



# Communication Situations

# Communication Situations

This section uses common writing situations to recommend specific modules that are most relevant to that job task.

		Course Titles										
		Avoiding Errors in Usage and Punctuation	Communication Skills for Effective Management	Crisp Composition	E-mail and Organizational Communication	Essentials of Electronic Communication	Exploring the New Basics of Business Writing	Overview to Effective Business Communication	Writing Concisely and Accurately	Writing Effective E-mail Messages	Writing High-Impact Reports and Proposals	Writing to Reach the Audience
<b>Communication Situations</b>	<b>General Organizational Communication</b>											
	Appropriate Use of E-mail					X		X		X		
	Writing Internal Reports	X		X			X		X		X	
	Weekly Reports								X		X	
	Critical Internal Communication		X				X		X			
	<b>External Communication</b>											
	Project Reports	X		X			X				X	X
	Web Pages	X		X					X			X
	E-mail	X		X						X		X
	Brochures / Handouts			X					X		X	X
	Talking Points			X					X			X
	<b>Managers</b>											
	Informational Messages		X		X		X		X	X		
	When Action is Needed		X							X		X
	Data Calls				X					X		
	<b>Mission Specific Example: National Weather Service Operations</b>											
	Briefings for Officials			X								X
	Forecast Products								X		X	X

# **General Organizational Communication**

## **Appropriate Use of E-mail**

It's tempting to use e-mail for nearly all communication, but is e-mail always the best way to communicate? Are you making the best use of e-mail? These modules may help:

- Essentials of Electronic Communication – for those who are particularly ineffective with e-mail use [*Note: NOAA's own security course trumps the third section of this course.*].
- Writing Effective E-mail Messages – the first section includes 3 instances where e-mail is not appropriate, what to think about when reviewing an e-mail, and how to decide who to send the e-mail to.
- Overview of Effective Business Communication – for administrative support personnel.

## **Writing Internal Reports**

Internal reports are important forms of communication. Are your reports clear? Are they concise? Do you highlight the important points up front, then use the body of the document to explain them? These modules may help you write more effective reports, in order from basic to advanced:

- Avoiding Errors in Usage and Punctuation – if you need help with word choices and punctuation.
- Writing Concisely and Accurately – clean up your writing by removing unnecessary words, being clear in what you want to say, using appropriate tone, and using the right word.
- Crisp Composition – calculate the Fog Index to see the education level you wrote to and learn how to be more concise.
- Exploring the New Basics of Business Writing – this one covers sentence variety, bulky phrases, writing for impact, considering your audience's reaction, and tricks to get past writer's block.
- Writing to Reach the Audience – covers establishing credibility, setting an appropriate tone, and organizing your thoughts.
- Writing High-Impact Reports and Proposals – this more extensive module helps you think about what you're trying to accomplish, how to back up what you want to say, how to organize the document, and more.

## **Weekly Reports**

Weekly reports work their way up through management. Some make it all the way to the NOAA Administrator and the very best highlights go all the way to the White House. Weekly reports are most effective when they are clear, concise, brief highlights of results. To improve your contributions to weekly reports, try these modules:

- Writing Concisely and Accurately – clean up your writing by removing unnecessary words, being clear in what you want to say, using appropriate tone, and using the right word.
- Writing to Reach the Audience – helps you think about tone and impact of your message.

### **Critical Internal Communication**

Computer security e-mails are one type of critical internal communication where key information is highlighted right up front: all the critical information is right in the first two sentences, then details follow afterward, with sections clearly marked. If you write critical internal communication, consider these modules:

- Exploring the New Basics of Business Writing – this one gets into sentence variety, bulky phrases, writing for impact, considering your audience’s reaction, and tricks to get past writer’s block.
- Writing Concisely and Accurately – clean up your writing by removing unnecessary words, being clear in what you want to say, using appropriate tone, and using the right word.
- Communication Skills for Successful Management – keep in mind that all communication is to a “customer” of your information. The writing portion of this module shows you 3 purposes for communication, how to avoid obscuring your message, hold attention, and eliminate potential questions by being specific.

