

GET THE SCOOP ON...

- The power of language in your search
- Managing your mouth to deliver the right message
- Image from the inside out
- Business etiquette in brief
- Writing in plain English
- Making the most of email communication

Honing Your Communication Skills and Tools

Most of the people you will communicate with in your job search don't listen and don't read. That may sound overly cynical, but it's an unfortunate reality. It's not necessarily that they don't want to hear what you have to say, and certainly they know how to read. It's just that most people do not have the time or attention span to focus carefully on what you are saying to them. Our society has become very selective when it comes to listening and reading. How often do you rely on the mute button of your television's remote control to block out a commercial you don't want to hear? Do you automatically click "Skip Intro" when a Web site opens with bells and whistles you don't have time for? Have you become so used to reading sound bites of news that getting through a long article seems like a bit of a chore? All of this results in fewer people these days

being attentive, patient listeners and readers. You, therefore, must communicate in a laser-sharp manner if you want your message to be heard.

The objective in this chapter is to help you pull together the first item in your self-marketing toolkit: effective communication techniques that enable you to get your message across. I point out common pitfalls to avoid and offer strategies for communicating in person, by telephone, and in writing. For more detailed advice on communication techniques, you may want to turn to some of the excellent books on the subject listed in the online Bonus Appendix 2, “Recommended Reading List.”

What to say—the content of your message

No doubt about it, you’ll be doing a whole lot of talking and writing in your job search. When it comes to the content of what you are saying (as opposed to the delivery style—how you say that content), there is no way to prepare for every unique situation you’ll face as you network, interview, and otherwise communicate with people. However, you can have some basic building blocks on hand to help you say the right thing at the right time. You’ve already developed some of this content from the work you did in Chapter 3, “Marketing You, the Product,” and in Chapter 4, “Your Marketing Plan’s Secret Weapon.” Through the exercises and advice in those chapters, you’ve already identified important elements of your communication content. You know which assets you have to offer as your main selling points, you know what you want from others, and you’ve built asset statements to distinguish yourself from the competition. The words and phrases you selected from the various checklists in those chapters or that came to mind as you contemplated what you have to offer and what you want are key elements of your communication.

The power of language

Whether you're saying your self-marketing sound bite or anything else, you must be cognizant of the power that specific words and phrases have on the person hearing or reading them. Cognitive and social psychologists as well as linguists have found that certain words and phrases can have a particularly positive or negative impact. Most job seekers don't realize how powerful an individual word can be, so if you equip yourself with this awareness, you'll have yet another way to distinguish yourself from the competition.

First, avoid weak verbs. Verbs and verb phrases like "assisted with," "helped with," "handled," or "worked with" are much less powerful than "collaborated on," "contributed to," "managed," or "served as an integral team member." Lots more action verbs are listed in Chapter 5 on résumés.

Also, add some color and flavor to your speech whenever possible. Recruiters and hiring managers tend to hear the same old words over and over, so if you can use language that's more memorable, you'll really stand out. Look at the difference in the following two statements:

Acceptable but boring: "By working with the production department, I improved our distribution process, leading to a large increase in profits."

Stronger and more memorable: "By collaborating with the production department, I uncovered ways to expedite our distribution process, which sent profits soaring."

By using just a few powerful words (and the strong visual image of profits soaring like eagles), the second statement makes much more of an impact on the listener.

Finally, be as precise as possible with your language, using tangible evidence of your strengths and accomplishments. When that evidence can be quantified, it's even better.

Example: By collaborating with the production department, I uncovered ways to expedite our distribution process, which sent profits soaring 24 percent over the previous year's level.

Dangerous Liaisons with Language

Certain words and phrases can be detrimental to your search because of the negative reaction they often trigger in others. Here's a sampling of words to omit from your job seeker's vocabulary. The negative connotations of most are obvious, but for those that could seem harmless, I've added an explanatory note about why they should be avoided.

Abandoned

Afraid/feared

Bad luck

Can't/couldn't

Cheated

Fail/Failed

Forgot

Miscalculated/misjudged

Mishap/snafu (Comes across as too much of a euphemism for a more serious mistake. If you made a mistake, call it that.)

Neglected/overlooked

Non-negotiable

Personality clash

Stressed/overloaded/burned-out

To be honest with you... (implies that you haven't been being honest the rest of the time)

Seven habits of effective communicators

When it comes to the content of a conversation or written communication, effective job seekers do the following:

- They present themselves in the best possible light, emphasizing the positives and never dwelling on the negatives.
- They sing their own praises but never embellish to the point of telling lies (or even half-truths).

