MARY ELLEN GUFFEY & DANA LOEWY

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Business
Communication

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Essentials of Business Communication

10E

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Dear Business Communication Student:

The **Tenth Edition** of *Essentials of Business Communication* brings you a four-in-one learning package including (a) an authoritative textbook, (b) a convenient workbook, (c) a self-teaching grammar/mechanics handbook, and (d) a comprehensive student website at **www.cengagebrain.com.**

   In preparing this Tenth Anniversary edition, your authors examined every topic and added new coverage to prepare you for success in today's thoroughly networked and hyper-connected digital-age workplace. Here are a few of the major features:

Dana Loewy and Mary Ellen Guffey

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- **Workplace relevance.** This edition continues to stress the practical and immediate importance of this course to your career success.
- **Communication technologies.** You'll find integrated coverage of cutting-edge digital technologies and mobile devices, emphasizing best practices for e-mail, texting, instant messaging, blogging, wikis, and social media.
- **Job search and interviewing coverage.** The Tenth Edition covers the latest trends and tips in preparing résumés and successful employment interviewing.
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- **Grammar and writing improvement exercises.** One of the best ways to improve your writing skills is to revise poorly written messages. This edition provides many new grammar/mechanics and writing assignments to help you hone your skills.
- **Writing plans.** Clear, step-by-step writing plans structure the writing process so that you can get started quickly and stay focused on the writing experience.

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We wish you well in your studies!
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Appreciation for Support

No successful textbook reaches a No. 1 position without a great deal of help. We are exceedingly grateful to the reviewers and other experts who contributed their pedagogic and academic expertise in shaping *Essentials of Business Communication*.

We extend sincere thanks to many professionals at Cengage Learning, including Jack W. Calhoun, Senior Vice President; Erin Joyner, Vice President, General Manager; Michael Schenk, Product Director, Business, Management & Marketing; Michele Rhoades, Senior Product Manager; Kristen Hurd, Senior Brand Manager; John Rich, Senior Media Developer; Jeff Tousignant, Marketing Manager; Shirley Stacy, Senior Art Director; and Jana Lewis, Content Project Manager. We are also grateful to Crystal Bullen, DPS Associates, and Malvine Litten, LEAP Publishing Services, who ensured premier quality and excellent accuracy throughout the publishing process.

Our very special thanks go to Mary Emmons, Senior Content Developer, whose wise counsel, exceptional management skills, friendship, and unfailingly upbeat outlook have kept us sane and on track as she shepherded many editions of our books to market leadership.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the following for their expertise in creating superior instructor and student support materials: Jane Flesher, Chippewa Valley Technical College; Janet Mizrahi, University of California, Santa Barbara; Joyce Staples, Bellevue College; and Christina Turner, Des Moines Area Community College.

Mary Ellen Guffey
Dana Loewy

Grateful Thanks to the Following

Faridah Awang
Eastern Kentucky University

Joyce M. Barnes
Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi

Patricia Beagle
Bryant & Stratton Business Institute

Nancy C. Bell
Wayne Community College

Ray D. Bernardi
Morehead State University

Karen Bounds
Boise State University

Daniel Brown
University of South Florida

Cheryl S. Byrne
Washtenaw Community College

Jean Bush-Bacelis
Eastern Michigan University

Mary Y. Bowers
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Vance-Granville Community College

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Irene Z. Church
Muskegon Community College

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Florida State University

Dee Anne Dill
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James A. Swindling
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SYRIT College

Marilyn Theissman
Rochester Community College

Zorica Wacker
Bellevue College

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A dedicated professional, Mary Ellen Guffey has taught business communication and business English topics for over thirty-five years. She received a bachelor's degree, *summa cum laude,* from Bowling Green State University; a master's degree from the University of Illinois, and a doctorate in business and economic education from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). She has taught at the University of Illinois, Santa Monica College, and Los Angeles Pierce College.

Now recognized as the world's leading business communication textbook author, Dr. Guffey corresponds with instructors around the globe who are using her books. She is the founding author of the award-winning *Business Communication: Process and Product,* the leading business communication textbook in this country. She also wrote *Business English,* which serves more students than any other book in its field; *Essentials of College English*; and *Essentials of Business Communication,* the leading text/workbook in its market. Dr. Guffey is active professionally, serving on the review boards of the *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly* and the *Journal of Business Communication*, publications of the Association for Business Communication. She participates in national meetings, sponsors business communication awards, and is committed to promoting excellence in business communication pedagogy and the development of student writing skills.

