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2 CREATING MEANINGFUL MESSAGES: INFORMING, PERSUADING, AND SHARING IDEAS AT WORK

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to:

2.1 Assess your purpose and goals when crafting meaningful messages.

2.2 Describe your means of persuasion and how they affect messaging.

2.3 Explore the role of audience in crafting persuasive workplace messages.

2.4 Learn how to create messages with representation and value.

2.5 Examine the role of ethics in persuasion and workplace culture.

THEIR STORY, MICA MCGRIGGS, PHD

Mica McGriggs knows a thing or two about creating meaningful messages.

In her work as an anti-racist educator and a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) consultant, McGriggs often finds herself engaging in tense conversations with people—whether she is in person, online, in meetings, or giving presentations. Because of the nature of her work, McGriggs knows how specific and attentive she needs to be with any message, regardless of the mode of communication. She has learned throughout her career that the needs of humans (or, for our purposes, "audiences") are an essential component of any effective message.

As she communicates, her messaging is first and foremost audience driven, but even with this audience-centered approach, sometimes her message is not as effective as she would like it to be. She says cross-cultural conversations about racism are "by far the most difficult to discuss in the workplace."

This difficulty doesn't mean she changes her message to make people feel more comfortable. "I want people to experience discomfort because discomfort is essential to growth; however, I don't want people to shut down or, worse, respond violently."

McGriggs knows that what she has to offer is essential to create a more equitable and effective workplace culture, so she sticks by her core values and her message, adapting instead the delivery method or the delivery itself. Her core values—sincerity, empathy, dialogue, and clarity—prompt her to approach interactions purposefully. Her mantra becomes: "Clear is kind. Transparency and consistency build trust." With those values in mind, she conveys her message and stays true to her ethics and values.

McGriggs's audience-centered approach also affects communication in her personal and professional associations. In her interactions with colleagues and clients, she works hard to cultivate personal relationships with them first because "interpersonal trust is the cornerstone of effective dialogue."

Her understanding of audience-centered communication came initially from her work as a practicing clinician focused on issues of mental health within marginalized populations. When she first engaged in these discussions professionally, McGriggs quickly learned that "personalizing your message humanizes the subject" or is made meaningful when it is tailored to a specific audience and is done with empathy and ethics.

In her written communication, McGriggs writes with primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences in mind. For example, she writes her in-session therapy notes with the understanding that "the patient might read them, the courts might read them, and other clinicians might read them." She purposely cultivates that same strategy to the messaging she does

in DEI work. Throughout all her communication—media messages, workplace sessions, and private therapy work—she thinks about how the person on the listening end affects what she wants to say and how she will say it. McGriggs continually thinks about audience because she is often a spokesperson for an organization: "Every message sent could be read individually, in community, and/or publicly."

To keep her communication grounded in her own boundaries and ethics, McGriggs asks herself this essential question with each piece of communication she touches: "Does this decision or plan, this strategy or message, this conversation . . . Does this move us toward our collective liberation?" If the answer is yes, then McGriggs begins the conversation.

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INTRODUCTION

In any workplace, from a small, local business with three employees to a large, multinational corporation, you will need to know how to create a variety of messages for different situations, contexts, and audiences. You will need to understand how your communication's purpose affects your messaging and your mode of communication. You will also need to carefully consider your audience's needs along with the available means of persuasion at your disposal.

If now you're thinking, *Creating meaningful messages requires a level of analysis and nuance that I might not ever be prepared to deliver!*, do not despair. All these skills can be learned, and each of them can be implemented. Although this may seem like a daunting way of looking at communication, it will actually help you become a more efficient and effective professional communicator overall.

In this chapter, we'll help you think about workplace messaging as a system of gathering information and presenting that information effectively. Once you develop these messaging muscles (through time and application), you'll be able to flex them whenever the need arises.

PERSUASIVE WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION: ASSESSING PURPOSE AND GOALS

As a professional communicator, your primary goal is to make your messages accessible, easy to understand, and feasible to implement. Doing all of these things takes quite a bit of work on your end. That is to say, easy reading is hard writing. You must be willing to take the time to craft a message for a specific audience at a particular time. This means you will need to assess the "available means of persuasion"[1] along with the rhetorical constraints and context of any given situation.

Essentially, to be persuasive (to get people on board), you will need to be something of a detective—gathering information about your intended audience, their needs and desires, and then cultivating your best messaging around a particular *rhetorical situation*. Oftentimes "persuasion" can be confused with "manipulation," but by the end of this chapter, you will better understand the distinct differences between the two and know how to create ethical, persuasive communication in any workplace context.

Throughout this chapter we will break down how to analyze the different pieces of meaningful workplace communication and leave you with some tangible ways to craft these types of messages going forward.

Assessing the Rhetorical Situation

First, let's start by defining the terms "rhetoric" and the "rhetorical situation."

Rhetoric was defined by Aristotle as "the available means of persuasion." More specifically, Aristotle, in his meandering way of speaking, described someone with expertise in rhetoric as possessing "an ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion."[2] This means the *ability* to *choose* the most effective "available means of persuasion" is the golden skill, not necessarily the rhetoric itself.

Expanding upon Aristotle's quintessential definition, scholars and communicators continually expand definitions of "rhetoric" to encompass more nuanced realities from a variety of communities and cultural viewpoints. For example, writing scholar Sheila Lorraine Carter-Tod reimagines rhetoric as a "shared," "participatory" experience between a pastor and a congregation within a Black church community. Here, she defines rhetoric as "an awareness of language as rhythmic, sonorous, with persuasion being woven in narrative."[3] Her expansion of Aristotle's term provides a richness that expands the idea of persuasion beyond the language we use.

Richness of Rhetoric

To understand the richness of rhetoric, let's try an example. Imagine you are a chef in a fledgling restaurant. You are low on ingredients, but the night isn't over yet. In fact, you have a food critic at Table 4, and she wants something new and fresh—chef's choice. In your kitchen, the "available means of persuasion" are the disparate ingredients in the restaurant's pantry. As the experienced chef you are, you can assess and select the sparse, seemingly unconnected ingredients (the available means) and create a marvelous dish that is unexpected and well received. Thus, the skill displayed is in your ability to choose the ingredients and put them together into a complex *dish* (the persuasive communication or rhetoric) that becomes successful in this particular case.

Because you are *that* kind of chef, you also select a warming plate that best keeps your dish at its perfect temperature, and you choose the silverware that effectively complements the culinary presentation. Upon delivering the exquisite meal to the critic, you will explain the dish to the food critic, helping them appreciate and make sense of the meal before they consume it.

In essence, Aristotle might say you have demonstrated "an ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion." It seems you also incorporated an "awareness of rhythmic, sonorous" persuasion as you prepared your specialty dish as your communication or your rhetoric.[4] Preparing a bit of communication is much like preparing a specialty dish for a food critic: we have a message we need to communicate, and we have available means—words, punctuation, colors, visuals, organization, style, sentence structure, medium, and so on—from which we can create our customized message.

Now, let's explore the term "rhetorical situation."

A **rhetorical situation** can be understood as a combination of timing, relevance, purpose, and audience, but any given situation encompasses much more than merely those factors. Thus a rhetorical situation is the *context* within which a piece of communication is created—a communication that is "understood best when analyzed within its historical moment with its surrounding factors."[5] Renowned rhetorician and scholar Lloyd F. Bitzer coined and defined the term

"rhetorical situation" in his seminal essay titled, you guessed it, "The Rhetorical Situation."[6] In this essay, he claimed:

> Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.[7]

Crystal clear, right? Here's what you need to know to think about workplace communication in terms of a rhetorical situation: Every piece of communication is constrained by factors we can control, factors we can somewhat control, and factors we cannot control. Our ability to assess those factors and turn them into an effective message is a skill you can develop. Thus, the rhetorical situation is the context in which we communicate, which includes our audience, the timing of the message, the location, the medium, and many other factors.

For instance, in the cooking metaphor, the rhetorical situation is the context in which you created and served the dish. You took into account the audience (the food critic), the available means of persuasion (your ingredients on hand), the timing, and probably a dozen other situational factors that affected your cooking. Maybe the supplier who brings in fresh fish was delayed, so you had to make do with frozen fish. Perhaps the usual utensils you prefer were dirty, and so you made do with other kitchen tools. Your breakdown of controllable factors might look something like Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1 ■ Controllable Factors

Controllable	Somewhat controllable	Uncontrollable
You, the chef	The audience (food critic)	Also, the audience (food critic)
The kitchen, your cooking tools, your appliances	Ingredients	Unexpected guests
Timing	Timing	Unexpected delays

As you can see, factors can quickly switch from controllable to uncontrollable depending upon context and timing. Similar to cooking a dish with specific ingredients, crafting meaningful messages—especially in a workplace setting—requires a careful, deliberate assessment of the rhetorical situation surrounding your communication. In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss how to analyze a rhetorical situation for purpose, audience, available means of persuasion, and ethics.

