

# Writing and Communicating in Business

THIRD EDITION

J. Harold Janis

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**Writing and  
Communicating in  
Business** THIRD EDITION

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# Preface to the Third Edition

THIS edition, like its predecessors, is the distillation of my years of college teaching, my complementary experience as a professional writer for business, and my association with the communication training programs of many business and governmental organizations. I think this information is important to the reader, for it helps to explain the fusion of theory and practice that sets the tone for the book.

When the first edition of this work appeared, it marked a departure from contemporary textbooks on business writing in two ways. First, it treated writing as a form of business behavior; and, second, it broadened the conventional letters-and-reports regimen by bringing new variety and greater intellectual discipline to the basic business writing course. The present edition remains faithful to this concept even while it adapts to the climate of change. There is a new pragmatism in learning and an urgency about the need to sharpen language skills. There is also a fresh commitment to examine the nature and importance of communication in organizations. Happily, as the novelty of communication theory has settled into acceptance, the uses to which it can be put have emerged more clearly. As a result, the ties between rhetoric and communication have been strengthened, and students are showing a bread-and-butter interest in writing and speaking effectively.

What is there, then, in this new edition that can help? Briefly:

- a broad current view of communication within the organizational structure;
- a simplification of the material on the communication process;
- many new problems dealing with communication situations that students can easily identify with;
- new report assignments calling for library research on business subjects;
- the inclusion of a sample library paper to help the student with form and structure;
- a reorganization and infusion of material designed to make the instruction more concrete and better suited to the needs of the nonprofessional writer;
- the addition, in the early chapters, of discussion topics to stimulate thought, develop perspectives, and give the student informal opportunities to speak.

Along with these changes, many new examples and other learning features have been introduced. Among the latter are the section on “Getting Started” at the end of Chapter 1 and the graphic demonstration of methods of organizing data at the end of Chapter 8.

**Preface to the  
Third Edition**

And now, what has not changed? Mainly, it is the aim of equipping students for the writing tasks they inevitably face when they enter the business world. For this, their intelligence demands an explanation of the “why” of what they are asked to do; their energetic spirit requires that they take an active part in the communication experience, whether by writing, discussion, or stand-up speaking; and their interest must be fed by an instructional approach that takes them into the business environment and says, “This is the way it’s really done; emulate it, and improve on it if you can.”

This text serves those needs. Essentially, it treats the process, language, and practice of communication in organizations. Letters and reports remain the chief vehicles for student writing because they touch most closely on the experience of students and provide the best all-round introduction to communication problems. Still, the contributory roles of other media are shown, and the variety of writing challenges put to students remains at a high level. This diversity is evident in areas ranging from routine letters to job resumes, and it is especially noticeable in the chapters on reports and, later, in those dealing with persuasion, sales writing, and argument. The chapter on “Speech Communication” recognizes the complementary roles of speaking and writing.

Readers wanting to investigate further any of the aspects of communication treated in this text will find it useful to consult the list of “Selected Books for Reference,” following Chapter 16. The comprehensive “Manual of Style” closes the book. It supplies a needed reference in matters of English and mechanics. Conveniently placed inside the back cover are a key to the manual and a list of correction symbols.

J. H. J.

# Acknowledgments

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United States Life Insurance Company  
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# 1

# Communicating in Organizations

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Everywhere, Business Communication

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Classification by Medium

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External Uses

The Need for Effectiveness

The Basic Skills: Writing and Speaking

Writing and Speaking Compared

Developing Competence

The Rewards of Proficiency

Getting Started

Summary

Topics for Discussion

Problems

If our instant-picture camera works better than theirs, buyers ought to know why. Let's stress convenience and speed.

Please address this letter to Mr. Greystone of Dana Stores: "We welcome your inquiry about our No. 4 grade fiber doormats. . . ."

Senator Hastings tells us nobody can understand this tax form. Isn't there some way the IRS can put it into simple English?

I'm meeting the Pension Committee tomorrow. I must have my proposals ready for distribution and discussion.

Closing the Willamette office isn't going to be easy. What do we tell our workers? What do we tell the community?

**T**HE WORLD of business is a world of action. Products are designed, made, and sold. People are hired. Services are rendered. Policies are devised and implemented. Jobs are learned and performed. Yet there is no practical way in which any of these events can take place without communication.

Communication is the glue that binds the parts of the organization together; it is the open door through which information enters and leaves. Without communication, there can be no organization, and when communication stops, the organization ceases to function.

To most of us, communication is simply writing and speaking. In fact, communication is much more. An organization, for example, operates in an environment influenced by the state of the economy, competition, taxes, politics, public opinion, and government regulation. So, too, within the organization, individuals do their work in an atmosphere controlled by space and time,

status, management goals, supervisory discipline, and personal ambition. Communication by these individuals satisfies many needs, takes many forms, requires many skills, and entails many risks and rewards.

