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Business communication research on reader analysis has stagnated. This article examines why current business communication theory and practice makes new inroads into reader analysis difficult. To account for this lack of new critical thinking, the article assesses the field's confusion about critical terminology, its poor heuristics for assessing readers, its oversimplified cases, and its misleading message classification system. In addition, the article explores a new factor in reader analysis—readers' perceptual sets—as a way of more accurately modeling the dynamics of the writer-reader relationship.

Toward a Better Understanding of Reader Analysis

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IN "READING, WRITING AND RESEARCH: Pedagogical Implications," Bob Gieselman (1982) praises business communication instructors for their long-standing concern about audience analysis and adaptation. To some extent Gieselman's praise is justified. Aphorisms such as "consider your audience" and "adapt to your reader" have echoed off the walls of business communication classrooms for decades. Even Alta Guinn Saunders (1925), one of the field's premier early textbook writers, addressed the importance of reader analysis and adaptation.

Despite this early concern about reader analysis, the business communication field's research in this area has slowed to a trickle. Over the past five years, only six (Brent, 1985; Locker, 1982; McCallister, 1983; Saldow, 1982; Smeltzer, 1986; Suchan & Dulek, 1986) out of 104 articles in *The Journal of Business Communication* deal directly or semi-directly with audience and reader analysis. Current business communication texts add little to the advice first offered by Saunders and her followers. In contrast, composition researchers during the same period have made important new inroads into reader analysis. Work by Bruffee (1986), Clark (1982), Ede (1984), Ede & Lunsford (1984), Freed and Broadhead (1987), Kroll (1984), Thomas (1986), and Walzer (1985) form the basis for much of this research.

Why, with the developments occurring in composition, has reader analysis scholarship stagnated within business communication? Have researchers exhausted the topic, or are there other factors in the writer-reader relationship that need careful examination? Also, what impact has this lack of research had on instruction? This article will answer these and other important questions about reader analysis. It will first examine why current business communication theory and practice create pedagogical problems that make new inroads into reader analysis difficult. Then, it will explore a new dimension of reader analysis—the assessment of readers' perceptual sets—as a way of more accurately modeling the dynamics of the reader-writer relationship.

PEDAGOGICAL PROBLEMS IN READER ANALYSIS

Four stumbling blocks account for the lack of new critical thinking about reader analysis:

1. Confusion over critical terminology.
2. Poor heuristics for assessing readers.
3. Oversimplified and therefore unintentionally deceptive cases.
4. Misleading message classification system.

Imprecise Terminology

One key in better understanding the writer-reader relationship is to make careful distinctions between the terms reader and audience. An audience is a collective, dynamic presence that provides a *speaker* with immediate feedback. On the other hand, a reader is a writer-created construct—a set of conceptions existing in the writer's consciousness—that manifests itself in the document the writer has created. Unlike an audience, a reader provides the writer with delayed feedback, if any at all.

Unfortunately, the terms audience and reader are used imprecisely within the business communications field. Numerous textbook authors (Golen, Pearce & Figgins, 1985; Lord & Dawe, 1983; Wells, 1981) fail to make clear, careful distinctions between the two terms. This failure to distinguish between reader and audience is not intended as a criticism of these texts. Instead, it indicates confusion, or at least uncertainty, about the precise meaning of these concepts. In fact, when explaining the importance of reader adaptation, many textbook authors discuss dynamics that more accurately reflect the *speaker-audience* rather than the *writer-reader* relationship. Clearly, our understanding of the writer-reader relationship is on shaky ground, ground that must be firmed up so as to give the business communications field the precise critical language necessary to develop an evolving body of scholarship on reader analysis.

Walter Ong (1975), in "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," cites several fundamental differences between audience and reader. Ong points out that the concept of audience is derived from the image of a speaker addressing a group of people who share a common interest in a particular topic and who have congregated for a clear, identifiable purpose. The audience's presence—its physicalness and the resulting nonverbal cues it transmits—creates a unique, evolving, ongoing relationship with the speaker. Thus, an audience is always a dynamic presence that is constantly providing the speaker with rich feedback that can help shape and adjust his or her presentation.

In contrast, writers communicate with readers: they do not address an audience. Unlike an audience, a reader by definition is absent or removed in both space and time from the writer's presence. This spatial and temporal distance results in a writer getting delayed feedback or often none at all. There is, therefore, a finality or closure to sending a written message. Once the message is transmitted, the writer is for the most part powerless to affect the reader's reaction to it.