Defining Our Communication's Purpose

Although we have used the definition of rhetoric mostly in terms of persuasion, within the last 60 years, communication scholars have expanded the definition of rhetoric to be more than *only* persuasion. Rhetorician and theorist Kenneth Burke argued that rhetoric could be seen as the ways in which people identify with one another.[8] Rhetoric, then, becomes a set of methods people use to communicate with and understand one another.

Throughout this chapter, we will refer to communication as discussed in Chapter 1: as functioning within a communication feedback loop composed of senders and receivers. This broad definition of communication, along with an expanded understanding of rhetoric as more than persuasion, means we have multiple audiences with multiple purposes within any given rhetorical situation.

So how do we account for these factors in our messaging? And how do we determine purpose in relation to audience?

Purpose of the Communication

Before you begin creating your message, go through this simple exercise:

1. Using the template provided, fill in the first blank for this sentence by choosing one of the function words listed in the Table 2.2.
2. Then choose an action word from Table 2.2 to fill in the second blank.
3. Choose a brief (2–3 word) description of your topic to fill in the final blank.

TABLE 2.2 ■ List of function and action words

FUNCTION WORDS	ACTION WORDS
Inform	Make a decision
Persuade	Take action
Educate	Understand
Teach	Empathize
Convince	Stop doing something
Ask	Start doing something
Engage	Think differently
Prompt	Respond
Encourage	Implement
Demand	
Insist	

Template

My communication's primary purpose is to _____ *(use a function word here)* my audience so they can or will _____ *(use an action word here)* about _____*(insert a description of your topic here).*

Example

My communication's primary purpose is to ***educate*** my audience so they can or will ***think differently*** about ***parental leave policies.***

Feel free to add your own function and action words and to change the sentence to fit your specific purpose. The point is to solidify your purpose into a strategic statement that sets you up to create an effective and efficient message.

Once you've filled out the sentence, you essentially have a purpose statement ready to go. Taking the time to plan out your purpose before you begin drafting a message will help you plan your communication strategy, assess your audience and context, and pick your mode of communication.

Now notice how differently this purpose statement sounds with different function words and action words:

Revised Example 1

My communication's primary purpose is to ***educate*** my audience so they can or will ***start implementingparental leave policies.***

Or

Revised Example 2

My communication's primary purpose is to ***share my story with*** my audience so they can or will ***empathize*** about ***parental leave policies.***

Each of these purpose statements necessitates a different rhetorical strategy. They each reach audiences in different ways through *rhetorical appeals* (more on these later). The messaging for Example 1 might be heavy on data, statistics, or policy information (logos) and a bit lighter on the personal story (pathos). In contrast, messaging for Example 2 might include several personal stories of people who would benefit from a parental leave policy and save data, statistics, and policy information for a follow-up piece of communication. If you're unfamiliar with the terms "logos" and "pathos," don't worry. We will explain each of the rhetorical appeals in detail in this chapter.

Exigency: A Need to Communicate

Exigency is (another!) Greek term that combines the idea of purpose and occasion. Exigency might be best understood as an urgent need to communicate. An **exigence** is the event that prompts communication. The idea of exigency is meant to help you think about why certain types of communication exist in any given moment and setting. Essentially, all communication is a response to both a rhetorical situation and an exigence.[9] Another way of thinking about exigency is as "call and response" in the tradition of African American spirituals.[10] In this context, call and response is a pattern of improvisation that becomes necessary within the particular, communal moment. In other words, the *call* of a singer invokes the *response* of the audience, or the *call* of a pastor brings about a *response* from the audience. The caller and responder are working together within the moment to meet the exigency brought about by the situation[11,12].

For example, an upcoming work event might be the exigence that prompts you to quickly write that report you've been procrastinating. But in this sense, exigence is *more* than an event. It's a moment in time that begs for communication. Each piece of communication—whether digital, verbal, nonverbal, written, or otherwise—is a response to an exigence.

Let's consider another example, a politician who wants stricter gun control laws might give an impassioned speech after a tragic mass shooting to persuade their colleagues to create comprehensive legislation. A parent might be compelled to communicate to their teenager about the dangers of texting and driving after a near collision shakes every passenger in the car. A college student might be compelled to confront their partner after spotting them cozying up at lunch with a new friend.

In business, exigency functions much the same way as the more personal examples here. Corporations need to communicate for all sorts of reasons, and oftentimes the exigency is impossible to ignore.

In 2013, Target Corporation experienced one of the largest data breaches in U.S. history, culminating in the release of more than 70 million credit card users' information and ending in a $18.5 million settlement to 47 U.S. states.[13] The exigency here was impossible to ignore,

and Target needed to communicate. The statement released by the corporate office reassured customers that Target's "top priority is taking care of you and helping you feel confident about shopping at Target, and it is our responsibility to protect your information when you shop with us."[14] The statement also offered 1 free year of credit card monitoring to customers affected by the breach.

As with the example of Target's statement, the purpose of a message should take into account the rhetorical situation, the intended (and sometimes unintended) audience(s), and your available means of persuasion. All of these factors together are part of the exigence that necessitate the communication.

UNDERSTANDING OUR AVAILABLE MEANS

Language is one of our most powerful tools in crafting persuasive messages. You're likely familiar with the phrase "the pen is mightier than the sword," but did you know that in addition to making a point about language, phrases like that have a function and a name? They are called **rhetorical devices**, or **figures of speech**, and incorporating these tools into your rhetorical, persuasive tool kit can be an effective way to create emotion and persuade an audience.

In Aristotle's time—300 BC—the available means of persuasion looked a bit differently than they do today. The primary mode of communication was oral, which meant that persuasion often involved variations in voice tonality, cadence, and amplification. The orators during Aristotle's time would have had extensive practice in memorization, delivery, body language, gestures, and any other bodily means of persuasion.[15]

As for the speeches themselves, orators employed a variety of rhetorical devices. These included techniques such as *alliteration* (the repetition of sounds across words like "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers") or *hyperbole* (the purposeful exaggeration of something to make a point, such as "drowning in paperwork"). These techniques were stylistic choices meant to persuade audiences to do . . . something.

In this section we will review the rhetorical appeals, ethos, logos, and pathos, and explore how they function in persuasive messaging. We will also explore some of the rhetorical devices—other available means of persuasion—you have at your disposal to make messages more interesting and persuasive.

Getting It Right: Credibility, Emotion, and Logic

It can be helpful for you to think about your available means of persuasion in terms of the rhetorical triangle and the key terms: "logos," "ethos," and "pathos" (see Figure 2.1).

We have to go back to Aristotle to understand the origin of these terms. He called them "**rhetorical appeals**." They are best understood in this way: **Logos** is an appeal to logic, **ethos** is an appeal to the credibility of the speaker, and **pathos** is an appeal to emotion.[16] Effective professional communicators assess each rhetorical situation and then include appeals to all three based on the purpose and desired impact of the message (Figure 2.2). These terms will come up several other times throughout this book because they are core concepts for understanding persuasive communication in general.