Complex? Yes. But not beyond understanding and mastery. So let's begin with an overview of the simpler and more visible aspects of communication, and then proceed to an examination of the role of communication in business and the qualities you will need most as you pursue your goals.

## **EVERYWHERE, BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

Business communication flourishes wherever business functions must be performed. It is not limited to business enterprises. The same needs for communication are felt and the same means are used in other types of organizations—government agencies, particularly, but also religious and charitable groups, schools and colleges, unions, foundations, museums, and fraternal, business, and trade associations. Private citizens, too, are business communicators, and everyone—the organization and the individual alike—is a receiver of business communications.

We live in a sea of communication. We find it on our doorsteps and in our mailboxes; it is blared over the radio, flashed on television screens, published in newspapers and magazines, enclosed in packages, and spread on boxes, bottles, and cans.

Business communication is the answer to our inquiry and the request to pay a bill. It is the soap coupon, the sale announcement, the charity solicitation, the mail-order catalog, the mortgage contract, the cheesemaker's recipe, and the "thank you" letter from the merchant who sold us our new suit.

As citizens and consumers, we personally contribute to the volume of business communication whenever we send an order, seek information, make a complaint, look for a job, or reserve a hotel room. We also become business communicators when we fill out an advertiser's coupon, enter a jingle contest, draw up a will, sign a lease, claim a tax refund, make application for credit, or report an accident to our insurance company.

In the office or factory, communication gains momentum. Let a sale be consummated, an article manufactured, an instruction given, a policy formulated, a trip taken, money borrowed, a dividend paid, an employee hired or fired—and someone must talk or write about it. The communication takes place in conversations, conferences, and meetings, and in letters, memorandums, reports, manuals, advertisements, press releases, business paper articles, legal documents, and records of all kinds.

We have mentioned the use of communication in public administration. Federal, state, and local governments are composed of innumerable departments, agencies, bureaus, and committees, and literally millions of employees here and abroad. It is hard to imagine activity of such dimensions without a torrent of messages to keep people and administrative units in touch with each other, to preserve and disseminate information, and to give citizens a necessary check on government activities. Big government also means addi-

tional checks on the activities of citizens and businesses. Hence there is a corresponding communication flow from business to government. A small army of accountants and lawyers, as well as hordes of executives and lesser employees, spend countless man-hours preparing the reports required by government and answering its inquiries.

## **KINDS OF COMMUNICATION**

The range of communication is perhaps the most clearly conveyed by an examination of the kinds that are employed. A number of classifications may be made.

### ***Classification by Audience***

Depending on the number of persons to whom the message is addressed, communication is *interpersonal*, *group*, or *mass*. Interpersonal communication is the contact between two individuals—for example, writer and reader, speaker and listener, worker and supervisor, salesperson and customer. A sociologist might say that in such communication there is a one-to-one relationship. Group communication involves a number of persons, each of whom retains his identity. The group may be small, as in the instance of the members of a work team or discussion group; or large, as in the instance of a theater audience, a trade convention, or a list of customers. Mass communication consists of messages to large numbers of people through such mass media as newspapers, radio, and television. In this kind of communication, the opportunities for individual identification and participation are minimal.

### ***Classification by Code***

Communication may also be classified as *verbal* or *nonverbal*. Writing and speaking use a verbal code, that is, words. Nonverbal communication consists of gestures, actions, pictures, forms of decoration, and other symbolic modes of expression excluding words. Thus one may communicate by manner of dress or grooming, by the thick pile on the office carpet, by a wink or handshake, by tone of voice, and by the promptness with which an appointment is kept. Too often communicators overlook these important influences on their effectiveness.

### ***Classification by Medium***

Another way of classifying communication is by reference to the medium employed. *Scribal media*, such as letters and reports, newspapers, magazines, catalogs, and other forms shown in Figure 1-1, communicate principally through the written word. *Aural media*, such as direct voice communication, the telephone, radio, and television, appeal partly or wholly to the ear. *Visual media*, such as pictures, live action, and television are received partly or wholly through the eye. Communication may also take place through the

