




## The Communication Strategy Framework Planning How to Communicate Clearly

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Nowadays, we communicate with others in many different ways.

For example, we can get our message across face-to-face, over the phone, by email or IM, or by video call or VoIP. We can also communicate with written reports, workshops, webinars, advertisements, presentations, and speeches.

However, to get the best results from our communications, we need to have planned them effectively. Without careful thought and consideration we can easily confuse our audience or fail to get our message across. This can undermine our credibility and effectiveness.

In this article, we'll look at the Communication Strategy Framework, a simple tool that you can use to organize your messages, remove possible communication barriers, and get the results you want.

### About the Model

Michael and Sandra Rouse developed the Communication Strategy Framework, and published it in their 2002 book, "**Business Communications: A Cultural and Strategic Approach.**"

The framework guides you through the process of planning and organizing your messages, so that you can avoid communication barriers, increase understanding, and get the response you want from your audience.

The Communication Strategy Framework consists of four elements that you should consider carefully as you organize and craft your message:

1. Communicator strategy.
2. Audience strategy.
3. Channel strategy.
4. Message strategy.

From "Business Communications: A Cultural and Strategic Approach" (pages 76-77) by Michael J. Rouse and Sandra Rouse. © 2002. Used with permission of Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd.

You can use the framework to plan many different types of communications, such as phone calls, reports, emails, and presentations.

### Using the Framework

To use the Communication Strategy Framework, think carefully about each of the elements below. You can also download our **worksheet** to help with your planning.

## 1. Communicator Strategy

First, you need to think about yourself as the "communicator," or the sender of the message. Consider these questions:

- Why are you communicating this message?
- What results do you want to achieve?
- What is your **reputation** with your audience members, and how much **credibility** do you have? And how should you adjust your message to take account of this?
- Does your audience **trust** you? If not, how could you build trust in your message?
- Do you share the same culture and background as your audience? (If not, brush up on your **cross-cultural communication skills**, and think about how you can ensure that others understand you easily.)

Consider the objective of your communication carefully, as this will determine the best approach to take with the next three elements of the framework. Write a **simple** but straightforward statement that defines the objective or purpose of your communication. (If you are delivering a training session, see our article on the **ABCD Learning Objectives Model** – this will help you refine your objectives statement even further.)

## 2. Audience Strategy

Next, think about your audience. When you consider the wants, needs, education, and skill levels of your audience members, you can craft a message that matches their interests, expectations, and understanding.

Consider these questions:

- Who is your audience?
- Are there identifiable sub-groups within it, with differing needs?
- What do you know about this person or group?
- What do they know about you?
- What do they know about this subject?
- How will you motivate them?

In some cases, you'll be very familiar with your audience: for example, when you write an email to your boss or colleagues. In other cases, you might not know your audience, such as when you give a presentation to a large group of prospective clients. Write down what you do know about them, and then think about how you can find out more.

Next, think about the different groups within your audience. Use our article on **market**

**segmentation** to think about how you can address their differing needs.

Consider what your audience members need from you, and how they will benefit from your communication.

### 3. Message Strategy

Here, you need to think about the style, tone, and structure of your message. Consider these questions:

- Is your purpose to persuade, entertain, consult, or inform? What style and tone will best fit your purpose?
- Does your message need to be formal or informal, or a subtle mix of both? Consider your audience carefully to answer this question.

When you think about your message, you also need to consider your audience's likely reaction. Do you think your audience will agree with what you say? And are your audience members busy? If so, you might want to take a direct approach. To do this, communicate your main idea upfront, and back it up with supporting arguments or evidence.

Are your audience members likely to disagree with what you have to say? And do they have time to listen to, or read, a longer communication? If so, you might want to take a less direct approach with your message. Include your supporting arguments first, followed by your main point or purpose.

As you craft your message, think about how you can let your audience members know why they should keep reading, and make sure that you finish with a clear, motivating call to action.

If you need to influence your audience in some way, use **Yukl and Tracey's positive influencers** to choose the best approach to use, and use **Monroe's motivated sequence** to craft an effective message. If you want to draft a written communication, brush up on your **writing skills**. And, when you need to give a presentation, consider using **business storytelling** to inspire and motivate your audience.

### 4. Channel Strategy

In the final element of the framework, you focus on choosing the most effective communication channel to get your message across.

Consider these questions:

- What channel is most appropriate to use with your audience and message?
- Do you need to have a record of this communication? (If so, an email can be a better choice than a phone call.)
- Is cost or time a consideration?
- Is culture a factor in this situation? Remember that people in some cultures prefer face-to-face communication, while others will favor using email.

Keep in mind that the channel you choose can directly affect how well your audience understands your message. If your message is complex, or if others might misunderstand it, choose a channel that allows you to see whether people have grasped the message, and, if necessary, take corrective action.

Our articles on **writing effective emails**, **delivering great presentations**, and **holding effective meetings** have specific strategies that you can follow to make best use of these communication channels.

### **Tip:**

Use the **7 Cs of Communication** to ensure that your message is clear, concise, well-constructed, and error-free.

### **Key Points**

Michael and Sandra Rouse developed the Communication Strategy Framework and published it in their 2002 book, "Business Communications: A Cultural and Strategic Approach." The framework guides you through the process of planning and organizing your communications, so that you can prepare clear and effective letters, emails, presentations, and speeches.

The framework consists of four elements:

1. Communicator strategy.
2. Audience strategy.
3. Channel strategy.
4. Message strategy.

To use the framework, consider each element carefully as you plan your message.

### **Download Worksheet**

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