In workplace communication, focusing on the humans who will read your message is crucial. Humans need to be persuaded to do most things (remember the brain, gut, heart discussion in Chapter 1?). Sometimes we even needed to be persuaded to *begin* to read an email. We then need to be persuaded to care about the email. We might then need to be persuaded to take the

FIGURE 2.1 ■ The Rhetorical Triangle: Logos, Ethos, Pathos

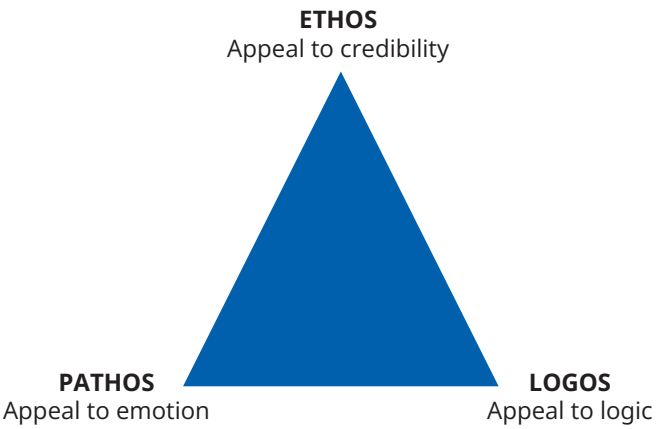
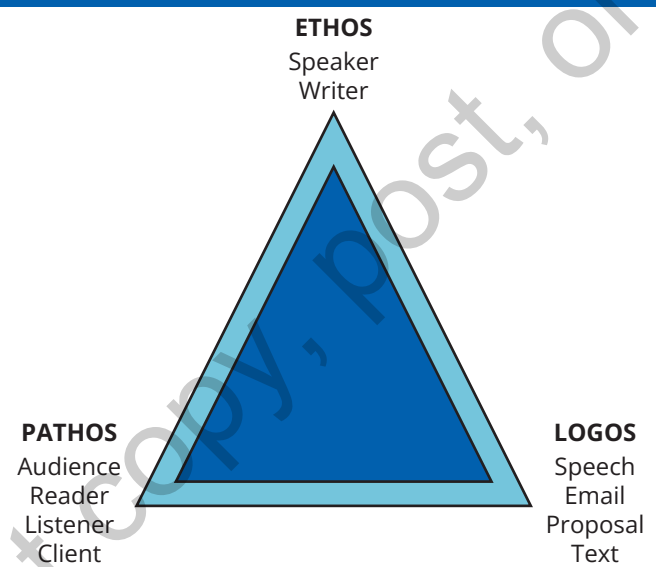


FIGURE 2.2 ■ The Rhetorical Triangle: Alignment With Speaker, Text, and Audience



action the email is proposing. This is why understanding and using the three rhetorical appeals is so important to effective workplace communication.

In business communication, writers try for a balanced approach to the rhetorical appeals. Relying on only one (e.g., logos) might make your annual report full of facts, but it might also make it hard to read and comprehend. Using too much pathos (emotional appeals) in an annual report might feel a bit manipulative for the context. (You'll learn more about differences between persuasion and manipulation later in this chapter.)

In addition to rhetorical appeals, you need to learn about persuasive tactics in messaging. Although not all rhetorical devices will be appropriate for usage in workplaces messages, having an understanding of how to use certain techniques and devices will be useful regardless of the message or medium. Putting together your knowledge of the rhetorical triangle, the three

rhetorical appeals, and certain rhetorical devices will make you a savvy and efficient communicator in any context.

Rhetorical Devices

Previously we mentioned two common rhetorical devices: *alliteration* (the repetition of sounds across words) and *hyperbole* (the purposeful exaggeration of something to make a point). Effective use of rhetorical devices like these, and others you're about to discover, can make you a communication Jedi. But perhaps this is best demonstrated by the ultimate Jedi mentor:

Yoda's words follow a rhetorical pattern called "anadiplosis," where sentences build on each other as the word or clause at the end of one sentence is used to start the next.

> Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.

Yoda could have simply said, "It's not good to have fear because that will eventually cause hatred and suffering," but that wouldn't have had as great an impact. It certainly wouldn't have turned into scores of internet memes.

Creating an impact for strategic purposes requires thoughtful consideration about structure. Words in one order simply don't have the same impact as the same or similar words in another order. Let's look at another example.

One of the most popular axioms in English is:

> When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.

This phrase applies the rhetorical device "antanagoge" (yes, these terms can be cumbersome), which suggests you turn a negative concept into something positive. Using antanagoge is what makes this phrase so impactful. The sentiment would be much less impactful if we instead said, "Being happy occurs when we learn how to turn bad things into good things. It's all about attitude." Rather, antanagoge makes a quick flip from bad to good. In this particular case, we're also using metaphors ("lemons" are the lousy things in life, and "lemonade" is the happiness that comes when we have the right attitude).

You could use antanagoge in any number of ways: "Sure, I lost my job, but my free time just opened up!" or "Yes, the diamond's fake, but I never worry about losing it!" The idea is you flip the negative on its head to put the emphasis on the positive (which lessens the impact of the negative concept).

Anadiplosis and antanagoge are only two of many different rhetorical devices you have at your disposal to make important statements more memorable. Although memorizing all of the devices probably isn't reasonable (there are, literally, hundreds of them), referencing the list of the most common ones (see Table 2.3) may help you develop more creative, memorable phrases for a presentation, report, white paper, or article titles; marketing and advertising materials; social media posts; business and brand slogans; or save-the-date event invitations.

You can see from the examples in Table 2.3 that applying rhetorical devices to your writing and speech often adds flavor, rhythm, and dramatic effect.

Many of these devices include metaphorical language or word pictures, concepts that become more relatable by painting a picture in the minds of your audience. First, let's discuss the use of metaphor as a rhetorical device.

Metaphors

You've probably noticed that some of life's greatest lessons or memorable axioms have been delivered through symbolic language: fables, allegories, idioms, metaphors, and so forth. Why do

TABLE 2.3 ■ Common Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical Device	*Definition*	*Example*
Alliteration	Repetition of constants in two or more words	Cranky crocodile
Antithesis	Juxtaposing two contradictory ideas	Keep your friends close but your enemies closer.
Assonance	Repetition of similar vowel sounds	"His tender heir might bear his memory." (Shakespeare)
Climax	Arranging words and phrases in order of increasing importance	"Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Superman!"
Ellipses	Omission of words implied by context	It was a very . . . unusual evening.
Hyperbole	Exaggeration for effect	The report took a million years to write.
Irony	Use of terms to convey a meaning opposite of the terms' literal meaning	The police station gets robbed.
Litotes	Deliberate understatement	The 20-year war felt like a second.
Meiosis	Use of a term to describe something disproportionately greater than the term implies	The concert was a bit loud.
Metaphor	Reference of one thing to imply another	The lake looked like glass.
Metonymy	Naming an object or concept to refer to another related object or concept	Let me give you a hand.
Onomatopoeia	Forming a word to imitate a sound	Bang! Slurp!
Oxymoron	Placing two opposing terms side by side	Silent scream
Paradox	Contradictory phrase that contains some measure of truth	This is the beginning of the end.
Parallelism	Similarity in structure between words and phrases	He ate, swam, and slept.
Paronomasia	Use of words similar in sound but different in meaning (punning)	Horse lovers are stable people.
Personification	Referencing inanimate objects with humanlike qualities or abilities	The car sat in the driveway.
Rhetorical question	Asking a question for a purpose other than to get an answer	Can fish swim?
Simile	Explicit comparison of two unlike things	He's as busy as a bee.
Synecdoche	A part is used for a whole or a whole if used for a part	Nice set of wheels!

they work so well? They're relatable and they're easy to remember; they make complex ideas come to life. Metaphors are, technically, one of the many types of rhetorical devices we discussed, but they deserve their own space because they're so critical to effective communication. Simply put, metaphors are linguistic tools that help us make sense of complex aspects of the world by replacing terms and ideas with concepts that are already familiar.

Metaphors are everywhere, and we use them every day. We learn the "branches" of government, we talk about the "light" of our lives, and we remind ourselves that the "early bird catches the worm." We have "pounding" headaches, we get "fired" up, we "swallow" our pride, and we become "night owls." These are all metaphorical descriptions that explain a broader concept.

You can use metaphors to help people make obvious sense out of otherwise esoteric concepts. Consider all the metaphors we use to talk about computers: opening windows, saving in folders, uploading to the cloud, exporting files, dragging our mouse, and so forth. We also use metaphors in science to explain new concepts like string theory, radio waves, magnetic fields, and on and on. In those cases, without metaphoric language, we would have to rely on complex technical and scientific lingo to understand how processes actually work.

Really, metaphors are used in every aspect of our lives. In some ways, they're what make us human. They allow us to make concrete sense out of an abstract world, and if you can learn to use them strategically in the way you speak and write, you'll be in a much greater position to make an impact wherever and whenever you communicate.

When teaching, explaining, motivating, or otherwise describing a concept to your audience, consider using metaphors. Does it make sense to talk about disparate but unified departments in your organization as functioning like a car's engine? Or, if your organization is full of "silos," what becomes the role of the "farmer"? Or how does achieving a goal function more like a marathon than a sprint?

