LIFEPAC®

Business Computer Information Systems

Student Book

Unit **1**

Alpha Omega Publications®

Communication Skills

LIFEPAC Business Computer Information Systems

Production Manager:

Alan Christopherson

Editorial:

Managing Editor:

Alan Christopherson

Copy Editor:

Laura Messner

Art, Layout, and Design:

Layout and Design:

Brian Ring, Melissa Fransen

Illustration:

Brian Ring, Melissa Fransen

Cover Design:

Ryan Egan

Foreword

Business Computer Information Systems is a ten-unit high school elective that explores the use of technology applications in both business and personal situations. Occupations have transitioned from those that primarily produced things to those that manipulate and manage information. Whether it is at home, in a factory, at a school, for a business, or in an office, almost everyone today uses many forms of technology on a daily basis. This course will explore the software applications and information technologies that everyone is likely to use in business situations.

In this course the students will learn computer terminology, hardware, software, operating systems and information systems that relate to the business environment. The units will concentrate on learning the standard applications of word processing, spreadsheets, database management and graphical presentation packages. In addition, skills in personal and interpersonal communications and in communication technologies will be studied.

The course is intended to help students arrive at the following understandings:

- Effective communication skills and productive work habits can increase employees' success.
- Technology solutions can help employees be more productive and effective.

Keyboarding is a stated prerequisite for this course. While there are some keyboarding reviews in the course, there is no keyboarding instruction.

Business Computer Information Systems covers topics from TEKS §120.23 and §120.64.

Business Computer Information Systems contains the following units:

Unit 1 — Communication Skills

Unit 2 — Business Technology

Unit 3 — Word Processing

Unit 4 — Spreadsheets

Unit 5 — Databases

Unit 6 — Telecommunications Technology

Unit 7 — Desktop Publishing Technology

Unit 8 — Presentation Technology

Unit 9 — Computer Networks

Unit 10 — Computer Operating Systems

Unit 1: Communication Skills
Introduction

Success in the workplace requires habits and skills you must develop to be an effective and valuable employee. A foundational job skill is the ability to be a good communicator. This unit explores effective communication skills and considers how these translate into and shape desirable workplace skills, habits, and attitudes.

Your goals for the unit include the following:

- Understand and apply effective communication skills.

- Demonstrate productive work habits and attitudes—for example, dependability and punctuality.

- Demonstrate active listening through oral and written feedback.

- Locate and interpret written information.

- Incorporate supplementary resources and references.

- Organize ideas logically and sequentially.

The objectives for this unit include the following:

- Identify characteristics of effective and ineffective communication.

- Evaluate your own communication skills and create an action plan for improving your communication skills.

- Write and revise professional email messages following common netiquette guidelines.

- Identify productive work habits and attitudes.

- Employ active listening techniques.

- Give and accept constructive feedback.

- Determine the suitability and reliability of Internet resources.

- Paraphrase and summarize written information.

- Organize information logically and sequentially.

I.   Effective Communication Skills
Communication Skills

Imagine that you have been applying for jobs all over town, and you finally get called for an interview. When you first listen to the voicemail message, you are really excited. But when you listen again to get the details about the interview, this is what you hear:

"Hi. Yeah, we got your application about the job. Um, we'd like to go ahead and interview you. Can you come in for an interview later? That would be great. OK, I'll see you then."

Did you get clear information about the interview? Do you know who to meet with and when to be there? Are you even sure which place you applied to is the one that is interested in interviewing you?

This lesson will focus on effective communication skills. You will accomplish the following during this lesson:

Objectives:

- Define communication and identify barriers to communication.
- Compare and contrast effective and ineffective communication skills.

Vocabulary:

barrier - anything that interferes with a message being sent or received.

communication - an exchange of information.

receiver - the person who receives a message.

sender - the person who creates or composes a message and delivers it either orally or in writing.

Very simply put, **communication** is the exchange of information. When you communicate, you may send a message, or you may receive a message. The goal is to have the message that is sent by Person A (the **sender**) be clearly and easily received by Person B (the **receiver**). The sender creates or composes the message and delivers it, either orally or in writing, to the receiver, who should be able to clearly understand the intent of the message. When this happens, successful and effective communication has occurred.