This lack of feedback and the shift in power once the message is sent force writers to confront issues about readers different from those speakers face when preparing to address an audience. Writers must become self-conscious about:

1. Their own *fixed* concept of those absent readers—a concept that may be mistaken or to varying degrees accurate when the reader actually reads the communication;
2. The role the writer has asked the reader to play (and his or her willingness to play that role) as a result of the writer's fixed concept of the reader.

The writer's responses to these considerations are almost always based on speculation. Business writers can use observation, analysis, and experience to gauge their readers' attitudes, beliefs, and needs. But their judgments can be no more than tentative and speculative because reader attitudes and motivations are dynamic and unpredictable, particularly when the reader is responding to a sensitive topic. These speculations force writers to make organizational, stylistic, and content choices that result in their creating *in* their messages a context—a kind of role, invention, or fiction—they hope their readers will adopt or engage in. This context may require the reader to act as a straightforward businessperson, team player, unbiased analyst, understanding colleague, or to play other appropriate roles.

Of course there are no guarantees that the reader is going to interpret the language cues as the writer intended. The assumptions the writer has made about the reader may be invalid because of factors the writer could not anticipate or control. Furthermore, because a writer is operating without the benefit of reader feedback when composing the message, the writer—unlike a speaker—has no way of conducting a "reality-check," so to speak, to determine if the reader will respond favorably to the role created for him or her.

This concept of the reader entering a context or adopting a role that the writer has created through stylistic and organizational choices implies that the reader is not so much a presence external to the writer, as an audience is to the speaker, but is largely an *internal awareness* reflecting the *writer's* interpretation of corporate variables and the reader's psychological characteristics. The writer's ability to create within the message a context that the reader agrees to enter depends in part on the writer's self-consciousness of this process and his or her skill in manipulating style, organization, and content to create that intended context or role.

It is easy to understand why business communication researchers and textbook writers use "audience" and "readers" interchangeably. The term audience conjures a powerful, easy-to-visualize image whose psychological relationship to the sender of the message is relatively easy to write about and to teach. But as we have seen, the concept of reader is much more complex. By inadvertently substituting the relatively clear-cut image of audience for the complex dynamics of reader, the business communications field has sidestepped the knotty problems of the writer-reader relationship that cognitive psychologists and rhetoricians have struggled with for the last ten years.

Poor Heuristics for Assessing Readers

A second factor which sidetracks careful thinking about reader analysis is the business communication field's oversimplified heuristics to categorize readers. Most business communication textbooks suggest that writers can determine important characteristics of their readers by answering a series of demographic questions. By defining the age, educational level, job title, income level, and religious and political affiliations of the reader, the writer—most texts claim—has valuable information about the reader that should affect how the message is written. However, answers to these questions merely provide writers with a thumbnail sketch of the external, often superficial, characteristics of the reader. In fact, organizational behavior researchers who used this demographic model in the 1950s to measure leadership potential have abandoned it.

There are two reasons why this demographic approach is so appealing to business communication researchers:

1. The information is relatively easy to obtain, thus making reader analysis a simple task.

2. The technique seems valid because its methodology is derived from empirical research in social and industrial psychology.

But the simplicity of the demographic approach creates problems by implying that readers are easy-to-categorize types whose behavior is predictable. This stereotyping causes writers to ignore the complex personal and professional ideologies alluded to earlier that make each reader unique and thus difficult to know and to predict. If we examine this demographic approach from a rhetorical/business perspective, we find it does not answer fundamental business questions about the writer-reader relationship and the characteristics of the organizations and departments readers work in. For example, this approach fails to provide information about the following:

1. The relative power position between the writer and the reader.

2. The communication requirements that the corporation exerts on the reader and writer.

3. The business functions the writer and reader work in.

4. The type of perceptual and problem-solving mindset the reader has developed as a result of his or her business function.

5. The frequency of communication between the writer and the reader.

6. The types of messages they typically send.

7. The reader's reaction to past messages from the writer.

8. The timing of the message.

9. The relative sensitivity of the message.

Writers must ask themselves questions about these and other important factors to determine appropriate stylistic and organizational strategies.

Oversimplified Cases

The third reason why thinking about reader analysis has stalled is the field's current approach toward case analysis. Aside from management simulation games, the only method business and managerial communication instructors have for getting students to evaluate the characteristics of the reader is through careful analysis of cases. But the field needs to exploit the case approach much more fully. So far, most business communication cases fail to create realistic writing contexts in the way that, say, business policy and managerial strategy cases create complex business contexts for students to analyze.