Metaphors are especially helpful when teaching complex or abstract concepts, and they're good for presentations, reports, books, trainings, and workshops. As you determine the appropriate channels for integrating metaphors, consider three fundamental rules:

- *Rule 1: Avoid Clichés.* You might have heard a motivational speaker talk about "climbing mountains" in reference to building a business or "running a race" while attempting to make a sale. Although these metaphors—climbing mountains and running races—are relatable, they are also somewhat overused. Think about how you can implement other metaphors that allow people to think differently about achievement. Perhaps try cave diving or piano playing as alternative metaphors to convey hard work and success. Furthermore, many clichés come from a narrow focus on able-bodied histories of language, so reflect on how to make metaphors more inclusive and engaging for your particular audience. Consider metaphors about painting, writing, or playing music. A playful and vivid metaphor about hard work and persistence comes from Shel Silverstein's poem "Tiny Melinda Mae,"12 who finished eating an entire whale one bite at a time (https://allpoetry.com/Melinda-Mae).
- *Rule 2: Don't Mix Metaphors.* A "mixed metaphor" is the blending of two unrelated metaphors, creating more confusion than clarification. An example of mixed metaphors and their consistent versions are in Table 2.4. If you're going to use a metaphor to describe something, keep that metaphor consistent so your audience's brains can make all the logical connections.

TABLE 2.4 ■ Mixed and Consistent Metaphors

Mixed Metaphors	Consistent Metaphors
We'll have to iron out the bottlenecks.	We'll have to iron out the wrinkles. We'll have to unclog some of the bottlenecks.
They put all their eggs in one basket, and it misfired.	They put all their eggs in one basket, and they cracked.

- *Rule 3: Draw From Personal Experience.* Sometimes the biggest challenge is coming up with the idea. You'd be surprised how you can use simple, daily activities in our lives to make interesting correlations at work. What was your process for cleaning that stain out of the rug? Might that be a good metaphor for getting rid of bad habits at work? What about that opossum you once observed so casually, methodically stealing your camping food from an unlocked cooler? Might that be a good comparison for how insecure passwords expose our possessions to unsuspecting theft?

As you can see from Rule 3, creating a mental picture for your audience can be an effective and persuasive tool for communication. In addition to using metaphors, two other rhetorical devices you can use are *word pictures* and *comparisons*.

Word Pictures and Comparisons

Similar in purpose to using metaphors, another way to make a concept relevant or understandable to an audience is to use word pictures. **Word pictures** reframe abstract numbers and data by comparing them to something meaningful—something that readers or audience members can make an obvious connection to.

For example, if you tell an audience the average human intestine is 22 feet long, that is somewhat interesting. But, if you tell an audience that if you were to stretch out your intestine, it would be the length of a small school bus, that's far more interesting!

Likewise, if you tell an audience that Lake Tahoe holds 37 trillion gallons of water, they may think, "Okay, but how much is that, really?" But, if you say that there is enough water in Lake Tahoe to cover a flat surface the size of California with 14 inches of water, your audience is more likely to say, "Whoa. Now that's a lot of water!" The word picture is more impactful because most people can make sense of the size of California and the depth of 14 inches.

Now, if you're speaking to marine biologists who frequently study the depths of lakes, the number 37 trillion might hold enough meaning to be impactful. However most people don't have a clue how many gallons of water are in a swimming pool, let alone a lake. A number like 37 trillion gallons doesn't have much impact until it's phrased as something an audience can relate to and compare. If you use a number that doesn't have much meaning to your audience, it will go in one ear and out the other.

As you relate data, information, and abstract concepts to your audience, ask yourself how much meaning the numbers or data have for your audience. Is there a better way you can rephrase it using a word picture? Can you make a more relevant comparison?

For instance, you could tell someone that 1.4 billion tons of food goes to waste every day in the United States, and that statistic would likely be shocking on its own; however, you could also translate that data into a more meaningful message that speaks to people's regular, daily lives and possibly have more impact. Figure 2.3 is an infographic by the Armor of Hope Foundation that

breaks down the unfathomable amount of 1.4 billion into a weight amount per person and then again into a monetary amount per household (www.armorofhopefoundation.org). The comparisons in this example help relate the information in an accessible way.

FIGURE 2.3 ■ Food Waste Infographic

Source: Armor of Hope Foundation (https://armorofhopefoundation.org/zero-waste/)

APPEALING TO OUR TARGET AUDIENCES

Knowing, understanding, and appealing to a target audience has long been considered an essential practice for effective communication. Researchers have found that "one of the hallmarks of good writers was the time they spent thinking about how they wanted to affect a reader."[17] Similarly, businesses often spend large amounts of money and time researching what consumers (their target audiences) want out of a product.

Business leaders often consider audience persuasion the most important element to any successful product. Steve Jobs, founder and former CEO of Apple, was noted for focusing on customers (his primary audience) first and foremost. In a 1997 speech to Apple developers, he

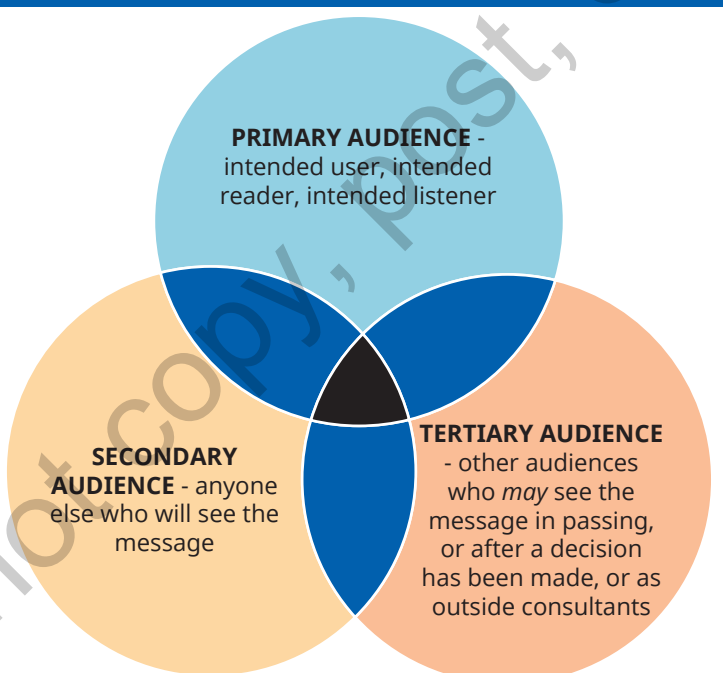
reiterated this commitment in a public questions-and-answer session: "One of the things I've always found is that you got to start with the customer experience and work backward to the technology. You can't start with the technology and try to figure out where you are going to sell it."[18] In other words, if something is going to work for people, you have to be thinking about what will appeal to them and work for them first.

In the next section we explore what it means to understand your primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences. We'll also explore how communicators can create audiences through the development of audience profiles.

Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Audiences

Although you might know the **primary audience** for your message (the intended user, reader, and listener), sometimes it is more difficult to know the other audiences who might encounter your message. We call these other potential viewers **secondary** (anyone else who will see the message) and **tertiary audiences** (other audiences who *may* see the message in passing) (Figure 2.4). Even if a memo you write is intended for one person, several other people (secondary and tertiary audiences) might encounter the same memo. As an effective communicator, it is helpful to consider and assess who these other audiences might be.

FIGURE 2.4 ■ Defining Audiences



For example, if you are writing a workplace standard operating procedure (SOP) for a team of employees, they are the primary audience because they are also the intended users. However, it is likely your manager, and maybe even their manager, might also see the SOP, so they become your secondary audiences. The primary audience is also the target audience

and is typically (although not always) the decision-maker. A tertiary audience is anyone other than the primary and secondary audiences—and can be considered within the larger rhetorical context as potential "eyes" or "ears" for your work. Tertiary audiences include the following:

- **Stakeholders:** those who have a stake (investment) in the outcome or impact of the message. They aren't necessarily making decisions, but they or their community will be affected by the message.
- **Gatekeepers:** those who make the decision about the message or who have the power to limit or grant access for the message to reach an audience

Asking the following questions can help you conduct an audience analysis to craft an effective and persuasive message for audiences. These questions help you understand who your audience is, what their needs are, and what they are expecting from the message. Once you have this information, you can organize your message accordingly.