Barriers to Communication

Having a clear, two-way exchange of information isn't always as easy as it sounds. Sometimes there are **barriers** to communication that interfere with or block the message. Barriers are anything that interferes with a message being sent or received. Some barriers might be caused by the sender, such as a confusing message, hard-to-understand words or language, or an accent or unfamiliar dialect. Other barriers may be caused by the receiver, such as distraction or inattentiveness. There are also barriers to communication that are not the fault of the sender or the receiver, such as noise.

Effective Communication

But remember, the goal of effective communication is for the message to travel clearly and easily from the sender to the receiver. It is important when communicating to reduce as many barriers as possible. Beginning with a clear message that is logical and organized and easy to understand is a good first step. Making sure there are few distractions to interfere with the message is another important step. If the receiver replies with a new message, this communication has become interactive.

In the workplace, communication becomes even more important. Often, business goals and timelines depend on clear communication. For example, imagine a new computerized cashiering system will be installed in the store at which you work in the next few months. Communication about this change is critical. Employees must be told when the new system will be in place, and there also needs to be communication about the highlights of the new system. There must be communication about training for employees on this new computerized system. And if clear communication does not occur before this new system is activated, this change could bring business to a halt when the employees are unprepared to use it.

But clear communication is not always as easy as it sounds. Sometimes, there are barriers to clear communication. What are some workplace barriers to effective communication? They include the following:

- The sender may not have enough time to create a clear message.

- The sender may not speak clearly or use language that can be easily understood.

- The receiver may not have the knowledge or information to make sense of the message.

- The receiver may not have time to carefully read the message.

- It may be too loud for clear communication to occur.

- It might be too busy for effective communication to occur.

Many times, communication does not happen face-to-face. A lot of business communication will take place by telephone, so employees must be able to communicate clearly using the phone. But the telephone itself can sometimes be a barrier to effective communication. When you are not speaking directly to another person, it can be easier to become distracted and not concentrate fully on the communication. It can also sometimes be harder to understand spoken words over a telephone. When a message is left on voicemail, communication can become even more tricky.

Example:

Imagine that you are a manager who has posted a "Help Wanted" advertisement so that you can hire some new employees. When you review your voicemail messages, you have messages from interested prospective employees. How a person presents him- or herself over the phone, even on a voicemail message, can go a long way toward creating a first impression, either positive or negative. Click on the first voicemail message to listen to it. What impression do you get of this job candidate based on the way she communicates in her phone message?

Please refer to the media CD to listen to the Voice Messages in this example.

Now click on the second message and compare it to the first one. What first impression do you get of the second caller?

What did you think of the person in message 1? As a manager, do you think you would call this person for an interview? It did not seem the caller was prepared with a clear and organized message. The caller did not speak slowly and clearly, and she seemed nervous and confused. Parts of the message were unintelligible. The ineffective communication skills shown by this caller probably affected your first impression. A manager may not be inclined to hire an employee with poor oral communication skills.

The second caller, on the other hand, probably did impress you. The caller was confident, clear, and ready to communicate. The message was logical and organized. Because employers like to hire people with good communication skills, as a manager, you would probably be interested in this job candidate.

✔ **Your Turn**

Now that you have had a chance to think about the differences between effective and ineffective communication, let's make a list of the main characteristics of each. In the following activity, you will be shown a list of descriptive words related to communication. If you think the word describes good and effective communication, drag-and-drop it into the "Characteristics of Effective Communication" column. But if the word does not describe effective communication, drag-and-drop it into the "Characteristics of Ineffective Communication" column.

Please refer to the media CD to compete Comparing Communication Skills.

Lets Review!

Remember, effective communication is the clear exchange of information. When you are involved in a communication exchange, you may send a message, or you may receive a message. Sometimes, there may be barriers to communication that interfere with or block the message. Some of these barriers cannot be avoided (such as noise), but others can be reduced if you pay attention to the characteristics of effective communication.

1.1 Bryan has e-mailed his boss, Shauna, asking if he can leave work early next Friday. Which choice best describes Bryan in this communication scenario?_____

    A. the sender of the message
    B. the receiver of the message
    C. a barrier to the message
    D. a source of the message

1.2 Jamie works as a receptionist for a small business. Fridays are always a challenge on the phone, since the front entrance sees a lot more customer traffic. Jamie's communication challenge is due to which factor?_____

    A. effective communication
    B. ineffective communication
    C. barriers to communication
    D. workplace communication

1.3 Liza is preparing a memo to her employees that explains the new procedure for asking for time off and switching shifts with another employee. By making sure her memo is well-prepared, logical, and organized, Liza has made sure her communication has the characteristics of _____.

