes | No |
| Describe a situation that is inappropriate for using a fax. | Yes | No |
| Differentiate between situations when it is better to talk or better to put it in writing. | Yes | No |

4. Would you recommend this program?
 - yes
 - no
5. Was this educational activity...
 - too long
 - too short
 - just right
6. I can use the information from this activity in my job.
 - strongly agree
 - agree
 - disagree
 - strongly disagree

7. The information was....
- easy to understand
 - difficult to understand