Although several recent business communication texts, for example *Managerial Communication* (Micheli, Cespedes, Byker & Raymond, 1984) and *Organizational Writing* (Bielawski & Parks, 1987), include detailed, complex cases, most texts merely sketch a business problem without providing sufficient context or background to it. Often these problems are trivial, mundane, and would normally be handled by a phone call or a brief meeting rather than with a written message. Here is a typical case from a recently published and highly publicized business communications textbook (Bovee and Thill, 1986).

The 108-Year-Old Television Set:
Letter Gently Refusing An Unreasonable Request

The last time Barbara Cottrell picked up her ten-year-old television set from your repair shop, you warned her that the set was on its last cathodes. You tried to make a joke, which Ms. Cottrell apparently missed: "In human terms, this set is now 108 years old!" At that time, you put in a special order for some long-out-of-stock components, and tightened the horizontal hold so that Ms. Cottrell would no longer have the impression of watching a passing freight train. Now she tells you that, in the process, you damaged the sound control, leaving her unable to turn off the sound and just "watch the pictures." She expects you to fix the set for nothing, given your 90-day guarantee on repairs.

Your 90-day guarantee applies only to the components that you worked with, so you must refuse her claim. But you appreciate Ms. Cottrell as a customer, however difficult she may be at times. If you could sell her one of the fine new television sets you have in stock, you wouldn't have to spend any more time hunting up long-outmoded parts for her ancient television set.

Your task: Write Ms. Cottrell (Rural Route 3, Forest Hill, LA 71430) and explain in an acceptable way that you are unwilling to fix her television set for free. Explain why any repair of the old set would probably be a mistake, and encourage her to purchase a replacement set. You are the owner of Crestwood Television Repair.

Obviously, this case is trivial and can be handled more easily and effectively with a phone call. A number of other issues—Ms. Cottrell's age, her financial condition, her likes and dislikes, her past dealing with the store, her attitude toward the owner—could influence how one would choose to write to her. Furthermore, the tone of the case—"the set is on its last cathodes"—may cause students to believe neither the instructor nor the text's authors take the situation seriously. Finally, and most importantly, the case's content trivializes both the student and the course. How many business communication students enroll in college with the goal of someday owning a television shop? In short, this case does not challenge students or instructors who assign it to think carefully about the writer-reader relationship.

In addition to their failure to provide adequate detail, most business communication cases take a narrow marketing focus, which results in their addressing external rather than internal communication problems. Consequently, consumer-oriented problems proliferate, while practical management issues are seldom treated. These marketing-oriented cases call for students to write sales letters, collection series, credit refusals, and acknowledgments to consumers. But this is not the kind of writing that economists, personnel directors, accountants, financial managers, information specialists, and managers do. Most likely, it is not the kind of writing students expect to do when they leave the university. Even more importantly, these marketing-oriented cases do not cause students to address the crucial issues of reader analysis and adaptation that the typical businessperson faces daily.

For cases to get to the heart of the substantive writer-reader issues, the cases must contain descriptions of interpersonal tensions, profiles of key members of the organization, an outline of the organizational hierarchy, and an array of facts—some useful and some misleading—about the organizational environment and the communication problem. Furthermore, cases should create problems requiring students to write to readers in a variety of functional areas within an organization. Students need to realize that the perceptual and cognitive sets, specialized language, unique expectations, and organizational needs of professionals in manufacturing, finance, human resources management, accounting, and sales and marketing differ dramatically. Engineers in manufacturing, for example, may expect communications written in a passive, impersonal style. On the other hand, their associates in management may prefer forceful, relatively personal communications, while their colleagues in marketing may expect a lively, colorful style.

Cases also need to create an organizational hierarchy complete with a variety of communication channels. Accurately analyzing readers in different power positions and adjusting organization and style to complement that reader's position in the organization is an essential skill for students to master if they are to be successful in any corporation. Also, cases must treat "communication channel" problems to make students aware of the importance of reporting to their superiors as well as the repercussions of making end-runs to someone outside their channel.

Finally, most entry-level employees find themselves writing communications for their superiors' signatures. These employees need to consider two readers: the person who is going to sign the communication and the ultimate reader of the message. Consequently, students need to be confronted with cases that force them to simultaneously keep in mind two sets of expectations: those of their superior whose persona they are expected to assume and those of the reader who will ultimately act on the communication.

