I. What is Effective Professional Communication?

The Three Laws of Professional Communication

It may be helpful to first identify how effective professional communication is defined and explore ways you can effectively communicate on the job.

In his informative article on effective professional communication entitled “The Three Laws of Professional Communication,” Jean-Luc Doumont concludes that whether you are communicating orally, in writing, or through a visual presentation (like a PowerPoint), your goal is to “get your message across” (2002, para. 7).


In order to do that, Dumont concludes, you need to adhere to three important “laws” or rules:

1. Adapt to your audience
2. Maximize the signal to noise ratio

1. Adapt To Your Audience: In many ways, Dumont’s article applies to any and all writing. All writing should focus on communicating a message effectively and should address the needs of the audience. Writing on the job, however, seems to require a specific awareness of the needs of the person or people to whom you are writing. Time constraints in the business world, for example, may require you to be as succinct and concise as possible when writing an email to your supervisor or employees. You should always focus your writing on the specific issue at hand, not allowing distracting or possibly irrelevant details to interfere with the main point.

It may also to help to remember that when you write on the job, your audience may be either internal, external, or international, depending on who that audience is, your message, and the way you convey that message may change. An INTERNAL AUDIENCE is considered to be someone within a particular business or organization, such as an employee or a supervisor. An EXTERNAL AUDIENCE would be someone like a customer who is outside the company or organization. The language you use and the information you include in a document will be determined by that audience. Writing to an
audience unfamiliar with your product would be different than writing to someone in your company who knows your product.

It is also important to recognize that often times you may be writing to an INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE, particularly if you sell a product or offer a service or your company is multinational. Writing to an INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE can be particularly challenging because this audience might consist of any number of people from various cultures, and each may have its own way of expressing ideas or doing business.

Whether your audience is internal, external, or international, you do always need to think of all the writing you do in the professional arena as being “you-centered” or audience centered. You must think about your audience. What do they know and need to know? What language and format will best or most effectively convey the information to them or persuade them to your point of view?

For more information on this you-centered concept of writing in the professional arena, please review this presentation:

http://prezi.com/bouvwpn454s8/you-centered-writing/

2. Maximize the Signal to Noise Ratio: Dumont also argues that when you write, you want to avoid anything that interferes with your audience’s receiving and understanding your message. You want to avoid what he calls “noise” or “disturbances” (2002). Using slang or regional dialect in a document that helps your audience to assemble a product you produce will, for example, confuse many audiences or distract them from your message. If you use distracting, bright colors in a PowerPoint presentation or if your PowerPoint presentation has too many transitions between slides, that will create “noise” that may prevent your audience from focusing on your ideas. If you are writing a memorandum to your employees and your goal is to inform them about a change in their work hour or insurance coverage, staying focused on that one particular issue and making sure your message is clear, succinct and focused on that one issue (your message) will ensure that they are not distracted by noise (2002).

3. Use Effective Redundancy: In this recommendation, Dumont is not suggesting that you simply repeat yourself. Instead, he is arguing that in order to make sure your audience receives, understands, and processes your information, you may need to reinforce information:
An oral presentation can usefully include a preview, to outline the upcoming structure, and a review, to recap the main points before concluding. Moreover, messages can be both stated by the speaker and illustrated on slides. A written document can similarly include an abstract or executive summary, telling the whole story again, yet with a different point of view or level of detail. It can also reveal its structure through the page layout, the set of headings, and the preview paragraphs. A graph can convey the same information through both shape, color, and label, as in a stop sign. (2002, para. 4)

Now that you have read about these three important laws of effective professional communication, apply what you have learned by completing the following activities.

**Activity: Imagine a Situation**  
http://extmedia.kaplan.edu/genEd/Media/CM107/CM107_1405C/CM107_Imagine_A_Situation/quiz.html

Now read the following KU Writing Center information on writing a memo or memorandum:

KUWC Writing a Memo:  
https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/WritingTypesAndTools/WritingMemo.aspx

**Activity: Review a Document**  

**II. Writing an Executive Summary**

An Executive Summary is a professional document aimed at both conveying information and making recommendations within a company. An employee might, for example, attend a conference at the company’s expense and then write a summary of what he or she learned during the conference, examining the benefits of the information to the company itself. An employee might also be asked to review a long, complex document explaining a particular concept and then to summarize that information in a brief report to a relevant audience within a company. He might, for example, be asked, if he works in HR, to review a lengthy report on a new strategy for evaluating employee performance. The summary of this report might be written to other members of the HR team and management, with an analysis of how this new strategy might be beneficial and implemented in this company to save time and money and improve employee performance.

In general, an executive summary should be brief, usually about 10–15 percent as long as the original document, should concisely explain the main points of the original document so that the audience reading the Executive Summary will understand the ideas without having to refer to the original document, and will consider the audience reading the Executive Summary--what do they most need to know about this topic, given their specific situation. An Executive Summary should not simply cut
and paste quotes from the original document. That is not summarizing and would require the audience of the Executive Summary to have to interpret that information. That is the job of the writer of the Executive Summary instead.

Often times, the original document may make recommendations. For example, it may suggest that this new HR strategy is a cost-savings measure. If you are writing an Executive Summary, you may need to summarize briefly why the author thinks this is so.

You will often be asked to explore the implications of this information, for your particular company and employees. This will require you to use your own critical thinking skills, as well as the ability to assess your company's situation.

Obviously, your ability to read a document analytically and summarize material in that document is extremely important to the success of an Executive Summary, so be sure to review the Writing Center's information on analytical reading and writing effective summaries below:

KUWC Analytical Reading:
https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/Information%20Literacy/AnalyticalReading.aspx

Activity: KUWC Summarizing
http://extmedia.kaplan.edu/genEd/Media/CM107/CM107_1405C/CM107_Writing_an_Executive_Summary/CM107_Writing_an_Executive_Summary/quiz.html

III. Writing Other Professional Documents

The following KU Writing Center documents provide you with examples of many of the types of documents you will probably write on the job. This is not an all-inclusive list. The Writing Center also has information on how to write effective job application letters, resumes, portfolios and business plans as well.

KUWC Writing Business Letters:
https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/WritingTypesAndTools/WritingBusinessLetters.aspx

KUWC Writing an E-mail:
https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/WritingTypesAndTools/WritingEmails.aspx

KUWC Creating an Effective PowerPoint Presentations:
https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibr
Now that you have learned what an Academic Essay is and have reviewed and practiced the early stages of the Writing Process, complete the Unit 9 Quiz to earn your Activities credit. Then begin your work in the Unit 9 Discussion Board.