

# Planning Business Messages

## Analyzing the Purpose and the Audience

**The primary purpose of most business messages is to inform or to persuade; the secondary purpose is to promote goodwill.**

## Identifying Your Purpose

Identify your purpose.

Why are you writing?  
What do you hope to achieve?

## Selecting the Best Channel

After identifying the purpose of your message, you need to select the most appropriate communication channel. Some information is most efficiently and effectively delivered orally. Other messages should be written, and still others are best delivered electronically. Whether to set up a meeting, send a message by e-mail, or write a report depends on some of the following factors:

- Importance of the message
- Amount and speed of feedback and interactivity required
- Necessity of a permanent record
- Cost of the channel
- Degree of formality desired
- Confidentiality and sensitivity of the message

An interesting theory, called media richness, describes the extent to which a channel or medium recreates or represents all the information available in the original message. A richer medium, such as face-to-face conversation, permits more interactivity and feedback. A leaner medium, such as a report or proposal, presents a flat, one-dimensional message. Richer media enable the sender to provide more verbal and visual cues, as well as allow the sender to tailor the message to the audience.

Many factors help you decide which of the channels shown in Figure 2.2 is most appropriate for delivering a workplace message.

**Choosing an appropriate channel depends on the importance of the message, the feedback required, the need for a permanent record, the cost, and the degree of formality, confidentiality, and sensitivity needed.**



"I sent you an e-mail and forwarded a copy to your PDA, cell phone, and home computer. I also faxed a copy to your office, your assistant, and laptop. Then I snail-mailed hard copies to you on paper, floppy, and CD. But in case you don't receive it, I'll just tell you what it said..."

**FIGURE 2.2** Choosing Communication Channels

Channel	Best Use
Blog	When one person needs to present digital information easily so that it is available to others.
E-mail	When you need feedback but not immediately. Lack of security makes it problematic for personal, emotional, or private messages.
Face-to-face conversation	When you need a rich, interactive medium. Useful for persuasive, bad-news, and personal messages.
Face-to-face group meeting	When group decisions and consensus are important. Inefficient for merely distributing information.
Fax	When your message must cross time zones or international boundaries, when a written record is significant, or when speed is important.
Instant message	When you are online and need a quick response. Useful for learning whether someone is available for a phone conversation.
Letter	When a written record or formality is required, especially with customers, the government, suppliers, or others outside an organization.
Memo	When you want a written record to clearly explain policies, discuss procedures, or collect information within an organization.
Phone call	When you need to deliver or gather information quickly, when nonverbal cues are unimportant, and when you cannot meet in person.
Report or proposal	When you are delivering considerable data internally or externally.
Voice mail message	When you wish to leave important or routine information that the receiver can respond to when convenient.
Video- or teleconference	When group consensus and interaction are important but members are geographically dispersed.
Wiki	When digital information must be made available to others. Useful for collaboration because participants can easily add, remove, and edit content.

## Media Advantages And Disadvantages

MEDIA	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<b>Oral</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunity for immediate feedback</li> <li>• Allow a certain ease of interaction</li> <li>• Involve rich nonverbal cues (both physical gesture and vocal inflection)</li> <li>• Allow you to express the emotion behind your message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrict participation to those physically present</li> <li>• Unless recorded, provide no permanent, verifiable record of the communication</li> <li>• Reduce communicator's control over the message</li> <li>• Other than for messages that are prewritten and rehearsed, offer no opportunity to revise or edit your spoken words</li> </ul>
<b>Written</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow you to plan and control your message</li> <li>• Reach geographically dispersed audiences</li> <li>• Offer a permanent, verifiable record</li> <li>• Minimize the distortion that can accompany oral messages</li> <li>• Can be used to avoid immediate interactions</li> <li>• De-emphasize any inappropriate emotional components</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually not conducive to speedy feedback</li> <li>• Lack the rich nonverbal cues provided by oral media</li> <li>• Often take more time and more resources to create and distribute</li> <li>• Elaborate printed documents can require special skills in preparation and production</li> </ul>
<b>Visual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can convey complex ideas and relationships quickly</li> <li>• Often less intimidating than long blocks of text</li> <li>• Can reduce the burden on the audience to figure out how the pieces fit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can require artistic skills to design</li> <li>• Require some technical skills to create</li> <li>• Can require more time to create than equivalent amount of text</li> <li>• More difficult to transmit and store than simple textual messages</li> </ul>
<b>Electronic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver messages quickly</li> <li>• Reach geographically dispersed audiences</li> <li>• Offer the persuasive power of multimedia formats</li> <li>• Can increase accessibility and openness in an organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are easy to overuse (sending too many messages to too many recipients)</li> <li>• Privacy risks and concerns (exposing confidential data; employer monitoring of e-mail and IM; accidental forwarding)</li> <li>• Security risks (viruses; spyware)</li> <li>• Productivity concerns (frequent interruptions; nonbusiness web surfing)</li> </ul>



## Anticipating the Audience

A good writer anticipates the audience for a message: What is the reader or listener like? How will that person react to the message?  
By profiling your audience and shaping a message to respond to that profile, you are more likely to achieve your communication goals.

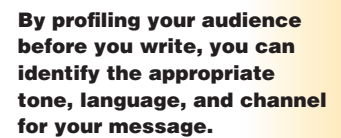
### Profiling the Audience

#### Primary Audience

Who is the primary reader?  
What are my personal and professional relationships with that person?  
What does the person know about the subject?  
What kind of response should I expect?

#### Secondary Audience

Who else might see or hear this message?  
Are they different from the primary audience?  
How must I reshape the message for the secondary audience?



**By profiling your audience before you write, you can identify the appropriate tone, language, and channel for your message.**

### Responding to the Profile

**After profiling the audience, you can decide whether the receiver will be neutral, positive, or hostile toward your message.**