Dr. Dana Loewy

Dana Loewy has been teaching business communication at California State University, Fullerton for the past eighteen years. She enjoys introducing undergraduates to business writing and honing the skills of graduate students in managerial communication. Most recently, she has also taught various German classes. Dr. Loewy is a regular guest lecturer at Fachhochschule Nürtingen, Germany. Having earned a PhD from the University of Southern California in English with a focus on translation, she is a well-published freelance translator, interpreter, brand-name consultant, and textbook author. Dr. Loewy has collaborated with Dr. Guffey on recent editions of *Business Communication: Process & Product* as well as on *Essentials of Business Communication.*

Fluent in several languages, among them German and Czech, her two native languages, Dr. Loewy has authored critical articles in many areas of interest—literary criticism, translation, business communication, and business ethics. Before teaming up with Dr. Guffey, Dr. Loewy published various poetry and prose translations, most notably *The Early Poetry* of Jaroslav Seifert and *On the Waves of TSF*. Active in the Association for Business Communication, Dr. Loewy focuses on creating effective teaching/learning materials for undergraduate and graduate business communication students.

Business Communication in the Digital Age

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Communicating in the Digital-Age Workplace

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OBJECTIVES
After studying this chapter, you should be able to

1-1
Describe how solid communication skills will improve your career prospects and help you succeed in today's challenging digital-age workplace.

1-2
Confront barriers to effective listening, and start building your listening skills.

1-3
Explain the importance of nonverbal communication and of improving your nonverbal communication skills.

1-4
Explain five common dimensions of culture, and understand how culture affects communication and the use of social media and communication technology.

1-5
Discuss strategies that help communicators overcome negative cultural attitudes and prevent miscommunication in today's diverse networked workplace.

2

1-1 Mastering the Tools for Success in the Twenty-First-Century Workplace

You may wonder what kind of workplace you will enter when you graduate and which skills you will need to be successful in it. Expect a fast-moving, competitive, and information-driven digital environment. Communication technology provides unmatched mobility and connects individuals anytime and anywhere in the world. Today's communicators interact using mobile electronic devices and access information stored on remote servers, "in the cloud." This mobility and instant access explain why increasing numbers of workers must be available practically around the clock and must respond quickly.

This first chapter presents an overview of communication in business today. It addresses the contemporary workplace, listening skills, nonverbal communication, the cultural dimensions of communication, and intercultural job skills. The remainder of the book is devoted to developing specific writing and speaking skills.

1-1a Solid Communication Skills: Your Pass to Success

Your ability to communicate is a powerful career sifter.[1] Strong communication skills will make you marketable even in a tough economic climate. When jobs are few and competition is fierce, superior communication skills will give you an edge over other job applicants. Recruiters rank communication high on their wish lists.[2]

Chapter 1: Communicating in the Digital-Age Workplace

In a Fortune poll, 1,000 executives cited writing, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills along with self-motivation and team skills as their top choices in new-hires. Effective writing skills can be a stepping-stone to great job opportunities; poorly developed writing skills, on the other hand, will derail a career.

Perhaps you are already working or will soon apply for your first job. How do your skills measure up? The good news is that you can learn effective communication. This textbook and this course can immediately improve your communication skills. Because the skills you are learning will make a huge difference in your ability to find a job and to be promoted, this will be one of the most important courses you will ever take.

1-1b The Digital Revolution: Why Writing Skills Matter More Than Ever

People in today's workforce communicate more, not less, since information technology and the Internet have transformed the world of work. Thanks to technology, messages travel instantly to distant locations, reaching potentially huge audiences with a minimum of expense and effort. Work team members collaborate even when they are physically apart. Moreover, social media are playing an increasingly prominent role in business. In such a hyperconnected world, writing matters more than ever. Digital media require more written communication, and workers' skills are always on display.[3]

As a result, employers seek employees with a broader range of skills and higher levels of knowledge in their field than in the past.[4] Unfortunately, a great number of workers can't deliver.[5] A survey of American corporations revealed that two thirds of salaried employees have some writing responsibility. About one third of them, however, do not meet the writing requirements for their positions.[6] "Businesses are crying out—they need to have people who write better," said Gaston Caperton, business executive and former College Board president.[7]