    A. effective communication
    B. ineffective communication
    C. barriers to communication
    D. workplace communication

1.4 True/False   Oral communication skills can present a positive or negative first impression.

1.5 True/False   Barriers to communication always can be eliminated.

1.6 True/False   Effective communication skills are a desirable workplace skill.

1.7 True/False   Communication is the exchange of information.

1.8 True/False   The telephone can be a barrier to communication.

Electronic Communication Skills

You likely engage in electronic communication on a daily basis. Whenever you send or receive an e-mail, text message, or IM, you are using electronic communication. In today's global workplace, these electronic communication tools have become very important to businesses.

This lesson will focus on effective communication skills. You will accomplish the following during this lesson:

Objectives:

- Identify guidelines for effective electronic communication, including netiquette.
- Determine how to ensure e-mail messages are appropriate for the workplace.

Vocabulary:

asynchronous communication - communication that occurs when the sender and receiver are separated by time and/or place.

audience - the person or people for whom your message is intended.

netiquette - guidelines for courteous electronic communication.

purpose - the reason for communication, such as to inform, to persuade, or to entertain.

synchronous communication - communication that occurs when the sender and receiver are communicating at the same time.

When we think about communication, we often think about words. But according to A. Barbour's book *Louder than Words: Non-verbal Communication*, communication is only seven percent the words we use. Thirty-eight percent of communication is related to how we speak our message—including how loudly or how quickly we speak—and fifty-five percent of communication involves body language, such as gestures and facial expressions.

Communication isn't limited to just oral, or spoken, communication. Effective written communication skills are also important. How can we communicate effectively when we do not have the benefit of nonverbal communication cues?

Preparation and Planning

Written communication requires special preparation and planning to be effective. It's a good idea to start by thinking about the purpose of your message. The **purpose** is why you are writing. Do you want to give information? Do you need to persuade your reader? Are you trying to entertain?

Next, you must consider the **audience**, or who will be reading your message. Knowing your audience will help you choose the right vocabulary and language to use in your message.

RIGHT

While you were out
Date: 3/25   Time: 4:00 p.m.
To: Craig Jones
From: Matt Peterson
Message: Wanted to talk about the Sales Meeting he missed yesterday.
Telephone: 555-555-1234
☐ Telephoned   ☐ Returned Call
☐ Called to see you   ☐ Will Call You
☐ Wants to see you   ☒ Please Call
Operator: Ali
☒ URGENT

WRONG

While you were out
Date: _____ Time: _____
To: _____
From: _____
Message: Matt Called
Telephone: _____
☐ Telephoned   ☐ Returned Call
☐ Called to see you   ☐ Will Call You
☐ Wants to see you   ☐ Please Call
Operator: _____
☐ URGENT

For example, imagine that your parents have been giving you an allowance and now you think it is a good time to ask for a raise. The way you ask them for a raise in an allowance is likely going to differ from how you might ask an employer for a raise at work. In both situations, the purpose of your message is to persuade the receiver that you need a raise. But the audience is different (your parents versus an employer), so the words you use to send this message are likely to be different as well.

Main Idea

Once you know your purpose and your audience, you can focus on the main idea for your communication. It's important to clearly know what your main point is so that you can focus on this idea throughout your written message. You should introduce your main idea, give any needed supporting information and details, and then summarize your main idea once again. Using clear language and proper grammar is also important. Sometimes, reading a message aloud can help you "hear" things in your written message that are unclear.

Effective Communication

Twenty-first century employees must be prepared to communicate effectively using a variety of technology. This includes both **synchronous** communication (when both parties in the communication are communicating at the same time) and **asynchronous** communication (when the people who are communicating are separated by time and/ or place). Most oral communication is synchronous, while written communication is often asynchronous. Technology communication tools include e-mail correspondence, chat rooms, electronic mailing lists or bulletin boards, instant messaging, and paging or texting. This type of electronic communication has its own special considerations. Some of these considerations include using a clear font color and large font size or avoiding the overuse of acronyms that might be unfamiliar to the receiver of the message.