- They avoid controversial topics like politics or religion (unless that's the focus of the conversation).
- They minimize the use of industry- or job-specific jargon and acronyms unless speaking to someone in the same field who will understand what they're saying.
- They don't speak unkindly, bitterly, or negatively about a current or former boss, colleague, customer, teacher, classmate, or just about anyone or anything else.
- They have an agenda for the conversation in mind so that they cover everything they want to cover.
- They speak with strong action verbs rather than passive or weak ones.

How you say it—perfecting your delivery

Delivery of your message is as important as—and in some ways more important than—the content of your message. You might have to make a conscious effort to keep your tone of voice positive and upbeat, especially on days when you are so tired of job hunting that making yet another phone call or attending one more networking meeting is the last thing you want to do. You have to remember, however, that each person you speak with by phone or in person needs to be treated as though they're the first person you've contacted in your search. Your voice, as well as your overall physical presentation for in-person meetings, needs to be fresh and enthusiastic. To ensure top-notch delivery, keep the following DOs and DON'Ts in mind:

- **DO** be concise. Don't ramble. If what you have to say is complicated or convoluted, edit it in advance so you can convey it smoothly and efficiently.
- **DO** speak clearly. Don't garble your words or mumble.
- **DO** convey energy and enthusiasm. Avoid speaking in a monotone or tired manner.

- DO pay attention to the volume of your speech. Make sure that you're not shouting or whispering without realizing it. Project but don't scream.
- DO convey a confident air, but don't be aggressive.
- DO pay attention to your overall image and self-presentation. Are you well groomed? Are you dressed appropriately for the occasion?
- DO minimize distracting body language. Keep fidgeting, twitching, hand gestures, and excessive blinking in check.
- DO maintain eye contact, but don't stare the other person down. Vary your gaze from time to time.
- DON'T speak too fast or too slowly.
- DON'T get rattled. Try to remain composed and relaxed. Pause and take a deep breath if you feel yourself getting nervous or talking too fast.
- DON'T crowd others' physical space when communicating in person. Keep a comfortable distance between you and the other person.
- DON'T forget to breathe! If you find yourself rattling on and running out of breath, pause and take a deep breath.
- DON'T turn statements into questions. Some people let their voices rise at the end of a sentence, turning statements into questions. If you're one of those, practice having your voice go down, or stay neutral, as you close a statement. You'll sound more confident.



Bright Idea

If you find yourself getting too nervous when speaking with someone in a networking situation or an interview, a handy trick is to ask the other person a question. This takes you off the hot seat and gives you a much needed chance to collect yourself.

The power of nonverbal communication

I doubt that I'm the first person to tell you that your nonverbal communication may have more of an impact than the actual words you utter. This fact is supported by the frequently cited findings of sociolinguist Albert Mehrabian, whose research into interpersonal communication has shed light on how impressions are formed and how meanings of verbal messages are interpreted. Through a large-scale study of adults in face-to-face encounters, Mehrabian found that our verbal message (the actual words we say) accounts for only 7 percent of the impression the listener forms about us. How we say what we're saying—that is, the tone, speed, volume, inflection, and vocal quality of our speech—accounts for 38 percent, while our facial expression and body language form 55 percent of the impression.

To be sure you're communicating effectively before you even open your mouth, or after you have, review the points that follow before networking encounters and interviews.

Comportment

Stand and walk with your head erect and shoulders back and keep your gait lively. Never let your feet shuffle on the ground.

Hands

Keep your hand gestures to a minimum but don't feel you have to sit on your hands and do nothing with them. Some movement of hands while speaking is natural; just be sure they're not flailing about wildly. Also be sure to keep your hands visible at all times, as not doing so can send a subliminal message that you are untrustworthy.

Handshake

Shaking hands well is an art. Of course you know not to give a limp, fishy handshake, but are you sure you're not doing so without realizing it? All too often men who are usually not the least bit chauvinist in the ordinary course of the day unwittingly

shake a woman's hand gingerly, as if it will break. On the flip-side, some women who want to be seen as strong, particularly in male-dominated workplaces, overcompensate by giving a handshake that is too firm. I've shaken hands with women who look rather delicate on the outside but who shake my hand with the power of Schwarzenegger. Whether it's a death-grip handshake from a woman or a dead-fish handshake from a man, neither one makes a good first impression. Everyone should give a firm but not bone-crushing handshake. Also be sure not to pump the other person's hand and arm too vigorously or for too long. A quick one or two pumps will suffice. And, use only one hand; the two-handed shake (with your second hand patting the top of the two clasped hands) should be reserved for the receiving line of weddings and funerals.

Facial expression

As mentioned in Chapter 1 where the importance of a positive attitude was discussed, smiling can work wonders. If the image you want to convey is of an upbeat, energetic, capable person, then you must have a pleasant expression on your face. A face that looks relaxed—no furrowed brow, tense jaw, nervous twitches, or stern expression—gives the interviewer the impression that you are not only a pleasant person to deal with but a confident one, too. You don't have to beam widely and incessantly, but do make sure that the corners of your mouth are slightly upturned the majority of the time, or in a neutral position when you need to look serious or contemplative.