Not surprisingly, many job listings mention the need for excellent oral and written communication skills. In a poll of recruiters, oral and written communication skills were by a large margin the top skill set sought.[8] Among the top choices in two other surveys were teamwork, critical-thinking, analytical-reasoning, and oral and written communication skills.[9] In addition, as you will learn in later chapters, recruiters will closely examine your social media presence to learn about your communication skills and professionalism. Naturally, they will not hire candidates who write poorly or post inappropriate content online.[10]

Techies Write Too. Even in technical fields such as accounting and information technology, you will need strong communication skills. A poll of 1,400 chief financial officers sponsored by Accountemps revealed that 75 percent said that verbal, written, and interpersonal skills are more important today than they were in the past.[11] Technical experts must be able to communicate with others and explain their work clearly, says an IBM systems specialist.[12] A survey of Web professionals showed that those with writing and copyediting skills were far less likely to have their jobs sent offshore.[13] Another survey conducted by the Society for Information Management revealed that network professionals ranked written and oral communication skills among the top five most desired skills for new-hires.[14]

Businesses Generate a Wide Range of Messages. Be prepared to use a variety of media. In addition to occasional traditional letters and memos, expect to communicate with the public and within the company by e-mail,* instant messaging and

---

*The usage standard in this book is *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* Eleventh Edition. Words such as *e-mail* and *Web* are in a state of flux, and a single standard has yet to establish itself. *Merriam-Webster's* continues to show conventional usage patterns.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1

Describe how solid communication skills will improve your career prospects and help you succeed in today's challenging digital-age workplace.

Note: Small superscript numbers in the text announce information sources. Full citations begin on page N-1 near the end of the book. This edition uses a modified American Psychological Association (APA) reference format.

texting, company blogs, collaboration software such as wikis, and social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and YouTube. You will learn more about workplace communication technology in Chapter 5.

Writing Is in Your Future. Regardless of career choice, you will probably be sending many digital messages, such as the e-mail shown in Figure 1.1. In fact, e-mail is "today's version of the business letter or interoffice memo."[15] Because electronic mail and other digital media have become important channels of communication in today's workplace, all digital business messages must be clear, concise, and professional. Notice that the message in Figure 1.1 is more businesslike and more professional than the quick e-mail or text you might send socially. Learning to write professional digital messages will be an important part of this course.

Figure **1.1** Businesslike, Professional E-Mail Message

Because e-mails have all but replaced business letters and interoffice memos in most workplaces, they must be written carefully, provide complete information, and sound businesslike and professional. Notice that this message is more formal in tone than e-mail messages you might send to friends.

File Edit Mailbox Message Transfer Special Tools Window Help

B / U | | Send

To: Customer Service Improvement Team
From: Ron P. Hernandez <ron.hernandez@lumitech-resources.com>
Subject: Social Media Strategy Meeting: Wednesday, February 11 — Uses precise subject line to convey key information quickly
Cc:
Bcc:

Starts with casual greeting to express friendliness —

Hi, Team,

As recommended at our last meeting, I have scheduled an e-marketing and social media specialist to speak to us about improving our social media responses. Social media consultant Patricia Adams, founder of Optima Marketing Solutions, has agreed to discuss ways to turn our social media presence into a competitive advantage. Mark your calendars for the following: — Announces most important idea first with minimal background information

Sets off meeting information for easy recognition and retrieval —

Social Media Strategy Meeting
Wednesday, February 11, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Conference Room

In previous meetings our team acknowledged that customers are increasingly turning to our website, blogs, and Facebook pages to locate information, seek support, and connect with us. However, we are experiencing problems in responding quickly and effectively. Ms. Adams promises to address these concerns. She will also tell us whether we need to establish a presence in additional social media networks. Ms. Adams will help us decide whether we should hire an in-house social media manager or pay for an external service. To make this meeting most productive, she asks that each team member submit at least three questions or problem areas for discussion. — Provides details about meeting with transition to action requests

Action Requests:

Bullets action requests and places them near message end where readers expect to find them —

• Please send three discussion questions to Jeff (jeff.yang@lumitech-resources.com) by February 9 at 5 p.m. so that he can relay them to Ms. Adams.

• Because we will be ordering box lunches for this meeting, please make your selection on the intranet before February 9.