## Communicating in Organizations

Abstracts	Job descriptions
Administrative orders	Laws and bylaws
Advertisements	Leaflets
Agenda	Legal briefs
Agreements	Letters
Announcements	Manuals
Annual reports	Market surveys
Applications	Memorandums
Arbitration findings	Minutes
Attitude surveys	
	Orders and order forms
Bill enclosures	Package copy
Billboards	Performance appraisals
Booklets	Plans
Bulletins	Policy statements
Business articles	Position papers
Business and financial news	Posters
	Press releases
Catalogs	Procedures
Certificates	Programs
Charts	Proposals
Circulars	Prospectuses
Citations	
Claims	Questionnaires
Collection notices	
Commemorative literature	Radio and television commercials
Complaints	Reading rack literature
Contracts	Recommendations
Coupons	Recruitment literature
Credit forms and letters	References
	Replies to inquiries
Data sheets	Reports
Direct-mail advertising	Requisitions
Directives	Research studies
Directories	Resolutions
Dividend notices	Resumes
Educational literature	Sales presentations
Employee publications	Schedules
Estimates	Signs
	Specifications
Fact sheets	Speeches
Financial analyses	Stockholder communications
Fliers	Suggestions
	Summaries
Goodwill literature	Surveys
Handbills	Tags and labels
Handbooks	Technical papers
Handouts	Telegrams
House organs	Training aids
Inquiries	Wills
Instructions	
Introductions	
Invitations	

FIG. 1-1. What business writing includes (a partial list).

sense of *touch* (tactile communication), *smell* (olfactory communication), and *taste*.<sup>1</sup>

As the descriptions indicate, there is considerable overlapping of the media classifications. A letter or report, though consisting mainly of words, may also appeal to the eye through the letterhead, page layouts, use of charts, and so on. Newspapers and magazines are visual to an even greater extent. Television, motion pictures, and live presentations have a divided aural and visual appeal. Messages sent by telephone, radio, and audio records and tapes can be received only through the ear.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL USES OF COMMUNICATION**

Because it is so pervasive, business communication cannot easily be separated from the other activities of which it is a part. On the management level, communication enters into every movement and decision. Communication is also predominant in supervisory and clerical jobs, where reading, writing or dictating, and talking may take up most of the working day. On all levels of authority and however it is practiced in the organization, communication may be viewed functionally as either internal or external (Figure 1-2).

### ***Internal Uses***

When directed to persons within the same organization, communication serves these main purposes:

1. *To keep management informed.* Reports, written and oral, travel up the organizational ladder from workers and supervisors to executives or horizontally from one section or department to another. They are designed principally to give the responsible persons the information they need for making decisions and carrying them out. The reports may deal with financial data, technical developments, production, sales, personnel problems, and similar subjects. Much of the information is obtained with the aid of computers. Management receives other information through procedures set up to receive employees' suggestions and grievances, and through such informal means as casual conversation, hearsay, and rumor.

2. *To coordinate organizational activity.* The interdependence of functions in the organization has already been noted. Through conferences and meetings, members of the management team discuss issues and suggest or formulate policies. When decisions are made, they are transmitted to the various parts of the organization through memorandums, directives, and briefings, and discussed in private conversations and meetings. The purpose is to promote efficiency through informed and united effort.

3. *To instruct workers.* It takes a great deal of communication to keep employees abreast of changes in work rules and to train them to deal with new conditions and job requirements. Labor turnover and the influx of new employees add to the problem. Instructional methods include manuals, charts

<sup>1</sup> To distinguish the class of medium from particular newspapers or magazines, or radio or television stations, the latter are often referred to as *vehicles*.

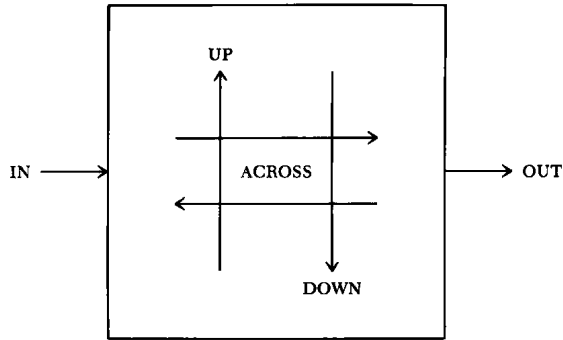


FIG. 1-2. *Communication flow in the organization.*

and worksheets, meetings, and both classroom and on-the-job instruction. The use of motion pictures and videotape is common.

4. *To maintain and improve morale.* Pay and working conditions are also the subject of much communication. Questions relating to these issues are treated through salary and promotion reviews, personal counseling, suggestion systems, and grievance procedures. Still other means are used to help workers develop pride in their jobs and in the company. This part of the program usually depends mainly on keeping employees informed about all aspects of their jobs and their company through bulletin boards, company magazines, annual reports, "family days," plant tours, and direct communications to the workers through letters, meetings, and public address systems.

### ***External Uses***

When directed outside the organization, communication has these principal tasks:

1. *To move goods and services.* Personal selling is done in retail stores, by telephone, and by salespersons who call on prospective customers at their homes or places of business. Sales are also made or assisted by mail solicitation, and advertising in newspapers, magazines, and other media. Both oral and written communication is also used to perform such peripheral functions as instructing in the use of a product, extending credit, collecting payment, and adjusting complaints.