Watch Out!

Avoid two common grammatical errors to which even the most articulate people often succumb. Don't use "at" unnecessarily, as in "I'm just calling to see where you're at." Similarly, don't use "to" at the end of a statement, as in "Where did that résumé go to?"

Head movement

A common problem for people who are anxious is to nod their heads excessively. I remember the first time I saw a tape of myself from a live television talk show on which I had been discussing career issues. My head was moving up and down so much I looked as if I was bobbing for apples. I was clearly so worried about saying the right things and so eager to please that I was using the nodding to compensate for my insecurities, as many people do in such situations. Be sure that your head nodding is subtle and occasional.

Eye contact

No list of tips on nonverbal communication would be complete without the mention of maintaining good eye contact, but do you really know what that means? It's often easier said than done. You must balance looking other people in the eyes without staring them down. To do so, concentrate on making eye contact most of the time but breaking it up with an occasional glance away. Just make sure that you don't look down when glancing away, or you may be seen as shifty or untrustworthy. A gaze that goes slightly upward, however, usually signals that you're thinking. Also, try shifting your gaze back and forth between the other person's two eyes. The subtle shift will keep the other person from feeling that you're staring.

Miscellaneous gestures

Watch out for such unnecessary and unprofessional gestures as tapping your foot, fiddling with a ring or other jewelry, twirling your hair, and drumming your fingers on the chair arm or desk. Not only are these movements distracting, they imply that you are nervous, impatient, or bored.

Image

Your nonverbal communication through body language is an important factor in forming a good first impression, but so is your overall image—namely, how you look and act. Let's face it:

**Watch Out!**

Although having a polished image is very important, it's not everything. Don't make the mistake of confusing style with substance.

A well-groomed, appropriately dressed individual with confident carriage will be better received than a less-polished person, even if the exact same words are coming out of their mouths.

The impression you make leads employers and networking contacts to conjure up assumptions about your competence, level of sophistication, integrity, social standing, and even intelligence. The image you project comes in part from what's going on inside your head—your attitude and confidence level—but it is primarily made up of your outward appearance. Some tips on what really works when it comes to attire, accessories, color choices, and grooming follow.

What to wear

Should I wear the white shirt or the blue one, the gray suit or the beige one? Do I wear a suit or dress casually? Outfitting yourself in a job search raises the issue of your personal branding and how that brand conforms to or conflicts with that of the environment in which you'd like to work or the job you want to hold.

No matter what you look like in terms of your natural features, height, and weight, it is important to communicate a clear image or style through the variables over which you do have some control: the color, cut, and style of clothes you wear; the accessories you choose; and your personal grooming. The image you radiate must be appropriate for your career field, career level (or level to which you aspire), industry, geographic location, and type of organization. More importantly, it needs to fit you; you are creating your own personal brand. Let's look at the components of your external image and examine some guidelines for making the most of each.



Moneysaver

Getting a makeover and advice from a professional make-up artist is a great way for women to boost their image, but it can be expensive. Drop by a department store cosmetics counter for a free makeover instead. Avoid small boutiques where you may feel more pressured to purchase lots of products!

Color

Before discussing clothing, accessories, and grooming, let's examine the issue of color, which pervades all aspects of your appearance. Color is actually the subject of a scientific movement, chromatics, which explores the physical properties of color and the effects of color on humans.

In 1666, Isaac Newton declared that light is essential for color to exist in the human eye and mind, which raises an interesting question: When the lights are turned out in a colorful room, does the color still exist if no one's there to see it? Apparently, it does if you touch it. Scientists have found that blind people can "see" color by picking up vibrations from colors' wave lengths on human tissue. Sometimes their tongue, earlobe, or tip of nose is even more effective than fingers. It seems that colored light beams transmit energy to humans who come in contact with them.

The length of these light waves and the speed of the vibrations that colors emit affect us in various ways. Color can affect our blood pressure, rate of breathing, pulse rate, sensitivity of taste buds, and sense of smell—not to mention our mood.

As a result, color has been used creatively and strategically in everything from marketing to engineering. Blue, for example, is used for packaging "slim" products such as club soda, cottage cheese, and skim milk. Red is the powerful, energetic color used for colas. And when the makers of sugar-free Canada Dry ginger ale changed their cans from red to green and white (to convey flavor, nature, and purity), sales rose 27 percent in six months. Engineers sometimes paint bridges blue in hopes that the

Color Symbolism

Adapted from Morton Walker's *The Power of Color*, this list shows what typically comes to mind when we see various hues, including the negative effects of those colors.