If you have any questions, drop by my office or send a note. Thanks for your continued efforts to improve our customer service! — Closes by telling where to find additional information; also expresses appreciation

Ron

Provides contact information similar to that in business letterheads —

Ron P. Hernandez
Director, Customer Service, Lumitech Resources, Inc.
E-mail: ron.hernandez@lumitech-resources.com
Phone: (213) 468-3290
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1-1c What Employers Want: Professionalism

Your future employer will expect you to show professionalism and possess what are often referred to as "soft skills" in addition to your technical knowledge. Soft skills are essential career attributes that include the ability to communicate, work well with others, solve problems, make ethical decisions, and appreciate diversity.[16] Sometimes called employability skills or key competencies, these soft skills are desirable in all business sectors and job positions.[17]

Not every job seeker is aware of the employer's expectations. Some new-hires have no idea that excessive absenteeism or tardiness is grounds for termination. Others are surprised to learn that they are expected to devote their full attention to their duties when on the job. One young man wanted to read novels when things got slow.[18] Some recent graduates had unrealistic expectations about their salaries and working hours.[19] Moreover, despite well-publicized warnings, some people continue to post racy photos and otherwise questionable content online, thus sabotaging their careers.[20]

Projecting and maintaining a professional image can make a real difference in helping you obtain the job of your dreams. Once you get that job, you are more likely to be taken seriously and promoted if you look and sound professional. Don't send the wrong message with unwitting and unprofessional behavior. Figure 1.2 reviews areas you will want to check to be sure you are projecting professionalism. You will learn more about soft skills and professionalism in Chapter 11.

1-1d How Your Education Drives Your Income

As college tuition rises steeply and student debt mounts, you may wonder whether going to college is worthwhile. Yet the effort and money you invest in earning your college degree will most likely pay off. College graduates earn more, suffer less unemployment, and can choose from a wider variety of career options than workers without a college education. Moreover, college graduates have access to the highest-paying and fastest-growing careers, many of which require a degree.[21] As Figure 1.3 on page 7 shows, graduates with bachelor's degrees earn nearly three times as much as high school dropouts and are almost three times less likely to be unemployed.[22]

Writing is one aspect of education that is particularly well rewarded. One corporate president explained that many people climbing the corporate ladder are good. When he faced a hard choice between candidates, he used writing ability as the deciding factor. He said that sometimes writing is the only skill that separates a candidate from the competition. A survey of employers confirms that soft skills such as communication ability can tip the scales in favor of one job applicant over another.[23] Your ticket to winning in a tight job market and launching a successful career is good communication skills.

1-1e Meeting the Challenges of the Information Age Workplace

Today's digital workplace is changing profoundly and rapidly. As a businessperson and as a business communicator, you will be affected by many trends, including new communication tools such as social media, the "anytime, anywhere" office, and team-based projects. Other trends are flattened management hierarchies, global competition, and a renewed emphasis on ethics. The following overview reveals how communication skills are closely tied to your success in a constantly evolving networked workplace.

- **Rapidly changing communication technologies**. New communication technology is dramatically affecting the way workers interact. In our always-connected world, businesses exchange information by e-mail, instant

"*The ability to write well is unquestionably a skill necessary for 21st-century success in college and the workplace. . . . Strong writing skills are essential.*"

—Gaston Caperton, former president, College Board

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Figure 1.2 Projecting Professionalism When You Communicate

Unprofessional		Professional
Uptalk, a singsong speech pattern, making sentences sound like questions; *like* used as a filler; *go* for *said*; slang; poor grammar and profanity.	**Speech habits**	Recognizing that your credibility can be seriously damaged by sounding uneducated, crude, or adolescent.
Messages with incomplete sentences, misspelled words, exclamation points, IM slang, and mindless chatter; sloppy messages signal that you don't care, don't know, or aren't smart enough to know what is correct.	**E-mail**	Messages with subjects, verbs, and punctuation marks. Employers dislike IM abbreviations. They value conciseness and correct spelling, even in brief e-mail messages and texts.
E-mail addresses such as *hotbabe@outlook.com, supasnugglykitty@yahoo.com, or buffedguy@gmail.com.*	**Internet**	E-mail addresses should include a name or a positive, businesslike expression; they should not sound cute or like a chat room nickname.
An outgoing message with strident background music, weird sounds, or a joke message.	**Voice mail**	An outgoing message that states your name or phone number and provides instructions for leaving a message.
Soap operas, thunderous music, or a TV football game playing noisily in the background when you answer the phone.	**Telephone presence**	A quiet background when you answer the telephone, especially if you are expecting a prospective employer's call.
Using electronics during business meetings for unrelated purposes or during conversations with fellow employees; raising your voice (cell yell); forcing others to overhear your calls.	**Cell phones, tablets**	Turning off phone and message notification, both audible and vibrate, during meetings; using your smart devices only for meeting-related purposes.
Sending and receiving text messages during meetings, allowing texting to interrupt face-to-face conversations, or texting when driving.	**Texting**	Sending appropriate business text messages only when necessary (perhaps when a cell phone call would disturb others).