# **External Communication**

## **Project Reports**

Project reports are an important communication between us and our internal or external customers and collaborators. These modules will help you improve your report writing:

- Writing High Impact Reports and Proposals – this relatively extensive module has you consider your report’s purpose, your audience’s needs, compiling information for the report, organizing content, and more.
- Writing to Reach the Audience – covers establishing credibility, setting an appropriate tone, and organizing your thoughts.
- Crisp Composition – After covering the Fog Index, which is less important here (you probably know your audience well), this module covers using plain English, linking ideas effectively, writing precisely for clarity, writing concisely, and more.
- Exploring the New Basics of Business Writing – this one gets into sentence variety, bulky phrases, writing for impact, considering your audience’s reaction, and tricks to get past writer’s block.
- Avoiding Errors in Usage and Punctuation – look at this module if you need to work on using the right words, avoiding jargon, and using the right punctuation.

## **Web Pages**

Consider your audience! Avoid jargon and technical terms. Be sure to include contact information! Try looking at these modules:

- Writing Concisely and Accurately – especially for inexperienced writers who need to write more concisely, clearly, and correctly!
- Crisp Composition – includes the Fog Index, which calculates the reading level of your writing. Also covers using plain English, linking ideas together, being concise and clear, and more.
- Writing to Reach the Audience – covers how to establish credibility, set an appropriate tone, and organize your thoughts.
- Avoiding Errors in Usage and Punctuation – look at this module if you need to work on using the right words, avoiding jargon, and using the right punctuation.

## **E-Mail**

E-mail is one of the most common ways we communicate with people outside of NOAA. Be sure to keep in mind that each e-mail to someone outside NOAA is an important communication with them. It may be the only contact that person has. Take the time to compose your e-mail and be sure your message is clear.

- Writing to Reach the Audience – covers how to establish credibility, set an appropriate tone, and organize your thoughts.
- Crisp Composition – the Fog Index will help you see what education level you’re writing to. The rest of the module is extensive, covering use of

plain English, linking ideas effectively, writing precisely for clarity, writing concisely, and more.

- Writing Effective E-mail Messages – helps you decide if e-mail is the best way to communicate, then goes on to help you write high-impact messages.
- Avoiding Errors in Usage and Punctuation – look at this module if you need to work on using the right words, avoiding jargon, and using the right punctuation.

### **Brochures / Handouts**

Many NOAA groups create their own handouts for visitors. These modules will help you write effective brochures/handouts:

- Writing Concisely and Accurately – especially for inexperienced writers who need to write more concisely, clearly, and correctly!
- Writing to Reach the Audience – how to organize content and establish credibility so that your messages are effective.
- Crisp Composition – includes the Fog Index, which calculates the reading level of your writing. Also covers using plain English, linking ideas together, being concise and clear, and more.
- Writing High Impact Reports and Proposals – while much of this is for more formal documents, notice that the last section includes information on choosing paper, binding, etc.

### **Talking Points**

Talking points are a special kind of written communication. They must be clear, concise, specific, and very brief – limited to 1 or 2 sentences per point. Make sure each point is relevant to your audience and the situation. Be sure to include anything that might be controversial or historically relevant. Be sure the person using your talking points is prepared for questions!

- Writing to Reach the Audience – how to establish credibility, match your approach to your message, set an appropriate tone, and organize your content.
- Writing Concisely and Accurately – write more concisely, clearly, and correctly! Includes using positive, gender-neutral, and conversational tone. Also includes confusing word pairs.
- Crisp Composition – includes the Fog Index, which calculates the reading level of your writing. Also covers using plain English, being concise and clear, and more.

# **NOAA Managers**

## **When Action is Needed**

Sometimes you need information or action from your staff, or are seeking volunteers for an outreach event or the Combined Federal Campaign. These messages may require some persuasion; you definitely want action.

- Writing to Reach the Audience – think about whether you need a direct or indirect tone, how to set an appropriate tone, and how to organize your content.
- Writing Effective E-mail Messages – includes tips for writing effective e-mail, such as choosing a good subject line and putting the most important information at the top.
- Communication Skills for Successful Management – keep in mind that all communication is to a “customer” of your information. The writing portion of this module shows you 3 purposes for communication, how to avoid obscuring your message, hold attention, and eliminate potential questions by being specific.

## **Data Calls**

Data calls are a type of action-needed e-mail that managers often send and receive. Be sure to clearly summarize – right at the top of the e-mail – what you need, from whom, and by when. Then explain why the information is requested and how it will be used in the body of the e-mail. Clear organization is key:

- Writing Effective E-mail Messages – this module gives tips for writing good subject lines and lead-in paragraphs, and how to write high-impact e-mail.
- E-mail and Organizational Communication – covers use of e-mail for processing and planning meetings, includes time management, and how e-mail is a tool useful for supporting corporate culture.