Yellow (bold)	Positive: Power, joy, wisdom, intuitional insight, youth, merriment Negative: Cowardice
Green	Positive: Nature, healing, peace, regeneration, fortune Negative: Selfishness, jealousy, laziness
Red	Positive: Power, energy, vitality, strength, excitement for life, passion Negative: Anger, danger, uncontrolled passion, suffering
Blue	Positive: Truth, harmony, calm, soothing Negative: Depressing
White	Positive: Innocence, purity, perfection, truth Negative: Intolerable to people who are deceitful, malicious, jealous, violent
Black	Positive: Absence of light, strength, power Negative: Emotional drain, loss, death

color's calming effect will deter suicides, and architects have changed school walls from orange to blue and found that students' blood pressure dropped.

And you thought your spouse was just being difficult when asking "Are you really planning to wear *that*?" Colors clearly have a profound effect on the people who see them. This does not mean you need to forget all other preparation for your interviews and networking meetings and agonize for days over

the colors you will wear. It does mean that the careful use of color can be a secret weapon in your job search strategy.

Certainly, choosing colors based on their potential effect on an interviewer's mood or purchasing decision is one tactic. But, you should also select colors that are appropriate for the occupation or industry in which you're seeking work and are flattering to you. Some conservative industries and professions such as banking and law require more subtle colors. In fields like advertising, media, technology, entertainment, and education, you can get away with much brighter, bolder hues and interesting color combinations.

Clothing

Besides being careful about the color of your clothing, you must pay attention to which items of clothing you choose to wear. As you probably know, gone are the days when navy blue suits and white shirts were *de rigueur* for interviews. You have considerably more leeway in how you dress for an interview now, as long as your attire is appropriate for the job, the organizational culture, and the industry or profession.

Be aware, however, that “professional” means different things to different target employers. The term usually brings to mind an image of pinstripe suits and a buttoned-down attitude, which is not always the norm as many workplaces are quite casual in both dress code and atmosphere. Jobs in finance, law, management consulting, and many areas of business do still have fairly rigid dress codes—at least for the interview. You usually can't go wrong with a navy or gray suit (brown, black, and beige are occasionally appropriate, but check that out with someone familiar



Moneysaver

When it comes to clothes, you save money by spending money. If you buy good-quality items that fit well and are durable—and also in classic styles that will stand the test of time—you'll save money in the long run.

with where you're going before straying too far from shades of blue or gray). A white shirt for men is the best option for its clean, crisp, and conservative appearance. Women have a bit more of a range of possibilities when it comes to blouses and can venture into other colors that work well with their skin tone. They may also wear well-tailored business dresses with matching jackets in lieu of the traditional skirt-blouse-jacket combo.

For jobs in creative or less conservative fields (as well as in education and social services), appropriate attire varies widely. You shouldn't show up for an interview as a social worker or an elementary school teacher in a pinstripe suit, but don't go so far as to wear jeans or extremely casual attire either, even if that's what you might wear on the job. The general rule is to find out what people wear on the job and then err slightly on the side of formality and conservatism while still reflecting the spirit of the setting.

Also make sure that what you choose to wear fits not only the prospective employer and the job, but you as well. Your outfit should enhance your features, coloring, and body shape and size. It should feel like you, not like a costume.

Consider the following additional clothing guidelines:

- Do wear durable fabrics that don't wrinkle excessively.
- Don't wear 100-percent synthetic fabrics unless they are very high quality ones that aren't shiny.
- Don't ever dress provocatively or in any way that detracts from your professionalism.
- Do wear clothes that are generously cut, not tight or clingy.
- Do make sure that the sleeves of jackets and shirts are long enough.
- Don't have a gap between the back of your neck and your jacket collar.
- Don't wear anything you haven't worn for at least an hour as a "trial run."
- Don't wear stockings darker than your shoes (women).

And, finally, be sure to consider the geographic region in which you're interviewing. This is obviously of particular importance if you are attempting to relocate and find yourself in a part of the country—or the world—where you're not familiar with typical styles of dress. Don't feel you can't be yourself; it's a mistake to try to adopt the look of a particular region or city if it's not really you. Be sensitive to the differences, however, and make some small accommodations that let you strike a balance between being yourself and not standing out like a sore thumb.

Accessories

When deciding what to wear, don't overlook the importance of accessories. For women, an attractive silk scarf or carefully selected piece of jewelry can make or break an outfit. For men, the right watch and pair of shoes can enhance your image more than even the more obvious items, such as your tie and suit.

