

Concision

Concise communication saves time and makes it easier for the audience to understand and process a message.

Effective business communication differs significantly from academic communication.

ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION

- demonstrates knowledge
- usually stands alone
- often uses an informative style

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

- gets work done – either the sender's, or someone else's
- often is part of a chain of communication
- often uses a persuasive style

Business communication must be concise to be effective.

As a business communicator, there are other reasons why you will benefit from learning to communicate concisely:

- **Verbose, cluttered communicators often lose credibility.** They don't appear to be clear thinkers with a good understanding of their topic.
- **Many people tune out rambling communication.** They don't have time to do the work of sifting through extraneous words for key points. They have short attention spans. They are overloaded with information.
- **Overcommunicating can be career limiting.** Sometimes wordy people aren't invited to meetings or aren't given critical writing assignments.

WHAT IS CONCISION?

Concision is **NOT** a synonym for brevity. Concision focuses content rather than simply cutting it. A long memo may be concise if it is:

Uncluttered:

Free of extraneous ideas, paragraphs, sentences, clauses, phrases and words are removed without sacrificing clarity or necessary details.

Simple:

Uses simple words and sentence structures.

Sufficient:

Includes enough relevant information for the audience to act.

Prepare to be Concise.

Decide to be concise and make a plan. Concision isn't simply part of the editing process. It is a mindset that should affect how you approach each section of the [Communication Development Strategy](#).

KNOW YOUR CONTENT/KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

You've learned that successful business communication relies on sufficient preparation. The starting point of our Communication Development Strategy is *Know Your Content, Know Your Audience*. This first step is critical to successful concision. Why?

- Knowing your content well can make it difficult to understand what the audience doesn't know or understand, and therefore needs to be told.
- It's easy to be passionate about your topic when you're the expert, which means you may have trouble letting go of details the audience doesn't need.

The first step in preparing to be concise is to “de-center.” Don't focus on what *you want* to tell your audience; focus on what *they need* to know.

- If the audience is knowledgeable about your topic, don't waste their time on what they already know. Address new information, new insights, or what you want them to do.
- If the audience is not knowledgeable about your topic, provide information essential to understanding – no more, no less.

Spend some time on audience analysis: what's in it for them, what “language” do they speak, what is their attitude toward your topic, etc. Use this analysis to decide what to include in your message and what to let go.

PURPOSE/OUTCOME

The next step of our Communication Development Strategy is to *Define Your Purpose* for the communication. In other words, what outcome do you want to achieve by communicating your message?

Summarize your purpose into 1-2 sentences – no more! If you can't describe your purpose in 1-2 sentences, chances are that it is not clear in your own mind. This lack of clarity will be apparent to your audience. Once you are successful, use your purpose statement as another tool for deciding what to include and what to let go. Prune any ideas, paragraphs or sentences that don't help your audience get to your goal.

STRUCTURE

The third step of the Communication Development Strategy is *Strategy/Structure*. A concise message flows logically and directly to the conclusion, without distracting, extraneous ideas and information.

Discipline yourself to create an outline as the starting point to drafting your message, be it written or spoken. It will help you develop the habit of thinking and communicating with clarity.

- Start with **the body**. Using your purpose statement as your guide, jot down the key points you need to achieve your desired outcome. Do they flow logically, with no missing ideas or tangents?
- Next, outline **the conclusion**. The first bullet of your conclusion outline should summarize or synthesize your key points. Your next bullet is a call to action.
- Finally, outline **the introduction**. You'll need a bullet each for (1) how you will grab the audience's attention, (2) establish your ethos, (3) communicate your purpose, and (4) provide a roadmap (preview) of the message to follow. Now figure out how you can combine those bullets into 2-3 concise sentences.

You may think that outlining adds time to creating your message. In fact, outlining will save you time. Have you ever discovered when editing a memo or draft of a presentation that the final piece isn't clear or doesn't achieve your desired outcome? For most people, it's difficult to delete sentences that they painstakingly wrote, but that don't work. It's also time consuming to edit a logical flow into a drafted message that isn't logically organized.

DELIVER CONCISELY

If you follow these communication preparation steps with concision in mind, you will greatly enhance your ability to create a focused message that achieves your goals. However, there are many more decisions to make at the sentence, phrase and word levels to make your message concise. The bottom line: Keep it simple. Use simple words and sentences.

COMMON OBSTACLES TO CONCISION ARE:

Passive Voice

Filler words/phrases

Compound sentences

Overly formal language

Unnecessary modifiers

Long or obscure words

Some people fear they won't sound intelligent if they communicate simply. Remember, your goal as a business communicator is to be understood quickly and correctly. Communicating complex ideas with concision is not easy!

Concision takes skill.

Concision takes preparation.

Concision takes practice.

The Wharton Undergraduate Communication Program helps students develop fundamental business communication skills that are critical to long-term success.