

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF **COMMUNICATION** AND WHY THE DETAILS MATTER

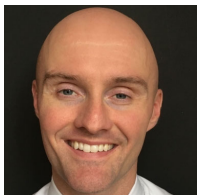
Day 4: Communication Etiquette: Different ways to communicate and when and how to use them best

We have so many ways to communicate in today's technology-driven world. It may go unnoticed, but several times a day we decide on what mode of communication best fits our needs when we need to deliver a message or need to receive information. Today's challenge looks at the most common modes (or channels) of communication and provides suggestions on how and when to apply them in a professional manner. Day 4 will help get us on the same page in choosing the right channel and applying standardized etiquette when we communicate. **This challenge consists of 2 articles and 1 task.**

Today's Mentors:



Mary Ellen Guffey is acknowledged as a leading author in business communication. Her award-winning, well-researched textbooks have served hundreds of thousands of students over the years in the United States, Canada, and abroad.

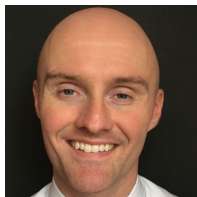


Jordan Smith received his PhD in 2019 from Iowa State University where he co-majored in rhetoric and professional communication (RPC) and applied linguistics and technology (ALT). His research interests include corpus linguistics, register variation, English grammar and usage, and technical editing.

Day 4: Communication Etiquette: Different ways to communicate and when and how to use them best

Selecting Appropriate Communication Channels

By Mary Ellen Guffey and Jordan Smith



Article 1

A communication channel is the means by which a message is conveyed. In general, more than one channel can be used to accomplish the same task. But choosing the most appropriate channel will depend on the audience, the message, and the purpose of the communication. When communicating a message, you have several options to choose from (e.g. letter, face-to-face meeting, telephone call, email, text message, video-conference, various forms of social media).

We have never had this many options for communicating in human history. Each has its own unique advantages and disadvantages that weigh into choosing which one to use. The table below lists some common channels of communication and when to use them.

Channels	Best use
Face-to-Face	When you want to be persuasive, deliver bad or sensitive news, or share personal information.
Voice-Mail	For simple and brief messages. When sender of information does not need an immediate response.
Telephone	When face-to-face interaction is not necessary, however, sender needs an immediate response
Text	Different time zones, written record is necessary, email is not available or appropriate.
Email	Different time zones, written record is necessary, communicating with a large group, can replace hard copy memo or letter.
Video/Tele conference	When group interaction is required, but group is geographically dispersed.
Memo	Communicating inside an organization, non sensitive company information, company policy, company procedure(s)
Letter	Communicating external to organization, non sensitive and non-complex information.
Report/ Proposal	Used for internal and external communication. Communicating complex or extensive ideas and initiatives.
Online forums/site	To share ideas with wide audience, to provide opportunity for interaction with and revision of information.

There are other considerations when choosing an appropriate channel... like - when is a written memo preferable to an electronic one? When is a text message more appropriate than a telephone call?

Consider the following guidance to help answer these questions:

Message formality: The choice in channel sends a non-verbal cue that affects style and tone. For example, a memo or letter is more formal than a text or IM message.

Media Limitation: Some channels are more appropriate for certain messages. For example, a report can convey a more complex message than a text message. Discussing sensitive information is more appropriate in a face-to-face meeting rather than over a text message.

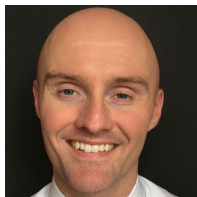
Urgency: Be mindful of people's time. Messages that do not require immediate feedback can be communicated via email or voicemail rather than a face-to-face meeting or telephone conversation.

Cost: Some channels are simply more costly than others.