2. *To obtain goods and services.* All organizations, whether commercial enterprises or not, spend much of their energies and resources for the necessities of their existence. Among their needs are not only land, buildings, machines, and supplies, but also personnel and professional services, furniture and decorations, food and catering services, advertising, and financing. Contracting for these needs requires some writing, whether in the form of requisitions, bid solicitations, inquiries, formal contracts, or follow-up correspondence, as well as considerable contact in person and by telephone.

3. *To educate and inform.* An important function of the organization is to apprise people of its interests, objectives, and activities. In this way it hopes to create a favorable public climate in which to operate. Public relations, as

the work is called, is the function of every member of the organization and of every department. The public relations department, where one exists, is usually the coordinating agency. Among other duties, it seeks out news of the organization, puts it in writing, and routes it to news media. Many articles in newspapers and magazines are based on material provided in press releases. The public relations program may also sponsor conducted tours of the factory or headquarters building, the loan of company-made educational films, and a speakers' bureau through which company executives are recruited to speak before social and civic groups.

4. *To communicate with stockholders and the government.* Stockholders are a numerous and important force and must receive regular reports regarding financial conditions and operations. Government agencies, too, require many different types of reports ranging from stock registration prospectuses to reports of accidents and potential health hazards. Many companies also have representatives in Washington and in state capitals to inform them of pending legislation and the possible effects on company operations. The same representatives may also serve as lobbyists in promoting their companies' legislative interests.

## **THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVENESS**

With the great volume and utility of communication, new ways are constantly being sought to make it more effective. Greater effectiveness means not only better response, but also a better coordination of communication with the aims of the organization and greater adaptability to change. The need for effectiveness arises especially from these conditions:

1. *Communication's key role in decision making.* Because of the size and complexity of modern organizations and the availability of sophisticated mathematical tools, there is a tendency toward central decision making. The trend is consistent with the view of business as a "system" comprising a number of interdependent functions, none of which can be manipulated without causing consequences to the others. It follows that successful operation of the system depends on a reliable inflow of information to the decision centers and a corresponding outflow of messages to the points at which the decisions must be carried out. Vital to the process is the regulation of the quantity, quality, distribution, and cost of communication within the organization. Since the internal environment is essentially a social one, management must also provide an atmosphere in which people can work harmoniously and efficiently.

2. *Communications's "workhorse" status.* Apart from the purely philosophical considerations that guide management, every organization has mundane work to do, such as financing, buying, hiring, producing, supervising, and selling. These operations involve the use of many kinds of messages and a good deal of exposition and persuasion. Good communication saves time, prevents mistakes, and promotes the objectives of the organization with the least cost and the greatest results. Poor communication defeats those objectives. An example will serve to illustrate the point.



When a policyholder of a large insurance company wrote to cancel his policy, he received a reply that read:

Dear Mr. Blaine:

Surrender of the policy is permissible only within the days attendant the grace period on compliance with the citation relevant options accruing to the policy. We are estopped from acquiescing to a surrender prior to the policy's anniversary date. We are confident that an investigation relevant to the incorporation of this feature will substantiate that the policy is not at variance with policies of other companies.

Yours truly,

The policyholder's reply was much clearer than the letter of the insurance company. He wrote:

Gentlemen:

I'm sorry but I don't understand your letter. If you will explain what you mean I will try to do what you ask.

Yours truly,

Obviously, if the insurance company had written a better letter in the first place, further correspondence would have been unnecessary. As it was, the customer was annoyed, and time and money were wasted—hardly, a satisfactory way to run a business.

3. *Demands of the new media.* In recent years technology has provided great new aids to communication, but not without a price. The computer, for example, is a revolutionary tool in processing quantitative data, but it has not relieved human communicators of performing such data-related functions as selecting, evaluating, deciding, informing, and persuading. In fact, the lightning speed of the computer and the volume of work it can process result in enormous increases in the amounts of data that human communicators must interpret and put to work. Since human communication is, at best, an uncertain and underdeveloped art, the pressure grows for improved performance.

In other ways, too, business is immersed in communication technology. The revolutionary changes in mass communications—including advertising—by motion pictures, radio, and television are an old story. Once office communication was similarly revolutionized by the typewriter, telephone, and dictating machine. But now typewriters are being linked to computer adjuncts to make typing faster and more efficient. The result is a new concept in office communications—"word processing." Meanwhile, messages are being duplicated with increasing fidelity and speed on machines that make every office its own printing house. Such a flowering of communication technology must inevitably have its consequences. Thus the proliferation of paper not only increases