Generally speaking, accessories should subtly accent your overall look, not detract from it. They also reflect your individual style; only so many cuts of suits exist, but you can choose from a seemingly infinite selection of watches, jewelry, bags, and scarves. When taking stock of your accessories, make sure that each of the following items meets the requirements of quality, style, taste, subtlety, and appropriateness:

- Jewelry
- Watch
- The pen you carry and may use during an interview or networking appointment
- Briefcase or portfolio
- Any other bags you carry (all should be in good condition and uncluttered)
- Overcoat or raincoat
- Shoes

**Bright Idea**

To make sure your polished image stays that way, always pack an interviewing/networking emergency kit. Include such items as safety pins, breath mints, a small mirror, nail file or clippers, an extra pair of stockings for women, an extra tie for men (in case of stains), and anything else you think you might need.

Grooming

No matter how busy you are or how disinterested you are in your looks, there's no excuse for cutting corners when it comes to personal grooming. A clean, tidy, fresh appearance goes a long way toward presenting the right image in interviews. Good grooming leads to forgiveness of any flaws in your natural appearance and shows that you care enough about yourself and about the occasion of your interview to make an effort. I probably don't have to tell you to have clean fingernails, take a bath, and make sure your makeup is subtle, but for the record, I've provided the following grooming checklist:

- Nails should be clean and trimmed, and skin should be moisturized to avoid a cracked, dry look. Women should keep nail polish to a neutral color for conservative jobs and organizations, or in a bolder but stylish, tasteful color for more creative or fashion-oriented settings.
- Your hair should be styled so that it's flattering to your face and body size and not outdated. Any coloring should be subtle and well-maintained. Most importantly, hair should be clean.
- Do your best to keep your skin clear and fresh by watching what you eat, getting rest and exercise, and using non-irritating cleansing products and cosmetics.
- Most women should wear makeup to an interview even if they don't typically do so. When applied well, it looks natural but enhances your own looks. If you are already a big

fan of makeup, make sure that you are not heavy-handed. The effects should be subtle, well-blended, and flattering. Consult a makeup artist if you have any doubts.

- Your safest bet is to wear no perfume or cologne, but if you do, put it on with a light touch. Remember, cologne is no substitute for a good, hot shower.
- Don't assume your breath is fresh; be extra vigilant in making and keeping it that way. Be careful what you eat for a day or two before an interview and always carry breath mints or spray. (And don't forget that a seemingly harmless cup of coffee before an interview can ruin your breath.)
- Never smoke in an interview or networking meeting—and if you smoke beforehand, do so in an open space so that the smell of smoke won't cling to your clothes and body.

Etiquette is more than table manners

We live in an age that is less formal than any time in recent history, both in society and in the workplace. As a result, the mention of etiquette may, for some, conjure up outmoded images of calling cards and shoes that match pocketbooks, leading them to assume that etiquette isn't relevant these days. Such an attitude can be devastating in the professional world, however. Having good manners and following accepted protocol is more than a nicety; it is a necessity.

Although I recommend that you be relaxed and down-to-earth in your dealings with prospective employers, I do not advocate abandoning all sense of protocol. It is possible to do both: to follow rules of etiquette and to be comfortably informal. In fact, when you know how to conduct yourself properly and don't have to agonize over which fork to use, you are liberated in a way that enables you to relax and be yourself. Plus, good manners show respect for others, and knowing the rules

**Bright Idea**

Always get the business card of anyone you meet when networking and interviewing so that you can send your thank-yous and follow-up notes promptly without having to chase down spellings of names, titles, and addresses later.

of etiquette helps you come across as self-assured. When you don't have to worry about how to conduct yourself in a social situation, you are free to concentrate on the business at hand and not on trivial matters.

It's worth it to take some time and get an etiquette lesson if you've never learned such things or are a bit rusty. To that end, I've listed a number of good books in the "Image/Etiquette/Attire" section of the online Bonus Appendix 2. You should consult them, or perhaps an etiquette expert, for more thorough instruction on the subject than the scope of this book allows. In the meantime, the following are a few quick tips on etiquette:

- Defer to, and show respect to, others who hold a higher position than you or who have more authority, rather than basing those gestures on gender or age. This applies to such circumstances as holding doors open for others and deciding whom to address first when you approach a group of people.
- When introducing yourself to others, do so in about 15 seconds or less. Don't monopolize the conversation before it even starts.
- Don't invade other people's personal space. Be sure that you are roughly arm's length—about three to five feet—from anyone to whom you're speaking.
- When you're in a group and a new person approaches, take the initiative to introduce yourself and others in the group to that new person (unless another group member is clearly in charge).