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By Mary Ellen Guffey, Jordan Smith



Article 1

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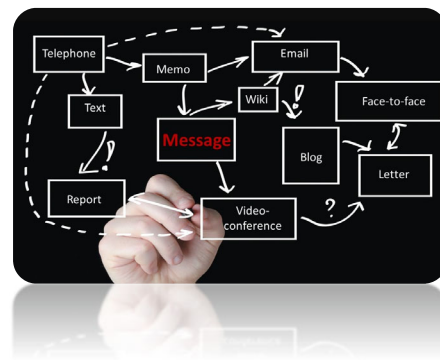
Another way to navigate through the various channel options is to consider them on a broader spectrum: Oral, Written, Visual, and Digital. The following table provides some guidance on narrowing down your communication options.

Types	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Oral	Face-to-face communication including meetings, interviews, speeches, and presentations. F2F communication allows non verbal cues and immediate feedback between sender and receiver. Oral communication is most appropriate when delivering bad, sensitive, or personal news.	✓ Provides opportunity for immediate feedback ✓ Involves non-verbal cues ✓ Allows for immediate feedback and consensus building	× Provides no permanent record of communication × Reduces sender's control of message × Immediate feedback may not be constructive
Written	Written messages, other than digital, are used to communicate routine, day-to-day, information to audiences inside and outside of an organization. Memos, letters, reports, or proposals fall into this category.	✓ Provides permanent record ✓ Shared easily with large audiences ✓ Minimizes emotional reaction to message	× Delays feedback including non-verbal cues × Takes time and resources to distribute
Visual	Visual documents are communication formats in which one or more visual element play a central in conveying the message and are supported by small amounts of text. SlideDoc Reports and Infographic illustrations fall into this category.	✓ Conveys complex ideas ✓ Simplifies messages ✓ Reduces demand on receiver's time demand ✓ Provides permanent record	× Requires specialised skills and more time to produce × Increases difficulty to transmit and store
Digital	Electronic media have largely replaced printed messages in many companies. Some degree of technical skills is required to use this category. Blogs, wikis, and websites fall into this category.	✓ Delivers messages quickly ✓ Reaches large audiences ✓ Provides interactive media ✓ Provides permanent record	× Entails privacy and security risks × Requires specialised skill and time to produce

Only through practice and repetition will these decisions become second nature to you. On occasion, you will still experience the regret of..."it would have been better if I had just walked over there and talked to him".

Supplementing the "rules of thumb" discussed in this article, it comes down to intuition and some level of emotional intelligence. For example, ask yourself: How would "so and so" best receive this message – as an email, as a text, or as a phone call? Do I need to be there to interpret their response, to provide clarification, or add context to my original message?

Use this information as a starting point; practice, practice, and practice; anticipate the consequences of your actions; and always think five moves ahead.



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CVWD's Reference Guide for Email Communication

By CVWD

Article 2

When, how often, and in which manner we should communicate, are points every organization should discuss to create consistency and a level of expectation for all employees. The following email communication guide (prepared in the form of an FAQ), provides CVWD employees with a starting point for creating uniformity in how we communicate using email.

CVWD's Reference Guide for Email Communication

1. **What is an email?** – It's easy to forget that an email is a letter. Unlike the days of the Pony Express, however, communication is instant. In addition, these letters can be addressed to one or more individuals, the letters can drop people from a thread, and they can be forwarded to others as well. (*Refer to: Day 2 – 7c's*)
2. **What is the purpose of my email?** – It is always a choice to decide whether to email rather than calling by phone, meeting in person or virtually, or perhaps texting. Often, email is the best choice. Sometimes, it's the next best choice. It's a good practice to take a second and think about what the purpose of my email is.
 - a. Provide a quick reply – Oftentimes it's quicker or easier to email than to call or meet. Maybe I've already tried calling and want to make sure they receive the message, whether because they're in a meeting (but can check email) or I don't want to risk forgetting to address the issue or question. Maybe I'm the one in a meeting and I need to reach out to somebody (if the meeting context allows for sending a pressing email).
 - b. Communicate to a group – I may want an efficient way to communicate direction or idea to a group. Perhaps I want to start a discussion before nailing down a meeting.
 - c. Memorialize what I'm writing for myself and/or others – Email.
 - i. Complex concept or many steps – The message may serve as a reference for readers to go back to.
 - ii. Document that I communicated – I may want to memorialize to show that I communicated timely and/or effectively.
 - iii. Something I can easily search for later – I may want to use the email as a note, which I can also search for in my inbox later using keywords.
 - d. Build stakeholdership and show inclusion – Emails can be used to introduce people. I can also use them to show inclusion regarding a topic

