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Electronic and hard copy files

A well-organised filing system is usually one of the easiest sources of information to find and access. When you are searching for information in a filing system, be aware that the material you are seeking may be in more than one file. Don't limit your search to the first appropriate file you come across.

Also, not all documents can be accessed freely. Some documents, such as personnel files, are kept in locked storage because their content is confidential. You may need to ask permission to access these files, or someone else may need to access them for you.



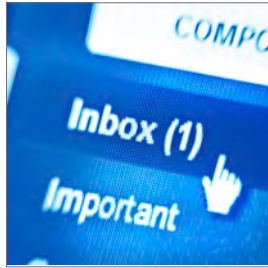
External sources of information

You can obtain information from several sources that are external to your organisation. As you become more familiar with the range of tasks in your office, you will learn what kind of information you are most likely to need to complete specific tasks quickly and efficiently. Some examples are shown below.

Internet

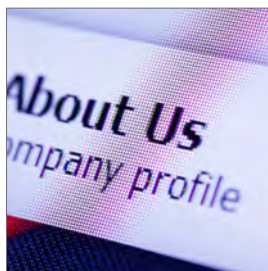
The internet gives you access to the world wide web. It's like a huge electronic library that contains all sorts of data from all over the world. You need to have a clear idea of what you are looking for before you start searching for information. It contains a vast amount of information so it is easy to waste time going through it.

Email



Email (electronic mail) has changed the way people work. Many organisations prefer their staff to use email to communicate internally because electronic files can be attached to an email message and sent instantly, which is cheaper than printing and carrying the information.

Intranet



An intranet is a network that is used to store and provide information within an organisation. It is like the internet, but only people within the organisation have access. Many organisations have their own intranet to store information such as forms, dates for meetings and details on personal and social events. If you need to communicate with everyone in the organisation, the intranet may be an excellent choice.

The main disadvantage of an intranet is that you cannot be sure the people who need to read your message have actually read it. There is no simple way of checking so important information may not get passed on at the right time. If your message is important, you may need to send an email to everyone to point them to the intranet, or perhaps notify them another way.

Fax (facsimilies)



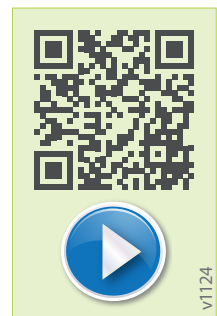
Facsimile means 'made the same'. 'Fax' is the abbreviation of facsimile. Many organisations still use fax machines to send printed copies of information. However, because it is increasingly easy to scan a document and attach it to an email, faxes are less commonly used than they once were. Information can be transmitted from the fax machine or directly from your computer, if your computer is connected to the fax machine.

Answer questions in a timely way

Requests for information can be either face-to-face or over the telephone. You will be able to answer some requests directly. Some you will not. Either way, remember to listen carefully. It is important to clarify what you have heard so that you know what type of information is required.

You will be able to answer some requests immediately; others may need more time while you gather information. If the inquiry is for routine information, try to answer promptly. If you can help your visitor or caller quickly and efficiently, they will have a good feeling about you and your organisation.

If an inquiry is not simple, routine or easy to answer, it may take a little longer to collect the information or there may be another way to answer the question.



Use appropriate language

To communicate well with another person, you need to match your language with their understanding. This is true of both formal and informal conversations in the workplace, at home and in the wider community.

Think about how you talk to a young child. Most children don't understand complicated words, so you change the way you talk and choose words that you think the child will understand. You use appropriate language so that you can communicate with the child.

It should be similar at work. Before you talk to somebody, you need to think about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Using appropriate language will help the other person better understand what you are trying to say. This is the same whether you are talking to a colleague, a visitor to the organisation or somebody on the telephone.

Here are some points to be aware of.

Technical jargon

Many workplaces use words that are particular to their industry. Almost every job has its own set of special words and ways of describing things. This is called 'jargon' and technical words are called 'technical jargon'. Before you talk to somebody, you need to think about the most appropriate terminology to use. It may be best to avoid jargon when speaking to someone from outside your workplace.

Accents and languages

To communicate well you need to consider the individual differences of other people. This may mean adjusting the way you speak. For example, if you are speaking to someone whose first language is not English, you may need to speak a little more slowly and clearly. Keep your voice at its normal volume though. Shouting does not help people understand English better.

Hearing problems

If you are communicating with someone who has a hearing impairment, you may need to adjust your way of speaking. Speak clearly and be patient. Make sure you understand what they want, then check they have understood what you have said.

Discrimination

You should always use non-discriminatory or inclusive language in the workplace. This means that what you say should include everyone regardless of sex, status, race or abilities.

For example, if you are giving information about parental leave, it includes maternity (mother) and paternity (father) leave. Discriminatory language leaves people out. For example, you should not address letters to 'Sir' or 'Mr' when you don't know whether the person is a man or a woman.

Example: prepare to call

Ellen needs to call a courier to deliver a parcel for her supervisor. Her company generally uses Express Couriers and she has found the number in the office directory. She has checked, with her supervisor, what time the parcel will be ready for pickup and the address it is going to.