messaging, text messaging, smartphones, fax, voice mail, powerful laptop computers, and tablets. Satellite communications, wireless networking, teleconferencing, and videoconferencing help workers conduct meetings with associates around the world. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube as well as blogs, wikis, forums, and peer-to-peer tools help businesspeople collect information, serve customers, and sell products and services. Figure 1.4 on pages 8 and 9 illustrates many new technologies you will encounter in today's workplace.

- **"Anytime, anywhere" and nonterritorial offices.** High-speed and wireless Internet access has freed millions of workers from nine-to-five jobs in brick-and-mortar offices. Flexible working arrangements allow them to work at home or on the road. Meet the "work shifter," a telecommuter or teleworker who largely remains outside the territorial office. The "anytime, anywhere" office requires only a mobile electronic device and a wireless connection.[24]

Figure 1.3 The Education Bonus: Higher Income, Lower Unemployment

Education	Median Weekly Earnings	Unemployment Rate
High school dropout	$ 471	12.4%
High school diploma	652	8.3%
Some college, no degree	727	7.7%
Associate's degree	785	6.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,367	4.5%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2013, February 5). Labor force statistics from the current population survey; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013, May 22). Employment Projections: Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment.

Teleworkers now represent almost 20 percent of the U.S. working adult population.[25] To save on office real estate, some industries provide "nonterritorial" workspaces, or "hot desks." The first to arrive gets the best desk and the corner window.[26] At the same time, 24/7 availability has blurred the line between work and leisure, so that some workers are always "on duty."

- **Self-directed work groups and virtual teams**. Teamwork has become a reality in business. Many companies have created cross-functional teams to empower employees and boost their involvement in decision making. You can expect to collaborate with a team in gathering information, finding and sharing solutions, implementing decisions, and managing conflict. You may even become part of a virtual team whose members are in remote locations. Increasingly, organizations are also forming ad hoc teams to solve particular problems. Such project-based teams disband once they have accomplished their objectives.[27] Moreover, parts of our future economy may rely on "free agents" who will be hired on a project basis, a far cry from today's full-time and relatively steady jobs.

- **Flattened management hierarchies**. To better compete and to reduce expenses, businesses have for years been trimming layers of management. This means that as a frontline employee, you will have fewer managers. You will be making decisions and communicating them to customers, to fellow employees, and to executives.

- **Heightened global competition**. Because many American companies continue to move beyond domestic markets, you may be interacting with people from many cultures. To be a successful business communicator, you will need to learn about other cultures. You will also need to develop intercultural skills including sensitivity, flexibility, patience, and tolerance.

- **Renewed emphasis on ethics**. Ethics is once again a hot topic in business. On the heels of the banking crisis and the collapse of the real estate market, a calamitous recession followed, caused largely, some say, by greed and ethical lapses. With the passage of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, the U.S. government now requires greater accountability. As a result, businesses are eager to regain public trust by building ethical environments. Many have written ethical mission statements, installed hotlines, and appointed compliance officers to ensure strict adherence to their high standards and the law.

These trends mean that your communication skills will constantly be on display. Those who can write clear and concise messages contribute to efficient operations and can expect to be rewarded.

Figure 1.4 Communication and Collaborative Technologies

Communication Technologies
Reshaping the World of Work

Becoming familiar with modern communication technology can help you be successful on the job. Today's digital workplace is changing dramatically as a result of innovative software; social media networks; superfast broadband and wireless access; and numerous technologies that allow workers to share information, work from remote locations, and be more productive in or away from the office. With today's tools you can exchange ideas, solve problems, develop products, forecast performance, and complete team projects any time of the day or night anywhere in the world.