- Make “thank you” a standard part of your vernacular. From the person who fills your water glass in a restaurant, to the receptionist who greets you before an interview, to the person who conducts an interview, you should make it a point to express your thanks.
- Stick to neutral, noncontroversial topics when making small talk, and don’t ask personal questions.
- When entering the room for a meeting or interview, wait to sit until you are invited to do so.
- Be an attentive, active listener. It is inconsiderate to be preoccupied with what you are going to say next rather than focusing on what the other person is saying at that moment.
- Be cordial to everyone you meet at all times.
- Be discreet. Don’t reveal secrets of your former employer, such as confidential projects, future plans, proprietary information, or personal matters of people with whom you’ve worked.
- Keep your technology in working order. A fax that doesn’t work or is always busy, email you forget to check, or an answering machine that cuts callers off after 10 seconds is frustrating to people trying to communicate with you. What’s more, this sends the wrong signal about whether you have your act together.
- Be punctual. Allow extra time to get to interviews to guard against unforeseen delays; if you are going to be late, call to let them know. Being punctual also applies to keeping telephone appointments, returning calls in a timely manner, and promptly sending any necessary documents (perhaps a résumé, school transcript, reference list, or other materials interviewers may request before or after you meet).

Keys to establishing rapport

In addition to paying attention to what you say and how you say it, it's also important to strive for a connection with the people to whom you're writing and talking. Perfecting your self-marketing sound bite, developing a flawless delivery style, and having impeccable grooming and comportment actually can have a downside: You might come across as too rehearsed—robotic, even. Although good preparation is key, just being yourself is even more important. In order to establish rapport with the people you meet in your search, you need to come across as genuine, down-to-earth, and easy to get along with.

When you are trying to establish rapport, consider the following DOs and DON'Ts:

- **DO smile.** As you talk to someone, try to notice whether your face is frozen. This can happen without your realizing it. Relax your facial muscles and smile naturally.
- **DO be courteous.** Be respectful of other people's time and sensitive to others' needs and feelings. A little tact goes a long way.
- **DO be down-to-earth.** If there's one style mistake that people most often make in career-related communication, it's coming across as overly formal.
- **DO be sincere.** If you don't have a genuine interest in the people with whom you're communicating, you have no business talking to them. Insincerity is easy to spot and is one of the quickest ways to squash rapport.
- **DON'T be unfriendly.** Even if you're having a bad day or are extremely busy, try to be patient and pleasant in all your dealings with people.
- **DO listen to the other person.** Don't tap your foot and get an impatient look on your face while the other person is talking. Trying to monopolize the conversation won't do

you any good—in fact, if you’re doing more than half of the talking, you’re probably talking too much and not listening enough or asking enough questions. Listen attentively and don’t act as though you’re just waiting until it’s your turn to talk.

- **DON’T interrupt.** Wait until a pause in the conversation to speak. When you do resume talking, make sure that what you say is related to the preceding points. Otherwise, you give away the fact that you weren’t listening.
- **DON’T rush the process of establishing rapport.** Although you can establish immediate rapport by using simple techniques like smiling and being courteous, lasting rapport develops over time. So, try to be patient and don’t rush it.
- **DO be attuned to the chemistry (or lack thereof)** between the other person and you. Be prepared to back off if the other person simply doesn’t seem to want to connect with you.

Finally, a great way to attract the attention and interest of other people is to have interesting things to say. Making small talk that’s not so small goes a long way toward building rapport. Talking about the weather only gets you so far before the other person’s eyes glaze over. To make sure you always have something more interesting to say in any sort of networking situation, make a habit of reading at least one newspaper every day, one popular magazine (relevant to your field) every week, and one professional or trade journal each month.



Bright Idea

Communication is a two-way street. To develop solid relationships, *don’t talk only about yourself and what you need*; demonstrate a genuine interest in the other person.

Cross-cultural communication

Whether the job you're seeking will take you around the globe or down the block, you must demonstrate your ability to communicate well with all sorts of people. As you speak about yourself and your accomplishments, make sure that some of the asset statements you use illustrate past examples of working well with people from diverse backgrounds. As you do this, make sure to keep in mind the following:

- Emphasize the similarities between you and others, not the differences.
- Use gender-neutral language, such as “spokesperson,” not “spokesman.”
- Don't trivialize or act inconvenienced by matters that are near and dear to the hearts of certain groups (for example, saying something condescending like “I think those people want to be called Native Americans”).
- Don't identify someone's race or ethnic origin when they are not central to the point you are making.

Cross-cultural communication also raises some tricky issues when it comes to matters of business etiquette—particularly when you're dealing with people from different geographic regions within your own country or from other parts of the world. The books listed in the “Cross-Cultural Communication” section of the online Bonus Appendix 2 have excellent tips on this point. Some of the cultural differences you'll find elaborated on in those publications include:

- The importance, or lack of concern for, punctuality
- The exchange of business cards—when and how to do it
- Ways of showing respect
- The appropriate time and place for business
- Making eye contact
- Shaking hands

- Expressiveness
- Questions about the other person's personal or family life
- The definition of hospitality
- The role of humor in business
- Rules of morality
- Interest in sports
- Comfort level with silence
- Pop culture references
- Humility versus brash self-confidence
- Touching
- Head motions that convey yes or no (such as nodding or shaking)

Each of those issues may be handled differently from your custom, so it's important to understand the differences. You don't want to find yourself nodding your head yes and having that taken as a no or making some other *faux pas* that is not only a breach of etiquette in that culture but could cost you the job.