Before she makes the call, Ellen has written down the information so she can give the courier company all the necessary details.

- Express Couriers: 6224 8651
- Parcel ready for pickup at 1.30 pm today.
- Parcel to be picked up from Positive Printers, Level 3, 102 Elizabeth Street, Hobart.
- Parcel to be delivered to: Student Records Department, University of Tasmania, Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay.



1D

Seek input to develop and refine new ideas

Always look for new or better ways to do your work. Developing and refining your ideas is very important. One of the best ways to do this is to ask for feedback or advice from colleagues and customers. You can also look for learning opportunities, such as seminars, information sessions and further training. Talking about your ideas with your colleagues also helps.



Ask for feedback

Seeking feedback about the way you work is always a good idea. Remember, feedback is not a negative thing, even if some of the comments are not what you want to hear. Feedback is an excellent way to find out how you are going. Did you gather the correct information? Did you pass it on appropriately? Have your speaking and listening skills improved? Seeking feedback is a great opportunity to think about how you can improve the way you work.

Feedback can be gathered from several different sources. These may be internal (for example, your supervisor, colleagues, team-mates) or external (for example, suppliers or customers). It can be verbal, such as comments, tips and helpful suggestions discussed while you are on the job. Or it can be written, such as notes, memos or brief reports explaining where to make changes and improvements.

Here are some sources of feedback.

Policies and procedures

Policies and procedures are ‘rules’ that provide guidelines for what is expected and accepted in the workplace. Policies and procedures are put in place for many different reasons and relate to various aspects of the organisation, such as customer service, profitability, quality assurance, ethics, defined resources, business and performance plans, sales targets, productivity, marketing, staff and customer safety, legal requirements and government regulations.

Every organisation has particular ways of doing things. An important part of being an employee is to learn how the workplace functions. Policies and procedures help employees by explaining exactly what is required in particular situations. To work safely and effectively, you need to understand the reasons behind these guidelines.

Some organisations do not have formal policies and procedures in place. Instead, employees learn what is expected by watching what happens and asking for feedback and advice from supervisors and others.



Codes of ethics

Some industries and organisations have a code of ethics that employees are expected to follow. These codes highlight areas such as honesty, privacy, integrity and respect. A code of ethics also lets customers know that the organisation expects to deal fairly with them. For example, the telecommunications industry has a strict code of ethics for people in call centres. The code includes instructions about what hours they can call people and how a contract for purchasing something must be explained to a customer.

Concise writing

Concise writing uses the least amount of words possible to relay information. To write concisely, you need to explain exactly what is meant, while avoiding repetition or boring the reader with unnecessary information. Include specific details and definite statements. Think carefully about what needs to be communicated. Only include information that is relevant to the situation and the receiver. Here are some examples of non-concise and concise writing.

Non-concise

Ms Byrne was forced to cancel her meeting this morning, due to food poisoning she contracted from a seafood dinner she ate last night at the restaurant adjacent to the train station.

Concise

Ms Byrne cancelled her meeting this morning because of illness.

Courteous writing

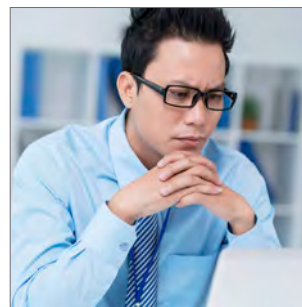
Courteous writing is polite and respectful. This means that you show respect for the reader as a person. It involves being tactful and making sure your writing doesn't offend your reader.

Avoid words and phrases that might provoke a negative response, such as 'You said that ...', 'You claimed that ...' or 'You have failed to ...'. Try to be positive, not negative. Remember that you need to encourage your reader's goodwill, even if the current situation makes it difficult. Compare the courteous and discourteous snippets below – both are from a letter to a customer.



Courteous writing

Thank you for your letter of 17 April 2014. If you post the faulty pair of sandals to us we will be happy to forward a replacement pair to you by return post.



Discourteous writing

We have received your letter of 17 April 2014. You claim that the sandals you bought are faulty. However, you failed to post them to us, so we cannot verify your claim.

Write emails (electronic mail)

How you receive, forward and send an email depends on the mail software you are using. It is important to be familiar with the way your particular system works.

Email messages at work need to be written in clear, plain English, using businesslike language – just like other routine correspondence. A common mistake is to write and send an email without checking it. However, errors in email messages are just as serious as those in other documents.

People tend to write brief email messages using a few words that sometimes don't even make a complete sentence. For example, 'Tied up Friday. Best day Wednesday. See you then'. This may be appropriate when communicating with a colleague or a friend, but it is not appropriate when sending information to a customer or client.

Similar to faxes, memos or letters, you can address your email message to one or more people. Here is some information about what to enter into different fields in your email.

To

The To... field is where you insert the address of the person or people you wish to send your message to

Cc

The Cc... field is where you insert the addresses of one or more people you want to send copies of the message to. Cc is short for 'carbon copy'. Before you Cc any email, think carefully about whether the other recipients really need it. People in workplaces often complain they are receiving Cc messages unnecessarily. Be selective and consider your colleagues' or manager's work schedules.