## **Informational Messages**

Sometimes you have information you need to share with your staff, such as building safety or changes/reminders of organization policy.

- Writing Effective E-mail Messages – the first section is key for this situation: it includes 3 instances where e-mail is not appropriate, what to think about when reviewing an e-mail, and how to decide who to send the e-mail to.
- Communication Skills for Successful Management – the writing portion of this module shows you 3 purposes for communication, how to avoid obscuring your message, hold attention, and eliminate potential questions by being specific.

*Others that may help:*

- E-mail and Organizational Communication – covers use of e-mail for processing and planning meetings, includes time management, and how e-mail is a tool useful for supporting corporate culture.
- Exploring the New Basics of Business Writing – this one gets into sentence variety, bulky phrases, writing for impact, considering your audience's reaction, and tricks to get past writer's block.
- Writing Concisely and Accurately – clean up your writing by removing unnecessary words, being clear in what you want to say, using appropriate tone, and using the right word.

# **Mission Specific Example**

We hope that this section helps you create your own specific communication situations. We chose two unscripted and important communication situations the National Weather Service is actively involved in. The first, weather briefings for non-meteorology officials, is an increasingly frequent and high-profile activity. These often include a written aspect. The second is that a few forecast products do not have a prescribed format, meaning each office has some leeway in how they structure the product for maximum impact.

## ***National Weather Service Operations***

Although more and more of NWS products are becoming automated, the role of humans in the weather forecasting process is as important as ever because we can put meaning on the information for our users.

### **Weather Briefings for Officials**

Your staff is probably asked to give briefings for non-meteorologist decision-makers. Such people need more information than the standard forecast products provide, but the information still needs to be concise, yet rich in meaning about what the weather might do. The officials relying on your information need to make good decisions and have appropriate contingency plans ready. Several modules apply:

- Writing to Reach the Audience – how to establish credibility, match your approach to your message, set an appropriate tone, and organize your content.
- Crisp Composition – includes the Fog Index, which calculates the reading level of your writing.

### **Writing Forecast Products for the General Public**

A few forecast products do not have a prescribed format: the Hazardous Weather Outlook, Severe Weather Statements, Short Term Forecasts, and Area Forecast Discussions. Individual offices or regions could select examples of these products to evaluate after going through relevant writing modules. Writing in a clear, concise way is key. Also consider the point of your message. Avoid burying important information within the body of the product.

- Writing Concisely and Accurately – clean up your writing by removing unnecessary words, being clear in what you want to say, using appropriate tone, and using the right word.
- Writing to Reach the Audience – setting tone for the level of urgency, how to organize your content for maximum impact. Helps especially with the call-to-action portion of products.
- Writing Effective E-mail Messages – although this module is written for e-mail, the point is how to write an effective, clear message. It talks about writing good lead-in paragraphs and composing high-impact messages.



# Course Descriptions

## Course Descriptions

The following list of SkillSoft courses is alphabetical. These courses are available to anyone with a “G” in their LMS library access codes. Some NOAA groups have access to modules from additional vendors.

### **Key:**

<i>Level:</i>	Notes on the level, as decided by NOAA’s Warning Decision Training Branch (WDTB) staff: basic, intermediate, and advanced.
<i>Audience:</i>	A few modules are aimed at specific jobs. These were decided by WDTB.
<i>Est. Time:</i>	The module creator’s estimate of how long it takes to complete the module. Many go faster, especially if you turn off the audio and go at your own pace.
<i>User Rating:</i>	Rating of the course as of September 7, 2006. Course ratings will change over time because they are an ongoing consensus of those who have completed and rated the course in our LMS.
<i>Description:</i>	A summary of the course by WDTB staff.
<i>Course-specific Application:</i>	One or more suggestions on how to apply the module. This is an alternative to the Communication Situations approach to deciding which modules would help you and your staff.