Answer the six "**journalistic questions**" (who, what, where, when, why, how) about each audience segment. You can answer these questions yourself, but you may have to conduct some brief, preliminary research to answer each of them sufficiently. Start with your primary audience and then also answer the questions for the secondary audience, stakeholder audience, and gatekeeper audience. You might have some overlap in your answers.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS:

1. **Who** are the people making up this audience segment?
2. **What** do they need?
3. **Where** will they be reading, viewing, or interacting with your work?
4. **When** will they be reading, viewing, or interacting with your work?
5. **Why** will they be reading, viewing, or interacting with your work?
6. **How** will they be reading, viewing, or interacting with your work?

How will this audience analysis influence and inform the work you will do for this message? How might it affect the tone of the message? The length? The format?

But wait. There is one last piece of the audience puzzle to consider . . . You, the writer. You, the speaker. You, the designer.

As you are conducting this analysis and catering your message accordingly, keep in mind that you are not *merely* responding to an audience analysis, but you are also an active participant in the creation of the audience because *you* are crafting the message. A pharmaceutical advertisement that is full of medical **jargon**—or specialized words unique to a particular industry—might be intended for a broad, nonmedical audience, but the use of jargon will restrict which audiences can access and understand its meaning fully.

In other words, as you conduct an audience analysis and cater your message accordingly, keep in mind that you are also constructing the audience you want. Think of a World War II scenario, for example. During the time of conflict, spies would often write messages in code using words and phrases that were accessible only to those who were trained in and familiar with

that code. In their case, they did this not necessarily to target a primary audience but to restrict potential secondary and tertiary audiences. You may not be intentionally restricting access to messages as a spy would, but it's possible that the way you craft and "code" your message—using specialized jargon or methods—may prevent or encourage some people to not access it fully. If you're not conscious of how you're coding your message, you will likely either speak to the wrong audience or miss your intended audience altogether.

Your presence in this audience puzzle is as important as the audiences for whom you are writing, so be sure to also include *yourself* in the audience analysis:

1. **Who** are *you* in the larger rhetorical context of this message?
2. **What** do *you* want an audience to know?
3. **Where** do *you* want an audience to interact with your work?
4. **When** do *you* want an audience to interact with your work?
5. **Why** do *you* want an audience to interact with your work?
6. **How** do *you* want an audience to interact with your work?

Now that you've learned about audience analysis for primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences, let's move to another strategy for appealing to a target audience: the development and use of consumer profiles.

Developing Effective Consumer Profiles

So far we've been discussing how audience analysis is crucial to creating a meaningful message. Oftentimes audience analysis is the first step toward creating a consumer profile that provides even more details about a target audience or demographic and also brings that target audience to life.

Consumer profiles are an amalgamation of both *demographics* and *psychographics*. **Demographics** are facts about a group of people's characteristics based on collectable data from census and other intake forms. These characteristics usually include age, sex, income, nationality, religion, gender, etc.). **Psychographics** (sometimes combined with "**behavioristics**") is data that represent how people think, feel, behave, and make decisions. These characteristics typically include attitudes, aspirations, values, habits, patterns, and ways of behaving.[19]

When communicators want to better understand and envision a target audience, they create consumer profiles as a way to connect their writing with an imaginary (but data-based) profile. Think of a consumer profile as "a composite sketch of a key segment of your audience" or the *type* of person you want your communication to appeal to.[20] It is not a stereotype or a caricature. Rather, communicates develop a profile in conjunction with audience analysis and market research.[21] For communication experts, an effective consumer profile can hone message discipline; establish voice and tone consistency across multiple platforms, writers, and/or modes of communication; and keep communication teams on the same page. Furthermore, an effective profile can help you, as a message and content creator, develop an appropriate tone, style, and perspective to better cater your messages to a specific audience.

As we discussed, developing a strong consumer profile is an effective strategy to help you better communicate your ideas to a target audience. As you develop a consumer profile, think about

how you can expand your ideas of an idealized or targeted consumer, audience, or target market. Expand your demographic and psychographic research to include a larger variety of human interests, backgrounds, and abilities. Doing this will open your messaging to include larger and more diverse market segments and audiences.

Here are some key characteristics of effective consumer profiles:

- Consumer profiles are an amalgamation of demographic and psychographic data that become reflected into one target person.
- Consumer profiles are typically a one-page document with one person's profile as representative of the audience.
- Consumer profiles are a realistic (but not real) sketch of a person.
- Consumer profiles include a name, gender, and profile picture to bring the profile to life and help you connect your writing to a human.

To create an effective consumer profile follow the steps and answer these questions:

Identify the scope of your messaging

1. Who are you communicating to and how?
2. What is the goal of the communication?
3. What is the form the communication will take?
4. Is this an audience you've written to before or a brand-new audience?

Research your target market

1. Who is your primary audience as determined by the scope of your messaging?
2. What demographic information can you ascertain about this audience?
3. What psychographic information can you ascertain about this audience?

Create a realistic persona for the profile

1. Based on your market research, what would a typical person look like?
2. How would this typical person think, feel, and behave?
3. What profile photo can best represent this person?
4. How can you expand your view of this typical person to also expand your potential audience?

Map out important characteristics

1. How can you develop features of this person to bring them to life?
2. What motivates or scares them?
3. What do they care about and depend on?
4. What realistic quotes and scenarios can you create for this person's life?

Once you've gone through these steps, you can then design and display your profile (Figure 2.5). Remember to keep it to one page so it is easy to access and use whenever you need to create targeted writing. Often, companies will create several consumer profiles within a target market or demographic to use for different communication tasks or goals. Ultimately, this consumer profile should help you see your audience as a real person with feelings, values, and tastes.

FIGURE 2.5 ■ An Effective Consumer Profile

MARIA LOPEZ

AGE 24
GENDER Female
PROFESSION Social Media Analyst
INCOME $82,000
STATUS Single
RESIDENCE Denver, CO

VALUES
Relationships, environment, philanthropy, music

MOTIVATIONS
Quality, comfort, unique characteristics, modern

FRUSTRATIONS
Cheap quality, common product, poor usability, environmentally damaging

BIO
Maria is an energetic and motivated professional, recently graduated from the University of Colorado-Boulder. Maria loves her job but sees it as a temporary stepping stone towards her more ambitious goal of running her own marketing agency. Maria is well connected in the tech industry, runs a blog in her free time, and is always looking for ways to stay active and outdoors. Maria volunteers at the local food pantry every week.

QUOTE
"I Love to be inspired. Show me something I can cling to, something I can squeal about. When I find something unique, happy, kind of eclectic, and flat-out cool, I jump on it. Life is about discovering the awesome."

CREATING MESSAGES WITH REPRESENTATION AND VALUE

The title of this chapter is "Creating Meaningful Messages." But what makes a message meaningful? An important tool in understanding this concept is empathy. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's position, understand and commiserate, and feel what the other person is feeling. Empathy also is free from judgment and advice. To develop effective, persuasive, and ethical audience profiles, you need to consider your audience in human-centered ways. Doing so will make your messages mean something important or, in other words, full of meaning. Synonyms for "meaningful" include "significant," "relevant," and "purposeful."[22]

What do we mean by "representation"?

In a literal sense, representation indicates the "portrayal of someone or something in a particular way,"[23] but culturally, this definition might be better understood in the context of two other terms: underrepresented and overrepresented. As you create consumer profiles, step back, take an objective look at your messages so far, and ask these questions:

1. Which experiences, backgrounds, abilities, or communities are typically or historically underrepresented in the messages created by you, your organization, or your industry at large?
2. Which experiences, backgrounds, abilities, or communities are typically or historically overrepresented in the messages created by you, your organization, or your industry at large?
3. How could historically underrepresented experiences, backgrounds, abilities, or communities be re-represented in the development of your consumer profiles?

A strategic representation of diversity is good for message development, and it is good for business. After all, how can you reach a diverse audience if your consumer profiles and personas are representative of the same old thing?

Effective development of a representative profile purposefully includes diverse communities, abilities, and historically marginalized groups to provide effective messaging and identify gaps in accessibility, user experience, and readability. Taking the time to assess the representation of the profiles you create will make your messages stronger and more accessible to a wider array of people with underrepresented backgrounds and experiences.[24]

Increasing and accurately representing diversity often includes race and gender along with age and experience. In this section, we are going to focus specifically on neurodiversity and accessibility, although the topics and questions posed will help you include a wider variety of representations in persona and message development to increase meaning, value, and accessibility.

Neurodiversity and Accessibility

Earlier in the chapter we talked about rhetoric as the "available means of persuasion." We can also think about accessibility as an "available means of access." Although available means of persuasion are often up to the writer or speaker to implement, available means of *access* are often left up to audiences to figure out. But neglecting to consider accessibility can limit the amount of people who can access your message. Plus, because each of us views the world through our individual lens, we rarely process or interpret messages in the same way as others or even through the same methods.