Classification of Messages

Business messages have traditionally been classified by their content—sales, credit, acknowledgement, goodwill, and so on. This approach, unfortunately, suggests that content primarily affects the reader's reaction to the message; in other words, the reader functions largely as a cipher for what the message says. Furthermore, this classification system is too reductive because of its underlying assumption that every message can be neatly labelled and categorized as being of one particular type.

A more useful way of classifying message content is to assess its impact from the reader's viewpoint. From this perspective, the key issue is not the content per se but the degree of emotional response the memo elicits from the reader. Messages that create little or no emotional response are labelled nonsensitive; those that generate significant emotional response are labelled sensitive. Predicting reader emotional response, though, can be extremely difficult because of the complex personal and professional factors that can color reader reaction to even the most innocuous communication. A brief examination of how readers may respond to both classifications of messages will help clarify their respective meanings.

Nonsensitive Messages

A nonsensitive message merely provides information to the reader. Since this information generally elicits little emotional response, the reader simply responds to or stores the information. Most nonsensitive messages fall within the traditional classification system of informative messages, though some do have persuasion as a secondary function. Such messages comprise the bulk of business correspondence.

Because nonsensitive messages elicit minimal emotional response from the reader, writers can safely assume readers are willing to adopt a traditional businessperson role when they receive the message. In other words, readers expect writers to present information in a succinct, straightforward manner so the readers can do their jobs quickly and efficiently. The inability (because of poor organization, unclear logic, unreadable language, etc.) to create this role or context for readers calls attention to the inadequacies of writers and makes them an obtrusive factor in the communication.

Sensitive Messages

Sensitive messages elicit emotional and psychological reactions that are often difficult for writers to anticipate. Also, writers may have trouble gauging whether reader reaction will be positive or negative because of the effects that the message's timing, the reader's mood, and his or her professional and personal preoccupations and biases have on the reader's interpretation of message content. Consequently, when composing sensitive messages, writers often are unable to predict with a high degree of certainty which role the reader will assume when reading the message.

Because sensitive messages may trigger emotional reactions, readers may shed the relatively predictable role of logical businessperson. Instead, they may react like a wounded adversary, betrayed colleague, or an unappreciated employee. Furthermore, reader reaction to sensitive messages is heavily based on an important extrinsic factor—the writer's credibility. Readers react far differently to sensitive messages from someone whom they personally or professionally trust or from someone whose personality and behavior style they admire than from a writer whom they don't know or have had little personal or professional contact with.

The current classification of business messages implies that by following a step-by-step procedure (the buffer-reasons-purpose format) a writer can compose an ideal sensitive message that will placate any reader. Such an implication is misleading; it is impossible for a writer to predict the myriad psychological factors that affect a reader. What texts and instructors can do is acknowledge these complex reader factors, offer writers the gamut of organizational and stylistic options, and then assess the risks and benefits of using them. This tactic does not preclude the option of a buffer-reasons-purpose format coupled with an impersonal style but clearly signals to writers that no one approach is infallible, that it always works in a given situation.

This section has discussed fundamental problems in business communications pedagogy and research that have caused a stagnant, simplified view of the writer-reader relationship. These comments about the need for careful distinction between reader and audience, better heuristics for assessing readers, judicious use of cases, and a more realistic message classification system are merely a starting point. Certainly other factors exist which help explain why critical thinking about reader analysis has stalled.

The next section explores a relatively new area of concern—the reader's perceptual set. Research in this area is trying to improve understanding of the writer-reader relationship and perhaps rejuvenate interest in reader analysis.

PERCEPTUAL SETS

The term *perceptual set* was originally used by cognitive psychologists to describe the unconscious distortion that people create when what they perceive is at odds with the way they customarily organize experience. In essence, people's psychological and environmental conditioning causes them to perceive stimuli in a way that conforms to the image of the world they have worked hard to create (Hanna & Wilson, 1984; Szilagyi & Wallace, 1980). We, however, intend to use perceptual sets not in this pejorative sense but merely as a term to describe a structure of integrated personal and professional experiences that shape a businessperson's perception of or reaction to language, people, and problems.

Readers, of course, have differing perceptual sets that writers must consider and adapt to. Yet writers must realize there may be impossible-to-anticipate reader factors at play—psychological triggers—that may cause readers to react irrationally. These triggers extend not only to how a reader feels about a particular business topic but also how a reader reacts to a specific person, a particular job, a business function, a management style, and a communication channel. For instance, a casual, informal written comment about one's secretary as "my girl" (a semantic issue) may raise a red flag in the eyes of a hard-driving, twenty-eight-year-old female executive. But the same phrase may be perceived as folksy, homespun, and relatively innocent to a sixty-four-year-old male corporate executive.