### **Avoiding Errors in Usage and Punctuation**

*Level:* basic

*Audience:* anyone

*Est. Time:* 4.5 hours

*User Rating:* 4 out of 5 stars

*Description:*

Good coverage of the following topics:

- Choosing words wisely
  - Includes: easily confused words, buzzwords, clichés, colloquialisms, and nonstandard forms of words
- Common punctuation problems
  - Includes: issues with commas, colons, semicolons, quotation marks, and exclamation points

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Have your staff go over items they have written (e.g. e-mail letters or reports) to look specifically for these items, then have them create reminder notes for themselves on the words or punctuation they are using incorrectly. Follow up at a later date with newer e-mails or reports to look for improvement.

### **Communication Skills for Successful Management**

*Level:* basic  
*Audience:* management  
*Est. Time:* 3.0 hours (full module; writing is only one section)  
*User Rating:* 3 out of 5 stars  
*Description:*

[Note! We only assessed the writing section.]  
Examples are mostly about communication with a customer. Writing is for one or more of the following purposes:

- Information
- Education (instruction)
- Persuasion (guidance)

The module shows how to use:

- familiar words: don't obscure your message!
  - active verbs: holds attention better and is more meaningful
  - concrete nouns: eliminate potential questions by being specific
- ...and when to consider using technical terms and jargon.

#### *Course-specific*

*Application:* This one is for you! Pull out some of your own writing samples – a report or e-mail that really mattered – and see how well you did with items covered in this module. Make reminder notes for those areas in which you could do better and post them beside your computer (or wherever you do your writing). Follow up 2 months later with similar writing samples and see how much you improved.

### **Crisp Composition**

*Level:* advanced  
*Audience:* anyone, especially those doing external communication or report/memo writing  
*Est. Time:* 4.5 hours  
*User Rating:* (not yet rated)  
*Description:*

Being clear and being concise are the two main sections of this module.

On clarity, the module:

- explains how, and then steps you through using the Fog Index to see how readable your writing is. It includes a Fog Index worksheet.
- tells you how to use plain English
- provides ways to link your ideas
- how to write with precision

On conciseness, the module:

- covers principles for concise writing
- shows four ways to be a more concise writer (use verbs for brevity, use active and passive voice appropriately, avoid pretentious language, and reduce clutter)

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Have your staff go over items they have written. Try applying the learning to both internal and external communication such as e-mail and reports and writing for the general public. Create reminder notes on how to be more clear and concise. Follow up at a later date with newer e-mails or reports to see improvement.

**E-mail and Organizational Communication**

*Level:* basic

*Audience:* management or any leadership positions

*Est. Time:* 2.5 hours

*User Rating:* (not yet rated)

*Description:*

[Note! This module is not specifically about writing.]

This module covers using e-mail for processing information, planning meetings, and mentoring. Shows how to use e-mail for:

- time management
- organizational skills
- reducing paper (and includes when *not* to use e-mail)
- supporting corporate culture

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Evaluate how well you do on the above, four items. Note items on which you could improve and make reminder notes for yourself. Take time to look periodically for improvements on these items and make new reminders on the items you would still like to do better on.

**Essentials of Electronic Communication**

*Level:* basic

*Audience:* those who are particularly ineffective with e-mail use

*Est. Time:* 1.5 hours

*User Rating:* 4 out of 5 stars

*Description:*

[Note! This module is very rudimentary.]

The first section advocates using e-mail for certain types of communication. The second section is on etiquette: use the proper case, review and check for spelling errors, send worthwhile messages, and include all or part of the original when replying. The third section could be skipped because anything covered there is trumped by NOAA's required Computer Security Course. [Note, if a section is skipped, it will show as "incomplete" in the LMS and you will not receive a completion e-mail.]

*Course-specific*

*Application:* If you have reason to assign this, you have a particular goal in mind. Use that goal and the Job Sheet in this Guide to form your own, custom job sheet.

### **Exploring the New Basics of Business Writing**

*Level:* advanced

*Audience:* managers and others writing reports/business documents

*Est. Time:* 3.0 hours

*User Rating:* 2 out of 5 stars

*Description:*

This module discusses:

- how business writing has changed in recent years
- how to use the right mix of:
  - clear, cohesive, and a variety of sentences
  - removing phrases that aren't concise
  - mixing words appropriately
- writing for high-impact:
  - decide the purpose (inform, persuade, collaborate)
  - question if writing is the best means
  - check your purpose
- identifying your audience & consider their reaction
- choosing the best channel(s) for communication
- getting over writer's block
- drafting your message