Fundamentally, if we care about creating messages that are meaningful, we need to consider our available means of access. Accessibility is another means of persuasion.

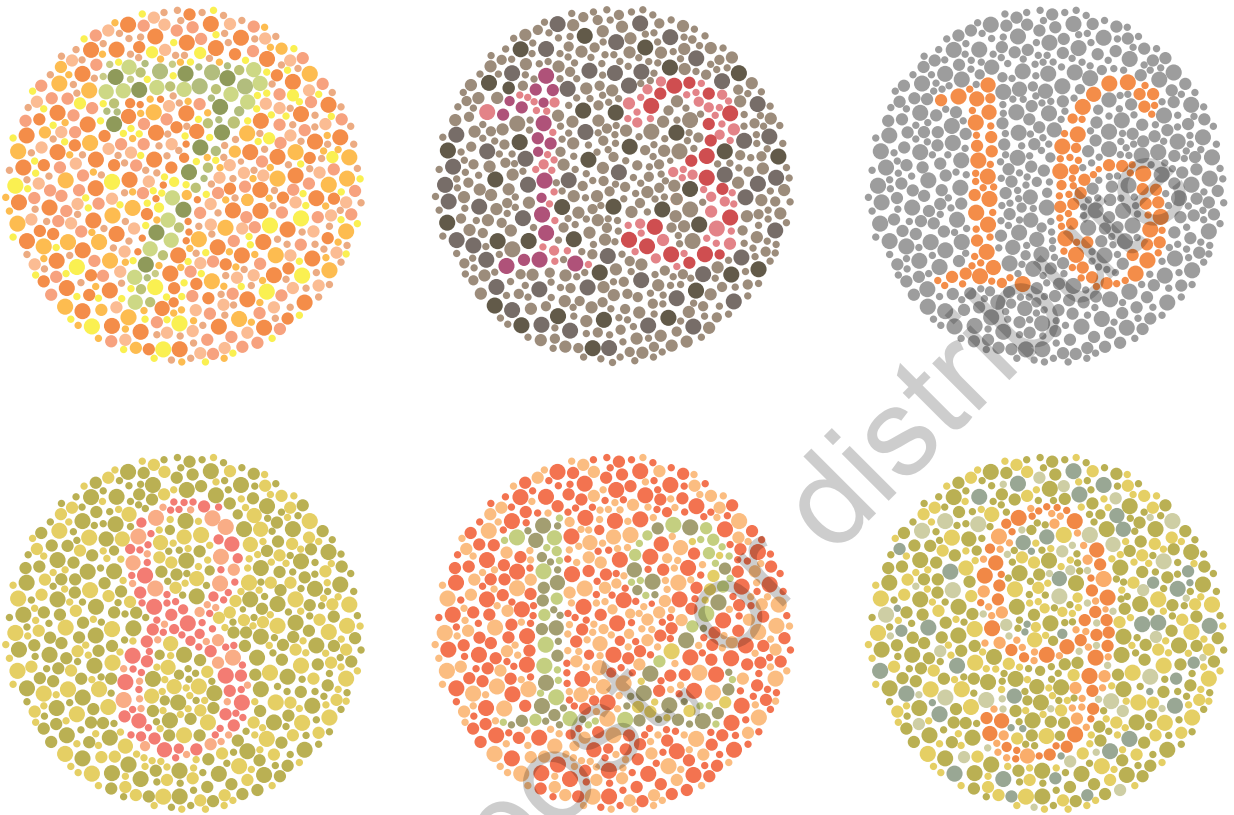
First, let's explore access in terms of sight and sound.

According to the National Eye Institute, an estimated 300 million people worldwide have some form of "colorblindness" or "color vision deficiency" (CVD).[25] The most common CVDs involve blue-yellow combinations and red-green combinations, and a small proportion of CVD cases involve people who cannot see color spectrum light at all and instead view graphics and colors as grayscale wavelengths. Figure 2.6 is an example of a test for colorblindness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1 million people in the United States over the age of 40, and nearly 3% of children under the age of 18, are considered blind, meaning they have little to no sight capability and use secondary means to access visual information.[26] The National Institutes of Health reports that nearly one in eight people in the United States over the age of 12 have hearing loss in both ears, and the World Health Organization estimates that around 1.5 billion people globally live with disabling degrees of hearing loss.

These instances are only the documented examples of accessibility needs. How many of us encounter comprehension difficulties with certain colors, fonts, sounds or pitches, small text size, overly long paragraphs, or subtle hearing loss? Thinking about accessibility as one of your

FIGURE 2.6 ■ Color Blind Test



available means of persuasion can open up your messages to a diverse group of thinkers and actors, increasing the reach and impact of communication in general.

Now, let's consider other forms of access related to cognition and neurodiversity. The term "**neurodiversity**" simply indicates the diversity of ways people understand and navigate the world. As Harvard Health explains, "People experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one 'right' way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits."[27]

Neurodiversity often includes people with autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and dyslexia. It is estimated that around 17% of the United States population self-identify as neurodivergent.[28] However, this subset of our human population is often underemployed (85–90% underemployment by some estimates) and are subject to "hiring processes that define talent too narrowly, and especially with reliance on job interviews, which are biased against people with atypical manners of interaction."[29] Although previous workplaces might have communicated poorly with their neurodivergent employees, current and future workplaces view differences in worldview and thinking as assets.

Overall, workplaces and workplace communications are becoming increasingly inclusive and accessible to differently abled people, including physical abilities and neurodiversity.[30] In the past 10 years, a growing number of prominent companies have changed hiring and retention processes to attract differently abled and neurodivergent employees because of their often unique and exceptional abilities. Among these companies are SAP, Hewlett Packard Enterprise,

Microsoft, Willis Towers Watson, Ford, and EY. Many others, including Caterpillar, Dell Technologies, Deloitte, IBM, JPMorgan Chase, and UBS have initiated similar programs to attract diverse talent.[31]

To increase accessibility for all types of neurodiversity, professional communicators are reimagining communication in terms of "signal-to-noise ratio." A **signal-to-noise ratio (SNR)** refers to the level of signal (pertinent information) in ratio to the level of noise (interference). The term originally comes from scientific fields, such as electrical engineering, but has recently been used by communication scholars to explain readability in visual, digital, and written messages.[32,33] The main goal behind SNR is to balance information by reducing excess in favor of clarity. This applies to the text and visual elements in a message. In communication, there is not a mathematical "golden ratio," so each piece of communication will be up to your discretion. To increase your accessibility for audiences ranging from humans to software (such as e-readers that describe visual information for visually impaired users), you'll want to regularly assess SNR in your messaging.

What all of this means is that to make our messages meaningful, we also need to consider the variety of ways in which people may encounter our messages.

As you conduct an audience analysis, and create consumer profiles for that audience, consider the usability and accessibility of your users and readers.[34] Think about ability and access as opportunities for unique and exciting message development. For example, consider the last question in the audience analysis questions mentioned earlier:

Previous Audience Analysis Question

How will your audience be reading, viewing, and interacting with your work?

Now, consider reframing this question to address accessibility.

Reframed Audience Analysis Question for Accessibility

How are audiences *able to interact* with your communication? What might prevent someone from *accessing* your message? What might *limit someone* from understanding your message the way you intend it to be understood? What features or aspects of your message will *not be accessible* to people with differing abilities?

When considering accessibility and neurodivergence as part of your message development, you can use the following questions to ensure you and your team are using all of your available means of persuasion.

1. How might you adapt your message for screen-reading software?
2. How could you adapt your colors and contrast for audiences with color deficiency disorders?
3. How could you segment and chunk your information for audiences with neurodivergent reading and attention needs?
4. How might you ensure your message can include closed captioning in real time? What about in a video conference?
5. How might you rework your message to reduce SNR?

Additional chapters in this book will address issues of accessibility and the concepts mentioned here, and if you would like additional resources, see the Additional Resources section at the end of Skills Mastery Workshop.

MAKING ETHICAL CHOICES

Business is essentially about the exchange of goods and services. Pretty simple, right? However, within that simple statement multiple ethical dimensions exist: workplace communication, product manufacturing and distribution, employee rights, advertising, and corporate social responsibility to name only a few.

