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Communicating: Text Applications

Chapter Overview

In the last chapter, we learned that communication is crucial to the success of modern engineers, and how to craft our message based on the context, purpose, and audience of our communication. In this chapter, we will build our skills in listening, speaking, presenting, and writing.

When communicating, it is important to be aware of the medium because the choice of medium can influence the formality and expected outcome of our communication. Modern engineers mainly communicate through three media: written, oral, and the internet, with written viewed as the most formal medium of communication. Written documents and correspondences typically fall under one of three categories in engineering: [1] designing and building, [2] operating and maintaining, and [3] reporting results and record keeping. A memorandum is a brief communication that stays within the organization. These one-page documents are designed for maximum readability and impact, and can be used to make requests, give replies and confirmations, and to provide procedures and information. A letter is an external document addressing recipients outside your organization. When composing letters, be aware of how you want to represent your organization and match your style and tone with this awareness in mind. Proposals are persuasive documents written with the purpose of convincing readers to adopt or approve a design, a product, or a service. Sometimes, a feasibility study is requested before the proposal is formally accepted. Reports are documents written with informative or persuasive purposes, and can target both internal and external audiences. Reports typically involve an abstract and a table of content.

Oral communication is less formal than written, but it is commonplace in the workplace and can be powerful in creating influence and results. Oral communications typically take the forms of in-person conversations, phone calls, meetings, and presentations. Presentations in particular can be stressful for many people, but it is possible to transform this stress into a source of motivation and

energy. Just like writing, it is important to be aware of your purpose and your audience when preparing a presentation. When delivering a presentation, be aware of your body language, eye contact, and speaking style, and make use of visual aids. The textbook gives a number of suggestions on how to deliver a presentation; the most important thing to remember is that your job is to connect with your audience. In fact, establishing a connection with your audience or your communication partner(s) is essential in all forms of oral communication.

When we think of oral communication, we often think of speaking. However, speaking is only half of the communication, and listening forms the other half. Active listening skills are extremely important in the modern workplace. Research suggests that people spend 30-70% of workplace communication time listening, yet most of us are poor listeners. The inability to listen can lead to misunderstandings in relationships, cause major disruptions in teams, and create “toxic” environments in the workplace. Here, “listening” refers to more than just auditory listening; it is also the awareness of the tone, facial expression, and body language of our communication partner.

The internet is the most “modern” of communication media, and is a common place in organizations and workplaces. Internet communication can take the form of chats, emails, visual calls (Skype) and social media postings. Written communications, such as memos and reports, are often sent through emails, and oral communications are often conducted via Skype calls and webinars. However, some people (often older) can be uncomfortable with this form of communication and treat them with less seriousness than written or oral communications, and confidentiality and security may be a concern. You must decide if communicating through the Internet is appropriate based on the preference of your audience, the culture of your organization, and the sensitivity of your message.

In many ways, communication is both an art and a science. It is only through practicing the skills of listening, speaking, presenting, and writing that you become a better communicator.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will:

- learn about different genres of engineering documents;
- learn about the written, oral, and Internet media of communication;
- improve your active listening skills; and
- learn to deliver powerful presentations.