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3. **When do I reply to an email?** – This is somewhat related to “what is the purpose of my email?” If I’m on an email, most of the time it’s because it is directed at me, I may have information to add, or it’s an “fyi” that I’m included on. The primary question to ask in deciding whether I reply to an email is: “Do I have value to add in this conversation?”
 - a. Respond to a direct request – If I’m being asked a question, I should respond.
 - b. Acknowledge receipt – In general, it is assumed as a business practice that emails sent are received and read. In fact, there is a general expectation in terms of accountability to communication received, and I don’t always need to respond. But there are times when time is of the essence or we want to make sure a message was received. In this case, I can acknowledge receipt, and I can reply directly to the sender, unless, for example, I also need my supervisor to know I received the message. In other words, I can drop the others off of the email.
 - c. Informational – There are also a lot of informational emails that go out – e.g. about my benefits, articles forwarded to me, or schedule changes. I don’t necessarily need to respond to these, as this can cause “white noise” or “chatter” (discussed further below).
 - d. I have value to add to the conversation – If the email is not directed at me, but I have information or an idea that will provide value to the sender or others copied on the email, I can consider replying directly or replying all with my value-add. I will also need to consider various roles and how my response may impact others. For example, will my eagerness to reply embarrass my coworker? Has the original recipient had a chance to respond first? (*Refer to: Day 3 – Emotional Intelligence*)
 - e. Show of support – Show of support is great. I don’t always need to join in a round of “thank yous” – after all, we should all be operating under an umbrella of support anyway – but sometimes, it’s nice to join in on a congratulatory round.
4. **What if there’s no response?** – There are times when we don’t receive a response to a direct request, and this is a common reason for a breakdown in communication. We’ve often heard someone say that they would have an answer or decision, but they’re still waiting on so-and-so. What is the best thing for me to do?
 - a. Do not send a transcript – It’s better for me not to send a follow-up email to the effect of “On such-and-such a date I sent you a message about such-and-such topic and have not heard back.”
 - b. Benefit of the doubt – We work under an umbrella of acceptance, transparency, honesty, respectfulness, and accountability. That means that if my recipient received your message, there’s a good chance they accidentally deleted it, the server lost the email, or they read it and were busy and made the honest mistake of forgetting to reply. I should assume a posture of extending benefit of the doubt in these situations.
 - c. Follow-up call or a walk down the hall – I need to be aware of my schedule and my team’s needs and budget accordingly. Assuming I’ve given my recipient enough lead time, I need to decide when I need a response by. And if I haven’t received one, my phone is within reach.

