



Master of Science in Computational Finance

Carnegie Mellon University

## MSCF COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS PRIMER

### INTRODUCTION

More and more, employers are searching for people who can communicate well. They want employees who can write concisely and coherently; they want people who can make strong presentations; they want people who understand all aspects of communication including body language, emotional intelligence, negotiation and other vital communication skills. To succeed in your job search and your career, you will need excellent communication skills!

This primer offers some basics about communication, especially as it applies to business. It addresses a few of the skills needed by people who are preparing themselves for the “real world.” It touches on questions such as: how do you network, how do you write a strong cover letter, how do you ace an interview, and what do you say in a follow-up email? It shows you that the audience always needs to be at the center of your message. We invite you to review the following and learn about some new communication tips and advice.

### BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

To be an effective businessperson you must understand your audience and your purpose. If you don't know your audience, you will connect with them only by accident. You must, of course, also know your own purpose. Are you trying to inform, query or persuade? Simply creating a message does not guarantee that it will connect with the audience.

Business people have little time and they greatly appreciate getting right to the most important content. The military calls this the BLUF Method: Bottom Line Up Front.

**LEARN HOW TO USE THE BLUF METHOD TO WRITE EMAILS WITH MILITARY PRECISION ›**

## THE AUDIENCE

Always defer to the audience. They rule! Whether you are writing or speaking, always consider the audience's point of view, their needs, and their wants. Ask yourself questions such as these:

- What is the age of the audience?
- What is their educational level?
- What is their position in the organization?
- What do they need to know about the topic at hand?
- What do they already know about the topic?
- How will they make their decision?
- What is their timeline?

After you have answered as many questions as you can about the audience, grab their attention. Unless you have their attention, you will be talking to yourself. Use these techniques to grab attention:

- Questions
- Quotes
- Stories
- Statistics
- Novelty

## LEARN SOME GREAT TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE THE AUDIENCE THE HERO IN YOUR NEXT PRESENTATION ›

*"The MSCF presentation and business communication classes helped to improve my presentation planning and delivery. It also gave me an edge in my internship. On the first day we met the team, we had an unexpected, impromptu presentation that included two managing directors. I felt confident - it turned out to be very successful and I left a good first impression on them." - Yolanda Hu (MSCF '19)*

## NETWORKING

When we approach someone at a networking event, especially someone we don't know, we are deciding in the deepest part of our brains whether or not this person is friend or foe. This process occurs automatically and subconsciously, so how do you convince someone that you're a friend, not a foe? It all begins with non-verbal messages.

Use this formula to get your networking off to a good start:

- Smile
- Have open body language
- Offer a handshake
- Make eye contact
- Introduce yourself
- Ask a question

When you are networking be interested, not interesting. You might ask any of the following questions in a networking session:

- How long have you worked for the company?
- What advice would you give to someone who wants an internship at the company?
- What skills help to make the best intern?
- What did you think about the news today (topic)?

You can think of many such questions. Try to make them open-ended, that is, ask the other person a “who, what, when, where, why, how” question so that they don’t answer “yes” or “no.” Also, keep in contact after the networking event.

**[DISCOVER EIGHT TIPS ON HOW TO NETWORK MORE SUCCESSFULLY ›](#)**

## COVER LETTER

Recruiters receive hundreds of resumes and cover letters. To cut through that clutter, write a letter that attracts attention and demonstrates your awareness of the recruiter’s needs. Write something that elaborates on your resume instead of just restating your resume’s content. Demonstrate the kind of person you are and the benefits you can bring to their organization. Use the following in your cover letter:

- Write a first sentence that grabs their attention
- Tell them the qualities they are looking for
- Tell a brief story about how those qualities are reflected in your experiences
- Use the word “you” as opposed to the word “I,” which focuses on the writer
- Be interesting, never boring or trite. Don’t write the same letter everyone else is writing
- Ask for action

**[LEARN THE SIX SECRETS TO WRITING A GOOD COVER LETTER ›](#)**

## INTERVIEWING

Once you have scored an interview, you need to make a great impression. The planning for that begins long before you ever show up at the company's offices. Among other things, you need to:

- Choose the right wardrobe; wear business attire that is simple, not ostentatious
- Know exactly how to get to the location; travel there ahead of time, if possible
- Practice being interviewed; ask a friend to help and video yourself
- Wake early; freshen up; use the right deodorant and cosmetics; be certain your clothes are pressed and shoes are shined
- Bring many copies of your resume
- Arrive about 15 minutes early; any earlier and the interviewers may not be ready for you
- Keep your posture erect, whether you are sitting or standing
- Give a firm handshake to anyone you meet (not a "limp fish" or "bone crusher")
- Keep an open body language
- Smile

When you are in the interview:

- Mirror the other person (subtly)
- Show enthusiasm and energy
- Use gestures to punctuate the important points you have stated
- Ask questions and try to have a conversation
- Avoid rambling when giving answers to behavioral questions

Above all, be confident. Studies have proven that the one thing employers look for in candidates is confidence. If you practice and prepare, you will be confident.

**ACE YOUR NEXT INTERVIEW WITH THESE HELPFUL TIPS ›**

## EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

Recruiters have the important but tedious job of reading hundreds of cover letters and resumes and culling the very best candidates. Sometimes, in the process, they lose sight of your excellent credentials. For that reason, you should send them a follow-up message to thank them and to remind them that you want the job. That's where your great email comes in. In order to reach them you must follow this formula:

- Attract their attention
- Create interest by showing them immediate benefits
- Move them to action

This formula applies to most communication, as you will see. When you apply the formula to email, you begin with the subject line. What can you say in the subject line that will make them want to read your message? Readers are moved to read messages when they:

- Know the person who has written to them
- Find some benefits suggested by the subject line
- Hear their name mentioned
- Are asked a question
- Are given an important fact

When you have attracted the reader's attention, you must write a powerful first sentence. If you don't want your email to be deleted, keep the message to one screen length. Try to put important information in the subject line. Write a first sentence that says it all. Keep each paragraph to two or three sentences. And, make all information relevant.

**LEARN FROM EDITORS ON HOW TO WRITE MORE EFFECTIVE EMAILS ›**

## MASTER THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

You can improve your communication by focusing on simplicity and using proven techniques. Albert Einstein said, "Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler." He was arguing for a balance between complexity and simplicity. He also said, "If you cannot explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

Above all you must PRACTICE, PRACTICE, and PRACTICE some more. Go to networking events, ask for informational interviews, and ask a friend to evaluate your performance in making a presentation or in writing an email or cover letter.

*The Carnegie Mellon University Master of Science in Computational Finance program has committed itself to educating students in both quantitative studies as well as communication studies. Our Communication Development Program provides one-to-one coaching to all students as well as classes in Business Communication. The classes cover professional writing, speaking, negotiation, emotional intelligence, influence, persuasion and a host of other critical communication skills. For more information on our program, visit our [website](#) and also check out our social media, especially [#AskEd](#) on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).*