Since so much of business communication can occur via e-mail, it's important to think about the guidelines that can help you write e-mails that are appropriate for the workplace. When you are e-mailing friends or family, these guidelines may not be quite as important, but in the workplace, it is important to know basic **netiquette** guidelines to make your e-mails professional and polished. Netiquette refers to the rules of polite and courteous electronic communication, or Internet etiquette. Here are some common netiquette guidelines:

- Make use of the subject line to let your reader know the main purpose of the e-mail.

- Keep e-mails short and to the point. No one likes to read a long and rambling e-mail, and many people just won't read the whole message. Try to keep the e-mail short enough that the reader will not have to scroll down to read it, and use bullet points to highlight important information.

- Use a font style, size, and color that is easy to read.

- Avoid composing e-mails in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS, OR ALL CAPS. For some readers, all caps can be very hard to read. For others, all caps indicates that you are shouting at the reader.

- Review your e-mail before you click "send" to make sure your message is clearly and accurately written (no misspelled words, no grammatical errors, etc.).

- Use language, vocabulary, and tone that are appropriate for the receiver of your message.

- Don't forward spam or chain letters. Only forward messages when you have permission to do so.

- Remember that e-mail is a permanent written record. Never write an e-mail with information that you would not want to have made public. If you are angry or upset, wait to write your email.

✓ **Your Turn**

Compare and contrast the two e-mail messages below. Notice that the purpose of each message is the same: this employee needs a particular date off from work and has e-mailed the supervisor about this request. But the approach is very different. Which one is more appropriate for the workplace?

Please refer to the media CD to complete the Send E-mail activity.

In e-mail A, the message has several grammatical errors, and the tone of the message seems more appropriate for a message to a friend than to a work supervisor. The sender has not kept the message clear and to the point. But e-mail B is clearly worded and brief, which makes it more appropriate for the workplace.

Lets Review!

Written communication requires even more care and attention than verbal communication because the receiver of the message does not have the benefit of nonverbal clues to the message, such as facial expressions. Many people today rely on electronic communication methods, such as e-mail or instant messaging, to help them communicate. Using netiquette guidelines can help you prepare an effective electronic message that will be clearly understood by the receiver.

1.9 Which of the following guidelines about the subject line of e-mail messages is most appropriate?_____

A. Make sure you provide all the details in the subject line in case the receiver does not have time to read the whole e-mail.
B. Use the subject line wisely to let your reader know the main purpose of the e-mail.
C. Try to keep the subject line very short, such as just one or two words.
D. Avoid using a subject line unless the e-mail is very important.

1.10 Which of the following guidelines about the use of all capital letters in e-mail messages is most appropriate?_____

A. Use all capital letters to emphasize the most important points in your message.
B. Use all capital letters to express strong emotions, such as anger or frustration.
C. Avoid the use of all capital letters because some people may have trouble reading this.
D. Avoid the use of all capital letters because this is not grammatically correct.

✓ **Matching**

1.11 Match the term with the appropriate definition.

_____1. purpose

_____2. audience

_____3. synchronous communication

_____4. asynchronous communication

_____5. netiquette

A. guidelines for courteous electronic communication

B. communication that occurs when the sender and receiver are communicating at the same time

C. communication that occurs when the sender and receiver are separated by time and/or place

D. the person/people for whom your message is intended

E. to inform, to persuade, or to entertain

✓ **Paragraph**

1.12 Select two netiquette guidelines. In 3–5 sentences, explain why these guidelines make professional online communication more effective.

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☑ Teacher Check: _____ Initial _____ Date

1.13   Read the following two e-mail messages. In 3–5 sentences, explain why e-mail B is the more appropriate workplace e-mail. Remember to consider netiquette guidelines in your response.

E-mail A:
DUDE! You totally shorted me on my paycheck! I seriously am upset. It is majorly less $$$$ than it shold be. I totally worked overtime last pay period!!!! YOU NEED TO FIX THIS RIGHT AWAY. I am going shopping this weekend and i need my cash.

E-mail B:
When I got my paycheck, I noticed that it was less than I expected. It looks like I did not receive over time pay for the extra hours I worked last pay period. Can you please review this and let me know how I can get this corrected?

_____

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☑ Teacher Check: _____ Initial _____ Date

Project 1: Revising Emails

E-mail is often used in the workplace for communication. It is important that you can compose appropriate workplace e-mails, and this project is designed to give you some practice.

Objectives:

- Evaluate workplace e-mail messages.
- Revise workplace e-mail messages.