Writers can become aware of some of a reader's psychological triggers, but many writers work in large bureaucracies where there is little contact with people to whom they often write. Furthermore, what triggers an emotional reaction to a communication may vary from day to day and from situation to situation. Even if a writer is relatively familiar with the reader, he or she may not be able to anticipate what will trigger psychological responses to a given communication.

There are, however, aspects of perceptual sets that writers can get a handle on. Three in particular deserve mention because of the recent attention they have received within the business community and within the field of organizational communication. They are: corporate image and culture, corporate sub-culture, and position and power.

Corporate Image and Culture

Corporate image and culture have received much attention recently because of the research of Deal and Kennedy (1982); Ouchi (1981); Schein (1985); Peters and Waterman (1982); and Peters and Allen (1985). Although these researchers have covered the broad spectrum of corporate image and culture, they have not tried to apply its importance to written messages. Their remarks about written communications have been limited to several comments about Procter and Gamble's insistence on one-page memos.

However, everyone with some business savvy knows that corporate culture significantly affects how messages are read and written. Each organization creates a unique social and language environment that has its own articulated or merely implied rules and regulations that affect how people communicate within the organization. Consequently, as Freed and Broadhead mention, every manager composing a message has his or her writing strategies restricted or determined by the characteristics of previous messages within that organization and by the image the organization strives to project.

For example, some companies, like DEC, strive to project a no-holds-barred, aggressive image. Consequently, a staff member trying to convince a superior to support a new software package may appear doubtful and not fully behind the proposal if the subordinate uses an indirect pattern of organization, abstract language, and many qualifiers and weasel words. The culture of the organization dictates that, even if opposition is expected, a subordinate should write a proposal in a forceful, direct manner. In short, readers in the organization are only willing to adopt the role of a straightforward, no-nonsense businessperson, even if that role means bruising their colleagues' egos.

On the other hand, some organizations have created environments in which forcefulness is perceived as rudeness and aggressiveness is seen as disruptive to the harmony of the organization. In such an environment, a controversial proposal, such as the new software system mentioned earlier, would have to be written in tentative, carefully measured language and organized indirectly rather than directly. If the writer drafted a direct, forceful proposal, readers may reject the idea merely because the writer seems too egotistical or sure of himself or herself, or because the proposal violated the communication norms of the organization.

Language customs that help define corporate culture even go beyond the issue of organization and writing style to affect some of the very basics of business writing such as usage, grammar, and message format. Staid, conservative companies may require all interoffice correspondence to be formally typed with appropriate headings, correct grammar, and exact usage. Other companies expect such formality in their interoffice memos but not in their electronic mail, which they regard as more casual. And a third group of companies may permit extreme casualness in interoffice memos, with readers showing little or no concern about message format and correct grammar. In other words, the different corporate cultures of IBM, DEC, and Apple extend even to the most basic written communication concerns.

The written communication norms that reflect a corporation's culture neither stem from individual readers nor can they be determined by analyzing a reader's attitudes or needs; they are the result of tradition and practice. In fact, the norms are often not formally codified and cannot be clearly articulated by long-standing members of the organization. These norms have become woven into the fabric of the organization and exist within the documents the organization views as being effective. Those who adhere to those norms and eventually internalize them are rewarded by being admitted to the organizational community; those who are unaware of them or reject them remain outsiders. Consequently, writers need to be conscious of the organizational culture and the resulting language customs that define acceptable communications.

Corporate Subcultures

To complicate matters further, corporations not only have their own cultures but also various subcultures that affect reader reaction. As mentioned earlier, each functional area in a corporation—marketing, manufacturing, finance, accounting, and personnel—differs from the others in general mindsets, beliefs of how to achieve corporate success, prejudices about the relative worth of each functional area, and expectations about how employees in those areas should communicate. Indeed, the issue is even more complicated. Each subcultural group not only feels comfortable with and prefers the language customs of its group but also has a tendency to be suspicious of and uncomfortable with the language customs of other groups. Just as a professor in social work may not relish a committee assignment with a professor in business, believing business professors talk only about profits and numbers, not about important human concerns, similarly in the business world marketers may be uncomfortable communicating with accountants, believing that accountants care only about numbers and legal protection.

