



# **The 7 Cs of Written Communication**

A Checklist for Clear Communication

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# Introduction

Think of how often you communicate with people during your day. You write emails, facilitate meetings, participate in conference calls, create reports, devise presentations, debate with your colleagues... the list goes on.

We can spend almost our entire day communicating. So, how can we provide a huge boost to our productivity? We can make sure that we communicate in the clearest, most effective way possible.

This is why the 7 Cs of Communication are helpful.

The 7 Cs provide a checklist for making sure that your **meetings, emails, conference calls, reports, and presentations** are well constructed and clear – so your audience gets your message.

# According to the 7 Cs, communication needs to be:

1C

•Clear.

2C

•Concise.

3C

•Concrete.

4C

•Correct.

5C

•Coherent.

6C

•Complete.

7C

•Courteous.

# •Clear

When writing or speaking to someone, be clear about your goal or message. What is your purpose in communicating with this person? If you're not sure, then your audience won't be sure either.

To be clear, try to minimize the number of ideas in each sentence. Make sure that it's easy for your reader to understand your meaning. People shouldn't have to "read between the lines" and make assumptions on their own to understand what you're trying to say.

## **BAD Example:**

*Hi Joe,  
I wanted to write you a quick note about Jeff, who's working in your department. He's a great asset, and I'd like to talk to you more about him when you have time.  
Best,  
Abinash*

## **GOOD Example:**

*Hi Joe,  
I wanted to write you a quick note about Jeff Kakkar, who's working in your department. In recent weeks, he's helped the IT department through several pressing deadlines on his own time.  
We've got a tough upgrade project due to run over the next three months, and his knowledge and skills would prove invaluable. Could we please have his help with this work?  
I'd appreciate speaking with you about this. When is it best to call you to discuss this further?  
Best wishes,  
Abinash*

# •Concise

When you're concise in your communication, you stick to the point and keep it brief. Your audience doesn't want to read six sentences when you could communicate your message in three.

- ✚ Are there any adjectives or "filler words" that you can delete? You can often eliminate words like "for instance," "you see," "definitely," "kind of," "literally," "basically," or "I mean."
- ✚ Are there any unnecessary sentences?
- ✚ Have you repeated the point several times, in different ways?

## **BAD Example:**

Hi Joe,

*I wanted to touch base with you about the email marketing campaign we kind of sketched out last Thursday. I really think that our target market is definitely going to want to see the company's philanthropic efforts. I think that could make a big impact, and it would stay in their minds longer than a sales pitch.*

*For instance, if we talk about the company's efforts to become sustainable, as well as the charity work we're doing in local schools, then the people that we want to attract are going to remember our message longer.*

*The impact will just be greater.*

*What do you think?*

Abinash

## **GOOD Example:**

Hi Joe,

*I wanted to quickly discuss the email marketing campaign that we analyzed last Thursday. Our target market will want to know about the company's philanthropic efforts, especially our goals to become sustainable and help local schools.*

*This would make a far greater impact, and it would stay in their minds longer than a traditional sales pitch.*

*What do you think?*

Abinash

# •Concrete

When your message is concrete, then your audience has a clear picture of what you're telling them. There are details (but not too many!) and vivid facts, and there's laser like focus. Your message is solid.

## **BAD Example:**

*Consider this advertising copy:*

*The Lunchbox Wizard will save you time every day.*

A statement like this probably won't sell many of these products. There's no passion, no vivid detail, nothing that creates emotion, and nothing that tells people in the audience why they should care. This message isn't concrete enough to make a difference.

## **GOOD Example:**

*How much time do you spend every day packing your kids' lunches? No more! Just take a complete Lunchbox Wizard from your refrigerator each day to give your kids a healthy lunch AND have more time to play or read with them!*

This copy is better because there are vivid images. The audience can picture spending quality time with their kids – and what parent could argue with that? And mentioning that the product is stored in the refrigerator explains how the idea is practical. The message has come alive through these details.



# •Correct

When your communication is correct, it fits your audience. And correct communication is also error-free communication.

- ✚ Do the technical terms you use fit your audience's level of education or knowledge?
- ✚ Have you checked your writing for grammatical errors? Remember, spell checkers won't catch everything.
- ✚ Are all names and titles spelled correctly?