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5. **How do I signoff?** – Signing off or using a signature is a preference. Like dressing for a party, it's safer to err on the side of being more formal if I'm unsure.
 - a. When sending an email to someone outside of the district always use your district-branded signature. This will make it clear where the email is coming from and your position in the organization. (*Refer to: Day 7 – District Branding*)
6. **When is it better not to email?**
 - a. Past difficult interaction or subject – Have I had a difficult interaction with this individual before? Maybe I've caused a misunderstanding in the past. Is this a subject that could be sensitive where things could get "lost in translation" through email? For example, it may be an area where both of our duties overlap. Or it could be an email where bringing up a project and copying their supervisor could feel accusatory before I know the full picture. In these types of instances, consider picking up the phone. (*Refer to: Day 2 – 7c's*)
 - b. Liability – As a public agency, the District is subject to Public Records Act requests, where anybody can make requests of files, including emails. If I think the email subject may be an area involving future liability in any number of areas – e.g., construction management, customer records, personnel etc. – and I'm unsure, it doesn't hurt to pick up the phone and start by having a conversation first with your supervisor.
 - c. Will my email lead to more questions? If it's easier to communicate my message and answer any follow-up questions with a 3-5 minute phone call it may be best to call.
7. **Who should I copy?** – Over or under-copying people is always a balance. Sometimes, it could be better to develop a thought or decision amongst fewer people. I can always copy the larger group later on or even forward a thread as an "fyi" after a thought or decision is fully formed. Oftentimes, it's better to err on the side of including more than less. Ultimately, this is always a judgment call.
8. **Do I ever drop people from an email or just reply directly?** –
 - a. It is worth considering whether I am creating "white noise" or "chatter". It's always nice to have a round of congratulatory remarks after a job or project well done. But what if I'm working out a detail – e.g. whether a vendor is going to receive a check today vs tomorrow? In this case, it's probably ok for me to reply all to the group one last time and indicate I'll work things out directly with the vendor going forward.
 - b. Be Empathetic - What if it's an area that I think may be unnecessarily embarrassing for my colleague and there is value in promoting a "safe learning space"? If I can maintain the values of transparency and honesty, I may consider dropping the others off of the thread for my colleague's sake. Remember, there is also value in vulnerability, so it is always a judgment call. (*Refer to: Day 3 – Emotional Intelligence*)

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CVWD's Reference Guide for Email Communication

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Article 2

(continued)

9. Are there any negative emotions that an email interaction might trigger in me or in somebody else? Any impact to CVWD values/culture? (Refer to: Day 3 – Emotional Intelligence)
- Fear of not being recognized for effort
 - Fear of not being included
 - Fear of looking incompetent
 - Insecurity of work presented
 - Fear of being leapfrogged
 - Annoyance (filled inbox)
10. Does my email warrant a follow-up call?
- Time-sensitive – If my topic is time-sensitive, but I sent an email because I wanted to memorialize something and/or it was a complex topic, I may still want to follow-up with a phone call to make sure the message was received.
 - Sensitive topic – If, based on my judgment, my topic is sensitive but I still decided to initiate communication via email, I may want to follow up by phone and review my talking points and verify what my “tone” was.
11. Response timing – When is it appropriate to respond?
- General response – It’s generally a good idea to respond in some form. Even if it’s to say “Received, thank you” or “Received, and will get back to you after I get a chance to review later.”
 - Timing – Certain emails demand swifter responses. Generally, 24 hours is the upper limit to respond. If you see an email sent late in the evening, you aren’t considered “unresponsive” if you don’t respond immediately. If the need is urgent, the expectation is that the sender will call or text message. Another option is for the email sender to indicate the level of urgency and a response-expectation in the subject line.
12. Quick Tips
- Leave the addresses for the end** – Prevent sending an email that isn’t ready to be sent. It is very easy to accidentally hit the send button before I am fully ready to send. Avoid this by leaving the to: field blank until I am ready to send.
 - Always enter a subject line** – Use keywords to give the reader some additional insight into my email. ‘Urgent’, ‘FYI’, or ‘Request’ are a few.
 - Reread** – Never send out an email without rereading it. Give your reader the respect of a grammatically correct email (there are spelling and grammar checks in Outlook).
 - Limit humor (depending on circumstance)** – An important part of communication is facial cues and voice inflexions. What I may find to be a funny line may be misread or interpreted.
 - Don’t trust autofill** – Always double check the recipient’s email address. It is not uncommon for the email software to find the wrong person in saved contacts.
 - Get to the point early** – It’s often appreciated when an email has the main idea, request, or topic stated upfront, early in the body of the email.
 - Reply All?** – It’s easy to quickly respond to an email by using the “reply all” button. Before you send it, make sure it’s truly intended for all recipients of the original email.