Most businesses have an ethical code of conduct that guides their business choices. Because the exchange of goods and services is multidimensional, most businesses have codes of conduct for different sectors of their business that interface with that core ethical guiding code. For example, Apple has a guiding Business Code of Conduct that covers some of its core guiding principles in worldwide offices, such as personal responsibility, business integrity, and protecting Apple itself. Then, the company also has specific ethical codes of conduct for Labor and Human Rights and Environmental Protection in the Supply Chain and Export and Sanctions, among others.[35]

Even with the guidance of a corporate code of ethical conduct, businesses still make unethical decisions and engage in immoral actions as they communicate about their organization, which is why developing your own standard of communication ethics is a cornerstone of effective messaging. If we accept the earlier definition of business (that business is about the exchange of goods and services), then let's also accept the premise that workplace communication, at its most basic, attempts to tell you about something and then attempts to persuade you to take an action—to buy, or believe, or engage in some way.

With these two simplified definitions, we now have two streamlined ways of looking at ethical choices in workplace messaging:

1. The exchange of goods and services
2. The communication and persuasion surrounding that exchange

This section will help you think about common ethical theories and metrics in business and then encourage you to establish your own standards that utilize those theories and also align with your own ethical values.

Communication Ethics in Business

To understand the role of communication ethics in the workplace, let's first briefly explore some of the common ethical theories or paradigms related to business and communication ethics. As a field of study, communication ethics is as large as the ocean is deep. For our purposes, we will briefly review four common theories of ethics to help establish a framework for ethical decision-making going forward.

Deontological Ethics

Deontology is the study of duty. **Deontological ethics**, then, is a theory that provides guidance on our moral and ethical duties or rules as we make particular choices. The main question asked by deontological ethics is: what is our duty in this scenario? This question could be reframed to explore a variety of stakeholders in any communication context by asking, what is my duty …

- to colleagues?
- to the environment?
- to humanity?

- to the company?
- to shareholders?
- to consumers?
- to underserved populations?
- to equity, diversity, and inclusion?

Put rather simply, deontological ethics asks whether or not the ends (the result, product, or goal) justify the means (the process, act, or strategy). One of the most famous deontological philosophers, Immanuel Kant, held a steadfast belief that humanity should never be treated as a means to an end or, in other words, that people should not use others to obtain their own interests. Depending upon your own ethical philosophies and values, you might add additional stakeholders to your consideration of duty.[36]

For example, a communication professional who follows a Kantian notion of deontological ethics, then, might ask duty-bound questions about different segments of society, including demographic and psychographic questions that urge communicators to consider how the process of communication might adversely affect the message and its intended audience.

Utilitarianism

In contrast to deontology, **utilitarianism** emphasizes the ends over the "means" (remember how Kant emphasized the means over the ends?). Simply put, a choice that maximizes the most good for the greatest number of people is the moral one to make (the ends will justify the means). Whichever choices increase the good of the outcome are the moral ones to make.

The most recognizable philosopher of utilitarian ethics, John Stuart Mill, would argue that a choice is deemed either right or wrong *not* by determining the motive or virtue of the person making the decision, and *not* by applying the moral rules or duties, but instead by the outcome—the ends instead of the means.[37]

To determine whether an outcome is the ethical one, Mill considered two aspects of utility:

1. The number of people helped versus the number of people harmed
2. The degree of benefit versus the degree of harm

A utilitarian view of communication ethics might compel a manager to justify a small deception in messaging if the overall outcome of the message increases the happiness for the largest number of employees. The manager might decide that the harm caused by the deception is negligible in contrast to the benefit to the employees' overall well-being.

Similarly, the cost-versus-benefit ratio often used in business is itself a form of utilitarianism. However, engaging in cost-versus-benefit thinking with a utilitarian ethics stance would require you to expand the cost and benefit of that equation to include more than financial gain or loss. For example, you might consider the pros and cons of developing a new parental leave policy in terms of employee satisfaction, societal implications for fatherhood, and gender pay parity rather than only the financial cost or gain for the business.

Virtue Ethics

If deontological ethics emphasizes duty and rules, then **virtue ethics** can best be understood as emphasizing virtues or moral character as the basis of decision-making. In this philosophy,

someone who makes good decisions is also moral; and someone who is moral (or virtuous) will also make the "right" decision.[38] With virtue ethics as a guiding principle, business communicators might focus on the virtues of a person as a higher priority than, say, the greatest good for the greatest number of people (utilitarianism) or one's duty to a particular ethical rule (deontology). A communication professional who emphasizes virtue ethics might employ this type of **syllogism** (deductive reasoning):

- Kindness is a virtue.
- It is virtuous to be kind in my communication.
- Therefore, kind communication is ethical communication.
- Whereas, unkind communication is unethical communication.

Essentially, the foundation of virtue ethics is the development of *good* traits, not necessarily (or only) *good* acts. Some of these virtues might include the following:

- Courage
- Justice
- Temperance
- Fairness
- Honesty
- Compassion
- Fortitude
- Kindness

In summary, it can be valuable to think about these three common ethical theories as you are carving out your own sense of communication ethics in the workplace. As you have learned, most companies have a code of conduct that meshes elements of deontology, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism. You can develop your own personal ethical standards for the way you communicate in the workplace—both in the creation of your messaging and in your interpersonal interactions.

In this next section, we'll look at applications of these theories in terms of manipulation and communication transparency.

Aiming to Persuade, Not Manipulate

Edward R. Murrow, renowned broadcast journalist, essayist, and war correspondent, wrote at length about ethics and communication. His most famous quote, though, might tell us all we need to know about his view on the subject:

> To be persuasive, we must be believable. To be believable, we must be credible. To be credible, we must be truthful.[39]

To make ethical choices in messaging, we must first aim for clarity and truthfulness. Oftentimes the terms "rhetoric" or "persuasion" become confused with "manipulation." In fact, many American politicians use the term "rhetoric" in a pejorative sense, as in "don't believe

them—they're full of rhetoric." The implication being that rhetoric is about crafting messages creatively and specifically to confuse or mislead audiences.

However, this is not the case. Indeed, someone can use persuasion with the intent to mislead or disinform, as we will discuss later in this section. Someone can also employ rhetoric as a means of persuasion with malice. It is important to differentiate between persuasion and manipulation.[40] The following distinctions will help you understand some key differences in these terms:

- Manipulation uses deception or coercion.
- Persuasion strives for identification—one person identifying with another through emotion, logic, and credibility.
- Manipulation is something you do to an audience.
- Persuasion is something you do with an audience.

In practice, communication and ethics are always intertwined, and crafting an effective message is about aiming for clarity and appeal for a target audience. The act of communication itself is a persuasive, interactional practice that gives and receives by trust. As Murrow indicated, "to be persuasive, we must be believable."[41] Therefore, persuasion and credibility are invariably intertwined in communication.

To assess whether your message engages in manipulation, check your persuasion with the 4Ps: people, power, position, and purpose. The 4Ps framework combines elements of deontology, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism and is a useful way to reconsider the ethics of your messaging and self-reflect on your own communication process (Table 2.5).

TABLE 2.5 ■ Ethical Persuasion

4Ps	Definition	Questions to Ask
People	Considers how all stakeholders involved in the message are viewed	Are people a means to an end or an end to the means? Whose interests are represented? Are people represented fairly and accurately?
Power	Considers how power and authority operate in the message	Is someone in a position of power exerting some form of pressure or deception? How would someone not in a position of power be affected by this message?
Position	Considers the positioning of this message (context, situation, timing)	Does the positioning of the message prey on someone's vulnerability? Is the timing of the message compassionate and ethical? Does the context change the ethics of the message?
Purpose	Considers the purpose of the message	Is the message aiming to inform, misinform, or disinform? What is the harm-vs.-help ratio of the message?

Overall, you can ask yourself the ultimate communication ethics question: Does the message balance 1) the greatest good for the greatest number of people along with 2) agreed-upon ethical virtues and 3) established ethical rules and standards?

Information, Misinformation, and Disinformation

The influx of information and sensory input we deal with daily is immense. From digital information to street signs along the walk to work, we are constantly barraged with information. Information itself is somewhat neutral. As a team it simply refers to the content used to explain a thing, product, fact, or different piece of knowledge.

Misinformation and disinformation are forms of information, but they both refer to information that is false. The difference between the terms lies in the intent of the communicator and the impact of the communication. Both intent and impact should be accounted for as part of an ethical consideration of information.

Disinformation, by its nature, is intentionally deceptive and usually disseminated as widely as possible with the goal to deceive as many people as possible. Disinformation is marked by a malicious intent and a specific goal.