Cloud Computing and Web 2.0

Increasingly, applications and data are stored in remote locations online, "in the cloud." *Cloud computing* means that businesses and individuals no longer need to maintain costly hardware and software in-house; instead, they can pay for digital storage space and software applications offered by providers online. Photo- and video-sharing sites such as Picasa and Flickr keep your photos "in the cloud." Similarly, Dropbox, a popular file-synchronization service, and online backup provider Carbonite allow users to edit and sync files online independent of the device used to access them. Websites and Web applications have moved from "read only" to "read–write," thus enabling users to participate, collaborate, and network in unprecedented ways.

Telephony: VoIP

Savvy businesses are switching from traditional phone service to voice over Internet protocol (VoIP). This technology allows callers to communicate using a broadband Internet connection, thus eliminating long-distance and local telephone charges. Higher-end VoIP systems now support unified voice mail, e-mail, click-to-call capabilities, and softphones (phones using computer networking). Free or low-cost Internet telephony sites, such as the popular Skype, are also increasingly used by businesses, although their sound and image quality is often uneven.

Voice Recognition

Computers equipped with voice recognition software enable users to dictate up to 160 words a minute with accurate transcription. Voice recognition is particularly helpful to disabled workers and to professionals with heavy dictation loads, such as physicians and attorneys. Users can create documents, enter data, compose and send e-mails, browse the Web, and control their desktops—all by voice. Smart devices can also execute tasks as directed through voice command apps.

Voice Conferencing

Telephone "bridges" join two or more callers from any location to share the same call. *Voice conferencing* (also called *audioconferencing, teleconferencing,* or just plain *conference calling*) enables people to collaborate by telephone. Communicators at both ends use enhanced speakerphones to talk and be heard simultaneously.

Open Offices

The widespread use of laptop computers, tablets, and other smart devices; wireless technology; and VoIP have led to more fluid, flexible, and open workspaces. Smaller computers and flat-screen monitors enable designers to save space with boomerang-shaped workstations and cockpit-style work surfaces rather than space-hogging corner work areas. Smaller breakout areas for impromptu meetings are taking over some cubicle space, and digital databases are replacing file cabinets. Mobile technology allows workers to be fully connected and productive on the go.

Cloud Computing: © vinzstudio/Shutterstock.com; Telephony: VoIP: © Magics/ZUMA Press/Newscom; Voice Recognition: © iStockphoto.com/ichaka Voice Conferencing; © Aspireimages Royalty-Free/Inmagine; Open Offices: © Inmagine

Smart Mobile Devices and Digital Convergence

A new generation of lightweight, handheld devices provide phone, e-mail, Web browsing, and calendar options anywhere there is a cellular or Wi-Fi network. Tablets and smartphones such as Android devices, iPhones, and iPads now allow workers to tap into corporate databases and intranets from remote locations. They can check customers' files, complete orders, and send out receipts without returning to the office. Increasingly, businesses are issuing smartphones to their workforces, abandoning landlines completely. At the same time, the need for separate electronic gadgets is waning as digital smart devices are becoming multifunctional and highly capable. With streaming video on the Web, connectivity between TVs and computers, and networked mobile devices, technology is converging, consolidating into increasingly powerful devices. Many smart devices today are fully capable of replacing digital point-and-shoot still photography and video cameras. Mobile smart devices are also competing with TVs and computers for primacy.

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing allows participants to meet in special conference rooms equipped with cameras and television screens. Individuals or groups see each other and interact in real time, although they may be far apart. Faster computers, rapid Internet connections, and better cameras now enable 2 to 200 participants to sit at their own computers or mobile devices and share applications, spreadsheets, presentations, and photos. The technology extends from the popular Internet applications Skype and FaceTime to sophisticated videoconferencing software that delivers HD-quality audio, video, and content sharing.
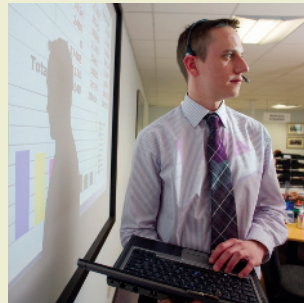
Electronic Presentations

Business presentations in PowerPoint, Keynote, SlideRocket, or Prezi can be projected from a laptop or tablet or posted online. Sophisticated presentations may include animation, sound effects, digital photos, video clips, or hyperlinks to Internet sites. In some industries, electronic slides ("decks") are replacing or supplementing traditional hard-copy reports.