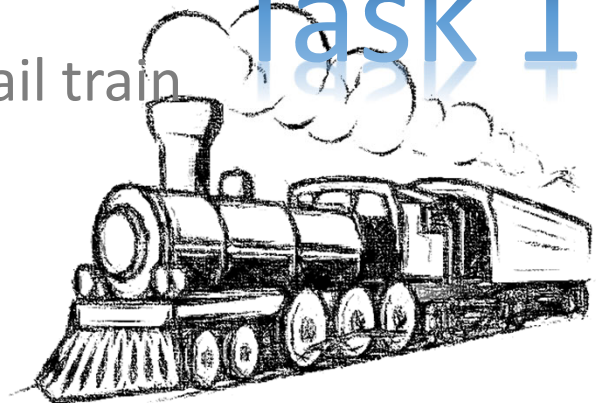
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Task 1

“Get on-board” the ACME email train

Instructions –

After having read through Articles 1 & 2, read the email thread below and comment on how this communication could have been improved.



Cast of Characters

Wile E. – Customer who bought a rocket from ACME rockets

Babs Bunny – CEO

Tweety – Sales Representative

Yosemite Sam – Customer Service Analyst

Marvin (the Martian) – Manufacturing Floor Supervisor

Sylvester – Rocket Powder Technician

From: Wile E Coyote <dubbayousee@toonmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2021 4:32 PM

To: Babs Bunny <bbunny@acmerockets.com>; Marvin The Martian <mthemartian@acmerockets.com>; Yosemite Sam <ysam@acmerockets.com>; Sylvester D Cat <scat@acmerockets.com>; Tweety Bird <tbird@acmerockets.com>

Subject: My Rocket Blew Up In My Face

To whom it may concern at ACME Rockets –

I purchased a bundle package of your premiere Canyon Rider rockets last June.

The last one in the bundle blew up in my face upon use. Not only did RoadRunner get away from me, I have no nose hairs left, and I'm surprised I have the capacity to write this notice of complaint to you.

I'm going to be looking for an immediate refund for this bundle. It's the least you can do.

Please advise on next steps.

Thanks,

Wile E.

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Task 1

(continued)

From: Yosemite Sam <ysam@acmerockets.com>;
Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2021 4:48 PM
To: Sylvester D Cat <scat@acmerockets.com>;
Cc: Babs Bunny <bbunny@acmerockets.com>; Marvin Themartian <mthemartian@acmerockets.com>; Tweety Bird <tbird@acmerockets.com>; Wile E Coyote <dubbayousee@toonmail.com>

Subject: RE: My Rocket Blew Up In My Face

Hi Sylvester, can you please see this customer's message? I wanted to forward you their complaint because our database shows your signoff in terms of packing the powder for the Canyon Rider rockets. Can you please confirm?

I guess we're lucky he's only asking for a refund given he almost had his face blown off hahaha.

Let me know!

Yosemite

From: Sylvester D Cat <scat@acmerockets.com>;
Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2021 5:07 PM
To: Babs Bunny <bbunny@acmerockets.com>; Marvin The Martian <mthemartian@acmerockets.com>; Yosemite Sam <ysam@acmerockets.com>; Tweety Bird <tbird@acmerockets.com>; Wile E Coyote <dubbayousee@toonmail.com>

Subject: RE: My Rocket Blew Up In My Face

Yosemite, I take great pride in my work and make sure my rockets are packed accordingly. We have an amazing team supporting this process from the Manufacturing Supervisor who's responsible for quality control to the sales team that has kept sales revenues up through the last three quarters.

I can review the records with Marvin, but not sure if we can find anything. You know that sometimes there's user errorrrr on the customer's part too, right? Just want to make sure your aware.

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Task 1

(continued)

From: Babs Bunny <bbunny@acmerockets.com>

Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2021 5:11 PM

To: Marvin The Martian <mthemartian@acmerockets.com>; Yosemite Sam <ysam@acmerockets.com>; Sylvester D Cat <scat@acmerockets.com>

Subject: RE: My Rocket Blew Up In My Face

Marvin, please set up a meeting with you, Sylvester and myself to discuss next steps.

Yosemite, please go through the appropriate channels to issue an immediate refund to the customer. I will follow up with you separately.

I am available after 12 noon today.