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Identify your three most common mistakes and work on them, as the module suggests:

- Find a buddy
- Give him or her some things you've written
- List all your mistakes
- Analyze your list
- Work on correcting your mistakes

### **Overview to Effective Business Communication**

*Level:* basic

*Audience:* administrative support personnel

*Est. Time:* 3.0 hours

*User Rating:* (not yet rated)

*Description:*

This module covers several aspects of business communication, not just writing:

- what communication is (send, receive, response, filter)
- roles of administrative support personnel: information officer, office manager, and administrators
- steps for preparing, sending, and receiving messages and understanding why messages may not be understood right
- types of communication: verbal/non-verbal, formal, and informal

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Choose one or more type of communication and evaluate how well your administrative personnel currently perform. Set goals for improvement. Practice! [We suggest browsing through this module in order to do this well.]

**Writing Concisely and Accurately**

*Level:* basic

*Audience:* young writers or anyone needing to write more clearly

*Est. Time:* 1.0 hours

*User Rating:* 2 out of 5 stars

*Description:*

This module anchors learning with simple practice that can be taken a step further with your own writing using the Job Sheet:

- writing concisely
  - remove unnecessary words
  - use active voice most of the time; passive for certain instances
- writing clearly: concise, clear, conversational, and correct
- using appropriate tone
  - use a positive, gender-neutral, conversational tone
  - write correctly
- using words correctly
  - includes tricks for remembering confusing word pairs and common spelling and punctuation errors
  - shows how to check your writing for other errors

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Apply these concepts to forecast products, memos, and reports. Evaluate past writing. Write reminder notes on areas you could improve. Then check your progress after a month of practice.

**Writing Effective E-mail Messages**

*Level:* intermediate

*Audience:* anyone needing to write clear and appropriate messages

*Est. Time:* 2.5 hours

*User Rating:* 4 out of 5 stars

*Description:*

This module helps you decide if e-mail is the best way to communicate your message and then goes on to help you write effective, high-impact messages.

- planning e-mail:
  - gives 3 instances where e-mail is not appropriate
  - what to think about when reviewing an e-mail you want to send
  - how to decide who to send it to
- tips for writing effective messages
  - 5 rules for writing e-mail

- tips for creating a good subject line
- how to write a good lead-in paragraph in e-mail
- writing high-impact e-mail
  - use topic sentences to keep your message clear
  - use a conversational tone
  - use active voice
- E-mail issues
  - legal issues, choosing a password, avoiding and handling junk mail

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Have staff review e-mails they have written for a variety of purposes: single recipient, mass e-mail, etc. Decide whether e-mail was the best form of communication. Evaluate the e-mail for effectiveness. See if it could be further improved using the ideas in the writing high-impact e-mail section.

**Writing High-Impact Reports and Proposals**

*Level:* advanced

*Audience:* management, project leaders, researchers, education/outreach

*Est. Time:* 3.5 hours

*User Rating:* 3 out of 5 stars

*Description:*

This module is more extensive than some. It covers:

- identifying the report's objectives
- meeting the audience's needs
- "report distortion" guidelines
- knowing the right questions to ask to plan
- compiling the data
- managing the information
- developing a concise, bias-free, report-writing style
- organizing the document
- proofreading (who & how)
- finishing touches for things you're printing in hard copy format for distribution (useful information on choosing paper, binding, etc.)

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Apply these concepts to memos, project reports, scientific papers, and handouts / brochures. Evaluate past writing. Write reminder notes on areas you could improve. Then check your progress after a month of practice.

**Writing To Reach the Audience**

*Level:* advanced

*Audience:* anyone writing e-mail with substance, whether that is to the general public, a particular user of NOAA information, or someone within NOAA

*Est. Time:* 3.0 hours

*User Rating:* (not yet rated)

*Description:* This module covers how to set an appropriate tone, organize the content, and establish credibility in order to write effective messages.

- choosing a direct vs. indirect approach
  - establish credibility
  - match direct/indirect to the message
- set an appropriate tone
  - tailor the tone for the message and audience
  - 5 questions to ask yourself about the tone
  - 6 questions to ask yourself about the impact your message may have
  - how to avoid bias-laden language
- organize content
  - how to decide how to organize the content

*Course-specific*

*Application:* Apply these concepts to important messages sent to the general public, other users of NOAA information, and to internal messages.