Misinformation, in contrast, might be false, but it is mistakenly false. Someone might actually misinform you about the deadline of a report because they misheard the deadline from someone else. This type of misinformation is not malicious.

Problematically, it can be quite difficult to determine the intent of someone's communication. In fact, those who watch for unethical behavior in advertising, for example, see intention as irrelevant to the harm caused by the deceit. An advertisement "may be deemed deceptive even if the advertiser doesn't intend to deceive anyone."[42] Thus, misinformation can often grow out of a disinformation seed. In other words, whereas disinformation is distributed with an intent to deceive, it is often shared to others by someone with a mistaken belief in its validity, turning the sharing of that disinformation into shared misinformation. The harm caused is the same whether the person sharing the dis/misinformation intended to deceive or not.

Deception or mis/disinformation in advertising and marketing is a hot topic. The United Kingdom-based nonprofit Conscious Advertising Network (CAN) is a coalition of advertising agencies set up to "ensure that industry ethics catches up with the technology of modern advertising."[43] One of their six manifestos on ethical advertising is a statement on mis/disinformation and its primary role in undermining democracy.

> The media has always included an element of the subjective, highly-partisan, misleading, and wrong. But the internet has led to the proliferation of inaccurate and misleading content, some of which is driven by the desire to increase advertising revenues.[44]

Furthermore, in October of 2020, The American Association of Advertising Agencies (a trade association known as the 4As) issued a white paper specifically focused on misinformation and disinformation. Similar to CAN's insistence that disinformation is undermining democracy worldwide, the 4As argue that "proximity to misinformation and disinformation [are] the social hazards they are universally acknowledged to represent."[45] They quite strongly state the risks posed by the proliferation of mis/disinformation:

> Given finite human attention, flooding media with malignant content corrupts the global exchange of ideas, eroding the public knowledge needed in democratic societies to maintain collective societal needs. In view of the desperate need for global consensus and informed choice highlighted by public health concerns around the coronavirus and climate change, we believe disinformation and misinformation represent the most significant source of public harm in the media ecosystem.[46]

Even though this section has focused heavily on misinformation and disinformation within the fields of advertising and marketing and on behalf of large corporations responsible for the

proliferation or censorship of mis/disinformation, many of the same concepts can apply to the communication ethics of each individual.

Alongside other ethical considerations already discussed in this section, you can assess the quality of information in your own messaging as you take care to avoid misleading an audience.

Some simple questions, along with the 4Ps and other ethical theories discussed, can help you effectively and ethically analyze your own messages:

1. Is the information truthful?
2. Is it accurate?
3. Is it authentic?
4. Is it responsible?
5. Is the information portrayed responsibly?
6. Is the content of the information appropriate for the audience it is targeting?
7. Will any harm be caused by the dissemination of this information?

Based on the sections in this chapter, you can see that creating meaningful messages can be a complex process. Take a moment and ponder how you think workplace communication has evolved over the last two decades. Consider how that will affect the way you create messages. Our workplace cultures are frequently and dramatically evolving. Most organizations today have a much greater focus on workplace equity and inclusivity than they did 10 or 20 years ago. Globalization is ubiquitous. Hearing from coworkers when we're not at work is common. Additionally, our job descriptions are less defined as we regularly adapt to the changes in our industry and in society.

As things continue to change, you'll want to be thinking of workplace communication as broader than documents, meetings, and presentations. You'll need to think in terms of the people to whom you're communicating and the problems you're solving for them—understanding messaging through a lens of strategy, context, and audience adaptability. You'll need to create messages that apply a human-centric, integrative, and holistic understanding of interpersonal, written, visual, and digital communication. Plus you'll need to be aware of how to apply—and merge—these communication modes based on context.

THAT'S THEIR STORY. WHAT'S YOURS?

At the beginning of the chapter, you learned how Mica McGriggs balances her audiences' needs with her core values to create meaningful, effective messages. Because the topics she discusses (race and racism in the workplace) can lead to some difficult conversations, she approaches each piece of communication with her audience and her purpose in mind.

That's her story. Now take a moment to think about the work you do or have done and, in a short essay or discussion, answer the following questions:

- What are some of your core communication values, and how do those values influence your communication?
- Think about a situation where you had to actively balance those values with the expectations or needs of an audience. How did you approach your message? How could you have approached or adapted your message for a better outcome? Or, if the outcome was optimal to you, what made the interaction go well?

SKILLS MASTERY WORKSHOP: CREATING MEANINGFUL MESSAGES

Application and Exploration

Interview three to five people about their habits of reading and digesting messages. Ask them how they read a long book chapter and how they read a social media post. Ask them how they prepare their mind for these different interactions and if they notice a difference in their comprehension. How can understanding peoples' different approaches to reading make you a stronger communicator as you create meaningful messages?

Identify a company or organization that uses social media to convey its messaging. Now see if you can reverse engineer a consumer profile based on the messaging you can view. Who do you think is the intended target audience? Remember to use the standard profile development framework discussed in the chapter to address both demographics and psychographics.

Identify a piece of communication that is inaccurate. Does the message intend to deceive (disinformation), or does it simply mislead (misinformation)? How do you know? What is the difference in your opinion?

Find a recent email you have received. Analyze the email for its use of the three rhetorical appeals: logos, ethos, and pathos. Write up your analysis by providing examples where the message uses each of the appeals. If your instructor asks you to share the original message with the class, be sure to remove any identifying information to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Practice in Context

Play a game of fill in the blank to create a purpose statement for the following writing scenarios. Refer to the section on audience and purpose if you need help filling in the blanks.

Scenario 1: The Office Promotion and Raise

You feel you have shown your value and worth in your current position, and you've been at this current entry-level position for almost 3 years. You'd like to move up in the company, and you have identified an open spot at the management level.

Write a purpose statement by filling in the blanks below:

My communication's primary purpose is to _____ *(use a verb here)* my audience so they can or will _____ *(use an action word here)* about _____*(insert a description of your topic here).*

Scenario 2: Buy a Puppy

You know that owning a pet increases an owner's happiness and life expectancy. You are ready, willing, and able to train a new puppy. But your roommate or partner is *not* on board.

Write a purpose statement by filling in the blanks below:

My communication's primary purpose is to _____ *(use a verb here)* my audience so they can or will _____ *(use an action word here)* about _____*(insert a description of your topic here).*

Scenario 3: Help Colleagues Learn New Software

You were put in charge of implementing a new procurement strategy for the merchandising department at your company. Unfortunately, everyone will be required to learn a new software

program to track procurement and fulfillment. As the person in charge, you have some choices to make. Which is your communication priority?

1. Do you persuade them first that this change is worthwhile?
2. Do you first teach them how to use the program?
3. Do you attempt both at the same time?

Write a purpose statement by filling in the blanks below:

My communication's primary purpose is to _____ *(use a verb here)* my audience so they can or will _____ *(use an action word here)* about _____*(insert a description of your topic here).*

ETHICS IN ADVERTISING

Use the example that follows to explore communication ethics in advertising (Figur 2.7).

FIGURE 2.7 ■ Sample Ad

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Remember, for our purposes, there are two elements of communication happening here that we can evaluate for ethical communication:

1. How does the ad communicate information about the product?
2. How does the ad persuade you to buy the product?

Now consider the ethics of each:

1. How does the ad communicate information about the product?
   - **a.** Is the information truthful?
   - **b.** Is the information accurate?
   - **c.** Is the information current and relevant?
   - **d.** Is the product credible?
   - **e.** Is the company credible?
2. How does the ad persuade you to buy the product?
   - **a.** Does it engage in deceit?
   - **b.** Does it try to manipulate emotions?
   - **c.** Does it mislead or disinform?

Last, answer the following questions to assess the overall ethics of the message:

1. Does the ad ethically communicate information about the product? Why or why not?
2. Does the ad engage in ethical persuasion? Why or why not?
3. Does the ad mislead or misinform in any way?

KEY TERMS

Behavioristics
Demographics
Deontological Ethics
Disinformation
Ethos
Exigence
Exigency
Figure of Speech
Gatekeepers
Jargon
Journalistic Questions
Logos
Misinformation
Neurodiversity
Pathos
Primary Audience
Psychographics
Rhetoric
Rhetorical Appeals
Rhetorical Device
Rhetorical Situation
Secondary Audience
Signal-to-Noise Ratio
Stakeholders
Syllogism
Tertiary Audience
Utilitarianism
Virtue Ethics
Word Picture