Collaboration With Blogs, Podcasts, and Wikis

Businesses use *blogs* to keep customers and employees informed and to receive feedback. Company news can be posted, updated, and categorized for easy cross-referencing. An audio or video file streamed online or downloaded to a digital music player is called a *podcast*. A *wiki* is a website that allows multiple users to collaboratively create and edit pages. Information can get lost in e-mails, but wikis provide an easy way to communicate and keep track of what has been said.

Presence Technology

Presence technology makes it possible to locate and identify a computing device as soon as users connect to the network. This technology is an integral part of communication devices including smartphones, laptop computers, tablets, and GPS devices. Collaboration is possible wherever and whenever users are online.
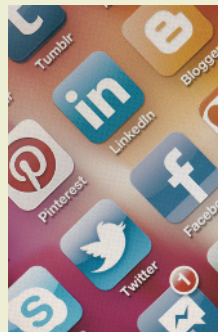
Web Conferencing

With services such as GoToMeeting, WebEx, and Microsoft LiveMeeting, all you need is a computer or a smart device and an Internet connection to hold a meeting (*webinar*) with customers or colleagues in real time. Although the functions are constantly evolving, Web conferencing currently incorporates screen sharing, chats, slide presentations, text messaging, and application sharing.

Social Media

Never before in history have so many people been connected in online communities called social networks. Broadly speaking, the term *social media* describes technology that enables participants to connect and participate in social networks online. For example, tech-savvy companies and individuals send *tweets*, short messages of up to 140 characters, to other users to issue up-to-date news about their products, to link to their blogs and websites, or to announce events and promotions. The microblogging service Twitter also allows businesses to track what is being said about them and their products. Similarly, businesses use social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram to interact with customers and to build their brands. Companies may also prospect for talent using social media networks.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2

Confront barriers to effective listening, and start building your listening skills.

1-2 Developing Listening Skills

In an age that thrives on information and communication technology, listening is an important skill. However, by all accounts most of us are not very good listeners. Do you ever pretend to be listening when you are not? Do you know how to look attentive in class when your mind wanders far away? How about "tuning out" people when their ideas are boring or complex? Do you find it hard to focus on ideas when a speaker's clothing or mannerisms are unusual?

You probably answered *yes* to one or more of these questions because many of us have poor listening habits. In fact, some researchers suggest that we listen at only 25 to 50 percent efficiency. Such poor listening habits are costly in business and affect professional relationships. Messages must be rewritten, shipments reshipped, appointments rescheduled, contracts renegotiated, and directions restated.

To develop better listening skills, we must first recognize barriers that prevent effective listening. Then we need to focus on specific techniques for improving listening skills.

1-2a Overcoming Barriers to Effective Listening

As you have seen, bad habits and distractions can interfere with effective listening. Have any of the following barriers and distractions prevented you from hearing what has been said?

- **Physical barriers**. You cannot listen if you cannot hear what is being said. Physical impediments include hearing disabilities, poor acoustics, and noisy surroundings. It is also difficult to listen if you are ill, tired, or uncomfortable.
- **Psychological barriers**. Everyone brings to the communication process a unique set of cultural, ethical, and personal values. Each of us has an idea of what is right and what is important. If other ideas run counter to our preconceived thoughts, we tend to "tune out" speakers and thus fail to receive their messages.
- **Language problems**. Unfamiliar words can destroy the communication process because they lack meaning for the receiver. In addition, emotion-laden, or "charged," words can adversely affect listening. If the mention of words such as *bankruptcy* or *real estate meltdown* has an intense emotional impact, a listener may be unable to focus on the words that follow.
- **Nonverbal distractions**. Many of us find it hard to listen if a speaker is different from what we view as normal. Unusual clothing or speech mannerisms, body twitches, or a radical hairstyle can cause enough distraction to prevent us from hearing what the speaker has to say.
- **Thought speed**. Because we can process thoughts at least three times faster than speakers can say them, we can become bored and allow our minds to wander.
- **Faking attention**. Most of us have learned to look as if we are listening even when we are not. Such behavior was perhaps necessary as part of our socialization. Faked attention, however, seriously threatens effective listening because it encourages the mind to engage in flights of unchecked fancy. Those who fake attention often find it hard to concentrate even when they want to.
- **Grandstanding**. Would you rather talk or listen? Naturally, most of us would rather talk. Because our own experiences and thoughts are most important to us, we grab the limelight in conversations. We sometimes fail to listen carefully because we are just waiting politely for the next pause so that we can have our turn to speak.