Directions:

Part One: Review the two e-mail messages below for their adherence to the guidelines for professional e-mail correspondence you have learned in this section. First, explain why the message is not appropriate for the workplace. Then revise each message to make it more appropriate for workplace communication.

E-mail A: HEY! I NEED THE TRAINING MANUAL 2 READ B4 MY NEXT SHIFT. R U DUN WITH IT?

E-mail B: This customer called today and totally yelled at me. She said there was a mistake on her bill, but I totally did not cause the problem. She went on and on about how this was the fourth time there was a mistake on her bill or something like that. Like I care! But she's gonna call again tomorrow. What do you want me to do to get this lady off my back?

Part Two: Imagine that you need to be late to work next Thursday because of a doctor's appointment. Compose your own e-mail appropriate for the workplace that explains this to your boss.

✓ **Paragraph: Part 1**

1.14

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☑ Teacher Check: _____ Initial _____ Date

✓ **Paragraph: Part 2**

1.15

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☑ Teacher Check: _____ Initial _____ Date

Self Test 1: Overview of Effective Communication Skills

✓ **Multiple Choice**

1.01   Which of the following can increase the clarity of a message?_____

    A.   using all capital letters to draw attention to your message.
    B.   using long words and sentences to impress your reader.
    C.   summarizing the message.
    D.   organizing the message around one clear main idea.

1.02   Which of the following barriers to oral communication is not the fault of the sender or receiver?_____

    A.   being unprepared
    B.   noise
    C.   not paying attention
    D.   laziness

1.03   When is it appropriate to use acronyms and emoticons in business communication?_____

    A.   when the receiver of the message knows what they mean.
    B.   when the receiver of the message will not have much time to read the message.
    C.   when the sender of the message is running short on time.
    D.   when the sender of the message wants to show they know the business lingo.

1.04   Which of the following guidelines about the length of e-mail messages is most appropriate?_____

    A.   Make sure you provide all the details in a clear manner, even if the e-mail seems long.
    B.   Avoid bullet points in e-mail because they may confuse some readers.
    C.   Try to keep the e-mail short enough that the reader will not have to scroll to read it.
    D.   Write e-mails that are like papers for school, with clear paragraphs and many supporting examples.

1.05   Which of the following is an example of synchronous communication?_____

    A.   e-mail
    B.   voicemail
    C.   telephone conversation
    D.   text message

1.06   Which of the following is an example of asynchronous communication?_____

    A.   e-mail
    B.   telephone conversation
    C.   face-to-face conversation
    D.   workplace meetings

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1.07 Josh's boss asked him to write a letter to their customers explaining some upcoming price increases. But Josh was in a hurry to get off work, so he didn't take the time to get the information he needed to explain the increase. As a result, the e-mail was confusing and disorganized. Josh's e-mail has the characteristics of _____ .

    A. effective communication
    B. ineffective communication
    C. barriers to communication
    D. workplace communication

1.08 Rebecca received the following e-mail from her boss: I NEED ALL EMPLOYEES TO WORK LATE ON SATURDAY. NO EXCEPTIONS! What is the most likely reason why this communication is not effective?_____

    A. Rebecca may not want to work on Saturday.
    B. Rebecca may not check her e-mail until after Saturday.
    C. The e-mail does not explain the reasons why the employees must work late.
    D. The use of capital letters may make Rebecca feel like her boss is yelling at her.

✔ True or False

1.09 True/False   Netiquette guidelines can help you prepare an effective electronic message.

1.010 True/False   The sender in a communication exchange can always eliminate all barriers to the communication.

1.011 True/False   Electronic communication is always asynchronous communication.

1.012 True/False   Noise can be a barrier to communication.

✔ Matching

1.013 Match the term with the appropriate definition.

    _____1. netiquette   A. exchange of information

    _____2. audience   B. anything that interferes with clear communication

    _____3. purpose   C. the reason for the communication, such as to inform or to persuade

    _____4. communication   D. guidelines for courteous electronic communication

    _____5. sender   E. the person who creates/composes the message

    _____6. barrier   F. the person/people who will read your message

1.014   Respond to the following in 3–5 sentences. What is the purpose of netiquette guidelines?

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✓ **Paragraph**

1.015   Respond to the following in 3–5 sentences. Describe why communication is a valuable workplace skill.

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Score: _____ **Teacher Initial:** _____ **Date:** _____

Each Answer = 1 point; Essay and Paragraph Questions = 5 - 10 Points