Communicating by phone

Barring a case of laryngitis, phone communication seems like a breeze compared with face-to-face encounters where you have to worry about all the nonverbal and image issues. Beware, however, as that ease can lull you into a false sense of security or overconfidence. Phone communication has its own set of pitfalls to avoid and tactics to employ. The content of what you say over the



Watch Out!

If you think that answering calls on your mobile phone during a networking appointment or interview makes you look important, think again. Use your phone only if in the midst of a personal emergency situation and explain that to the interviewer or networking contact in advance. Set the phone to a silent alert, such as vibration, and leave the room immediately to take your call.

Tips for Leaving Messages on Answering Machines and Voice Mail

- State your name slowly and clearly and spell it if the spelling is not obvious.
- Say your phone number clearly and slowly as well. People often race through their number because they're so used to saying it and know it so well. Remember, it's new to the person you're calling, so slow down! Repeat your number at the end of the message in case the listener wasn't able to write it down the first time around.
- Make it easy to reach you by giving times when you'll be available.
- Briefly state your reason for calling if your call isn't expected.
- Don't waste time leaving the date and time of your call if you're pretty sure you're speaking to a voice-mail system because it will automatically record the date and time. (It's okay to do so, however, if you want to be extra clear about the time you left your message.)

phone still has to share the spotlight with your phone presence. When you communicate by phone, remember the following:

- **DO** pay special attention to your tone of voice, as well as to the pitch, speed, and volume of your speech.
- **DON'T** litter your speech with *uhs* and *ums*. These are much more noticeable when someone is only hearing you, not hearing *and* seeing you.
- **DO** sound energetic and positive. Your voice is the best clue to your enthusiasm.

- DO stand up while talking on the phone if you need a quick energy boost.
- DO make sure your background is quiet—no barking dogs, screaming kids, chattering roommates, or loud music or TV.
- DON'T have an unprofessional or overly personal message on your answering machine or voice mail if you're actively networking for professional purposes.
- DON'T let a child or housekeeper answer the phone if you're doing business from home (unless they've been instructed to answer the phone in a professional manner, stating the business name rather than saying "hello").
- DO have a notepad and pen handy, as well as any materials to which you might need to refer.
- DO disable call waiting if you're going to be on an important business call.
- DO make note of the time difference when calling people in other time zones.

Written communication

Before witnessing on the Internet the various levels of writing skills of people all over the country, I had no idea what a rare and valuable commodity it is to be able to write even reasonably well. Anyone who can construct a sentence that makes sense and that is not riddled with spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors has a real advantage in the workplace—and in life in general. Anyone who can put two or more of those sentences together in a coherent fashion to convey a point, to educate, or to entertain is miles ahead of the pack.

The job search process inevitably involves written communication of some sort. You write various people to request networking appointments. You write résumés and cover letters to secure interviews. You often engage in rounds of email to arrange an interview. Then you have to write thank-you notes

and other follow-up communication after the interview. Every piece of paper you mail and all email you send is a reflection of you.

Writing in plain English

I have just one thing to say about written business communication: Write in plain English as though you were speaking to the reader. Writing from this perspective means abandoning most of the commonly held assumptions about how business writing should sound. Just because you're writing in a business arena or for a job search, you don't have to be overly formal or serious, and you don't have to use a cumbersome vocabulary that feels alien. If you begin by thinking of how an idea or point would sound if you simply said it to someone out loud, you can get that information down on paper in a way that will be pleasing and understandable for the reader. This method is so effective that there has been something of a "Plain English Movement" in the corporate and legal worlds and in the public sector, with consultants training employees in this homespun approach to writing.

Of course, writing well is a little more complicated than simply writing as if you were speaking. If you have problems with grammar, punctuation, syntax, and organizing content, you should solve those problems through a formal course, tutoring, or some other means. If you know the basics of writing, however, then you are ready to tackle the method of writing simply and conversationally.

To write in the plain English method, consider the following tips.

- Use an active rather than passive voice for verbs and for your overall tone. For example, instead of saying "It has come to my attention..." say "I have realized that...." Or, instead of "My efforts on that project were well received," say "My boss and coworkers gave me excellent feedback on my efforts with that project."