## **BAD Example:**

*Hi John,*

*Thanks so much for meeting me at lunch today! I enjoyed our conservation, and I'm looking forward to moving ahead on our project. I'm sure that the two-week deadline won't be an issue.*

*Thanks again, and I'll speak to you soon!*

*Best,*

*Abinash*

## **GOOD Practice:**

*If you read that example fast, then you might not have caught any errors. But on closer inspection, you'll find two.*

*Can you see them?*

*The first error is that the writer accidentally typed conservation instead of conversation. This common error can happen when you're typing too fast. The other error is using weak instead of week.*

*Again, spell checkers won't catch word errors like this, which is why it's so important to proofread everything!*

# •Coherent

When your communication is coherent, it's logical. All points are connected and relevant to the main topic, and the tone and flow of the text is consistent.

## **BAD Example:**

*Hi Steve,*

*I wanted to write you a quick note about the report you finished last week. I gave it to Pooja to proof, and he wanted to make sure you knew about the department meeting we're having this Friday. We'll be creating an outline for the new employee handbook.*

*Thanks,*

*Abinash*

As you can see, this email doesn't communicate its point very well. Where is Michelle's feedback on Traci's report? She started to mention it, but then she changed the topic to Friday's meeting.

## **GOOD Example:**

*Hi Steve,*

*I wanted to write you a quick note about the report you finished last week. I gave it to Pooja to proof, and he let me know that there are a few changes that you'll need to make. She'll email you her detailed comments later this afternoon.*

*Thanks,*

*Abinash*

Notice that in the good example, Michelle does not mention Friday's meeting. This is because the meeting reminder should be an entirely separate email. This way, Traci can delete the report feedback email after she makes her changes, but save the email about the meeting as her reminder to attend. Each email has only one main topic.



# •Complete

In a complete message, the audience has everything they need to be informed and, if applicable, take action.

- ✚ Does your message include a "call to action", so that your audience clearly knows what you want them to do?
- ✚ Have you included all relevant information – contact names, dates, times, locations, and so on?

## **BAD Example:**

*Hi Everyone,  
I just wanted to send you all a reminder about the meeting we're having tomorrow!  
See you then,  
Abinash*

This message is not complete, for obvious reasons. What meeting? When is it? Where? Chris has left his team without the necessary information.

## **GOOD Example:**

*Hi Everyone,  
I just wanted to remind you about tomorrow's meeting on the new updated policies. The meeting will be at 10:00 p.m. in the 3B conference room. Please let me know if you can't attend.  
See you then,  
Abinash*

# •Courteous

Courteous communication is friendly, open, and honest. There are no hidden insults or passive-aggressive tones. You keep your reader's viewpoint in mind, and you're empathetic to their needs.

## **BAD Example:**

Alexa,  
*I wanted to let you know that I don't appreciate how your team always monopolizes the discussion at our weekly meetings. I have a lot of projects, and I really need time to get my team's progress discussed as well. So far, thanks to your department, I haven't been able to do that. Can you make sure they make time for me and my team next week?*  
Thanks,  
Abinash

Well, that's hardly courteous! Messages like this can potentially start office wide fights. And this email does nothing but create bad feelings, and lower productivity and morale. A little bit of courtesy, even in difficult situations, can go a long way.

## **GOOD Example:**

Hi Alexa,  
*I wanted to write you a quick note to ask a favor. During our weekly meetings, your team does an excellent job of highlighting their progress. But this uses some of the time available for my team to highlight theirs. I'd really appreciate it if you could give my team a little extra time each week to fully cover their progress reports.*  
*Thanks so much, and please let me know if there's anything I can do for you!*  
Best,  
Abinash

What a difference! This email is courteous and friendly, and it has little chance of spreading bad feelings around the office.

# •Variations

## **Credible:**

*Does your message improve or highlight your credibility? This is especially important when communicating with an audience that doesn't know much about you.*

## **Creative:**

*Does your message communicate creatively? Creative communication helps keep your audience engaged.*

*There are a few  
variations of the 7  
Cs of  
Communication:*



# •Key Points

- All of us communicate every day. The better we communicate, the more credibility we'll have with our clients, our boss, and our colleagues.
- Use the 7 Cs of Communication as a checklist for all of your communication. By doing this, you'll stay clear, concise, concrete, correct, coherent, complete, and courteous.



*Thank You!*