People working in a particular function, therefore, usually have fewer cultural problems communicating within their own functions. Trouble can occur when people in one functional area communicate with employees in other functions. Business students, therefore, need to be aware that they must expect and be prepared to anticipate reader problems when they write documents to be read by people whose general business mindset and language customs are markedly different from their own. Both teachers and researchers in business communications need to discuss the significant difference in language customs among functional areas and the relative degree of trust or suspicion writers may meet when operating in channels outside their own function.

Position and Power

Another factor that instructors and researchers of reader analysis must assess is the relative power position between the writer and reader. Most business communication texts fail to make any reference whatever to a corporate chart and the implicit power relationships in the organizational hierarchy that the chart maps. The few that do allude to organizational hierarchy never discuss in detail how the power structure establishes the patterns of communication and the flow of information in the organization, let alone ways to adapt one's writing to the reader's position on the chart. Experienced businesspeople know, as French and Raven (1959) documented, that their position in the organization—the amount of "legitimate," "coercive," "reward," "referent," and "expert" power they have—significantly affects how they organize and write messages.

We can apply the effect of power and position to the business communication field's traditional advice about negative messages. Brent, for example, makes some interesting observations about when and how to use an indirect structure. But once other complicating factors are added to the picture, such as the direction of the communication, the amount of resources and information the reader has access to, and the decision-making power of the reader, it is clear that his comments need to be refined and reconsidered. A negative message from a first-line manager to a superior may be organized quite differently from a negative message the line manager sends to clerical staff members. The news to the superior may need to be handled diplomatically, passively, and perhaps even with a buffer-reasons-negative news pattern of organization. On the other hand, negative news sent downward may need to be stated directly so that the superior will be seen as exercising his or her power.

The impact of position and power at mid and upper levels of an organization can cause complex problems of reader analysis. When mid-level managers send negative messages upward in an indirect manner, they may be perceived by their superiors as tricky, sly, or even manipulative. Moreover, when these same managers send negative messages downward in a direct fashion they may be seen as rude, uncaring, or unfeeling by their subordinates who are professionals like themselves. Negative news is not the only type of message affected by position and power. Persuasive and informative messages may be organized differently depending where the writer and reader are located on the corporate chart.

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing and adapting to readers is a process far more complex than business communication texts and articles lead one to believe. The confusion about the exact meaning of the terms reader and audience and about the similarities and differences between these terms has created a foggy theoretical base upon which clear instruction, not to mention research about reader analysis, is difficult. Consequently, the claim that business communication classes teach students to write to real readers is undoubtedly an overstatement. The sketchy cases found in most texts, the marketing orientation of these cases, and the poor heuristics offered for teaching students to thoroughly analyze readers virtually force students to write for an ideal reader, or worse yet, instructors.

Further complicating the study of reader analysis is the extensive use of checklists in many business communication texts. These checklists, particularly those for sensitive messages, imply that by following a set procedure a writer will be able to meet the needs of the reader. Such checklists deny the impact that the individual reader's consciousness—his or her perceptual set—has on interpreting a message, and they ignore the role of the corporation's and functional area's culture and resulting language customs in shaping the reader's perception of a given communication situation. Such an approach, as we have tried to point out, oversimplifies complex factors involved in reader analysis.

What help, then, can business communication instructors give writers who will eventually face delicate, hard-to-handle communication problems? First, and most importantly, these instructors can offer an honest assessment of the complex factors that can affect the reader's response to a message. Suggestions or implications that reader analysis is an easy job soluble by a set formula or by merely determining a reader's demographic characteristics significantly distort the reality of the writer-reader relationship. Second, business communication instructors can offer students useful advice about the multifaceted situational variables they will need to consider when analyzing readers. Factors such as the corporate and departmental environment the reader operates within, the relative power position between the writer and reader, the timing of the message, the reader's perceptual set, and many others can be discussed within a wide range of managerial situations. Finally, business communication instructors should turn their classes into practice fields that imitate the diverse aspects of the actual business world. Through the use of complex, management-oriented cases, students can develop the analytical skills they need to isolate and assess multidimensional communication problems as well as learn the traditional business communication strategies that will enable them to compose effective written messages that solve those problems.

By implementing these suggestions, business communication instructors will sacrifice some of the closure and certainty that have come to characterize their classes and their field's texts. But at the same time, these instructors will introduce students to the kind of thinking about communication problems that students must master if they are to communicate effectively in the business world. Furthermore, through this process, students will begin to see that reader analysis, like management, is a complex, open-ended, problem-solving process that never can be mastered but can be managed more intelligently.

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