- Use contractions. Saying “I am” or “I have” becomes monotonous to the reader. Try to break up the monotony by using contractions in your subject-verb combinations occasionally, saying “I’m,” “I’ve,” and so on.
- Take some poetic license with rules of grammar. There’s nothing wrong with taking some liberties with grammatical rules that are often wrongly thought to be etched in stone. It is acceptable to occasionally split an infinitive, and you may choose to start a sentence with “and” or “but” from time to time to avoid chopiness.
- Use common words. People who truly have an extensive vocabulary don’t try to show off their knowledge at every turn but, instead, use impressive words only when appropriate. When you have a choice, it is usually best to opt for the more ordinary word to express a thought and then save the more sophisticated vocabulary for when it’s the best—and perhaps only—way to convey what you mean.

Also make sure that the way you organize the content of your writing is effective. Start with your main point in the first sentence or two and then lay out the details. Business communication should be something like the inverted pyramid style of journalistic writing. You begin with the headline and the crux of the story and then fill in the details.

Finally, make sure that the overall look and format of your written communication is pleasing to the eye, clean, and neat. Use adequate margins, space text well to avoid a crowded look, and keep paragraphs short to avoid a dense feel to the text. If your letters or résumés will be sent through regular mail (as opposed to faxing or emailing) or will be delivered by hand, use good-quality paper in a conservative color.

Making your point with email

As a career coach, I received hundreds of email messages each week from job seekers who needed me to review their résumés

or advise them about their job hunts. You would be amazed at how few of those emails come across as professional, easy to read, and inviting to reply to. The tips that follow will help you avoid the common pitfalls that I and others in the hiring world often see:

Make sure your email address is professional

BettyBoop@, SingleDadof3@, and other silly or overly personal email addresses just won't cut it. Try to have an email address that contains your name. If your name is already taken, or if you don't want your full name in your address for personal security reasons, at least create an address that contains some portion of your name and initials or is relevant to your field, such as processexpert@ or HRexpert@.

Avoid confusing email addresses

Sometimes when you can't get the address you want (such as your name) because it's taken, your Internet Service Provider will prompt you to select your name plus some combination of numbers. Or, you might switch to your initials plus some numbers. When doing this, be aware of how difficult the address will be to type. If I get email from a name like llt111100017@ and for some reason have to type in the address rather than just hitting "Reply," it drives me nuts! Be especially mindful of how the lowercase letter "l" and the numeral "1" can be easily confused.

Be specific in your email subject field

Avoid generic subjects like "hello" or "advice please" or "my résumé." Put your name in the subject field (if not obvious from your address) and/or a brief phrase explaining the purpose of your correspondence. Due to the risk of computer viruses, most people will not open email with a vague subject line.

Follow instructions

If a job posting or someone you've spoken with has requested that you send email with a particular message in the subject

field or has given instructions about whether they will accept attached files, follow those instructions!

Use a signature block

Close every email with your full name and contact information. I am always amazed when someone sends email related to their search and does not have their name anywhere on the email, including not in their email address. I have had to hit “reply” and tell the person that I need them to tell me who they are before I can respond to their message. I do it because I’m their search consultant, and it is my job to help them. Do you think a prospective employer or busy recruiter is going to take the time to do that? Probably not. Your email account may have a signature option where all you have to do is set up the signature block one time and click a button to have it appear automatically at the end of each message. If you don’t have that option, then type your name and contact information at the end of each message.

Don’t mark the email as urgent or high priority unless it truly is

What’s high priority to you in your networking and job search efforts may not be so high priority to the other person. Don’t be presumptuous.

Keep your messages brief

Online communication should be brief. If someone has to scroll down the screen more than once to read an email from you, you’ve said too much. Be brief, and if you have more to say, wait for a reply and then say it in a follow-up email or when you meet with someone in person or by phone.

Keep the look simple.

In the body of your email, don’t use any special backgrounds for your text. Making the background a different color than the standard default one can be hard on the eyes, and having any

sort of image like flowers can appear unprofessional (unless you're a florist). Similarly, don't use emoticons (those symbols that simulate smiley faces, winking faces, and so on). If you wouldn't put it in a regular typed business letter, why put it in email?

Follow those basic tips for email communication and you won't end up suffering a cyberspace embarrassment. For more details on what to say in email, you'll find sample job search email messages in Chapter 6, "Job Search Correspondence."

Just the facts

- Develop a self-marketing sound bite as a cornerstone of your communication.
- Strengthen the impact of your message with positive, powerful words and phrases.
- Ninety-three percent of your message is conveyed through your nonverbal communication style, so paying attention to your body language, image, and etiquette is critical.
- Establish rapport by being sincere, down-to-earth, and positive.
- When communicating by phone, pay extra attention to the energy level of your voice.
- The best approach to business writing is to write in plain English and not be overly formal.
- When communicating by email, pay attention to the details such as the professionalism of your email address, the name of your email in the subject field, and having a signature block.