Bcc

Some email software also includes Bcc, which is short for 'blind carbon copy'. This means you can send a copy of the message to someone (by typing their address in the Bcc field) without the other recipients knowing.

Follow policies and procedures

Some workplaces have specific policies and procedures for passing on written information. Some large organisations have internal, paper-based mail systems, where written information is collected and distributed at set times throughout the day. There may also be specific times for collecting messages to be sent externally.

Other procedures might include telephone messages being placed in people's individual in-trays. Written information on paper might need to be placed in people's in-trays on their desks, or in their pigeonholes or mailboxes. There may also be a central collection point in each area or department.

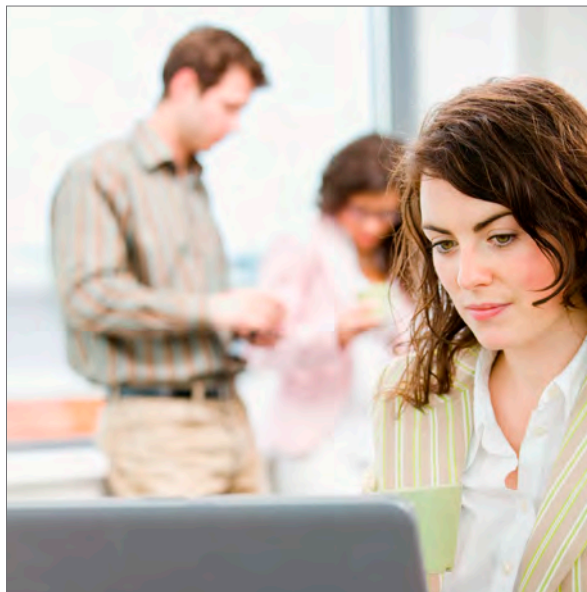
External messages are usually passed on by:

- postal services
- courier services
- hand delivery.

Pass on messages electronically

Most internal and external messages are passed on electronically by email, using attachments if they are needed. Some organisations have computer software that allows documents to be faxed directly from your computer; others scan hard-copy documents like diagrams, charts and photographs as PDFs (Portable Document Files). Some workplaces have an internal electronic mail system, or an intranet, where written information is distributed. In some organisations, large files are sent via the internet using FTP (File Transfer Protocol). Other groups of organisations set up web-based extranets where they can share information without the general public gaining access.

It is important to know what is used in your workplace so that you can pass on your written messages in the most efficient way.



Forms in the workplace

Many different forms are used in workplaces. You need to know where these forms are kept, what they are used for and how to fill them out correctly. Here is a summary of some commonly used workplace forms.

Annual leave



Annual leave forms will generally be straightforward to fill out. They may be combined with other leave forms, such as sick leave or study leave, and require the person completing the form to specify which type of leave they are applying for. These forms ask for dates and total amount of leave taken. They often have a space for the manager's approval. As employees are only entitled to a certain amount of leave per year, leave forms allow this to be calculated and an official record kept.

Petty cash



Petty cash forms are essential to maintain a record of small financial transactions. Sometimes employees need to pay for a work expense out of their own money. It may be milk for the tea room or a taxi to a meeting. To ensure they are reimbursed for the expense, a petty cash form is completed. This usually asks for details of the purchase and a receipt.

Stationery order



Stationery order forms may be for an internal department via a centralised order system, or from an external supplier. They generally have a list of available items and the employee specifies the quantity required. They may also have a space for product codes and prices or totals.

Example: stationery order form

Habeas Manufacturing		
Stationery order form		
Please indicate below which stationery items you would like to order. For more information, contact Cecelia Green at: cgreen@bowdin.edu.au		
*Person requesting order:	Joe Zazos	
*Email:	joez@company.com.au	
*Telephone number:	9878 6012	
*Fax number:	8979 6112	
*Account to be charged:	123-456	
*Ship to (Name, Department, Building, Room #):	Joe Zazos, Shipping Dept, Room 402, Building A, 456 Amos Blvd	
* Required fields		
	Product	Quantity
	Letterhead – Department	___ x 500 sheets
	Letterhead – Personalised	___ x 500 sheets
	#10 Regular Envelope	___ x 500 envelopes
	#10 Window Envelope	___ x 500 envelopes
	#10 White Window Envelope	___ x 500 envelopes
	#9 White Window Envelope	___ x 500 envelopes
	#9 White Regular Envelope	___ x 500 envelopes
	#10 White Regular Envelope	___ x 500 envelopes

Practice task 9

Marco has been working at Ontira Recording Studios as an administration assistant and bookings coordinator for 12 months. As part of his annual performance review with his manager, they discuss what training Marco needs to develop his skills. They decide that Advanced Access Database training will allow him to take on additional responsibilities, as well as perform his current role more efficiently.

Complete this form for Marco to formally apply for the course using the information supplied.

Ontira Human Resources			
Application form to attend a course or conference			
Staff ID:		Surname:	
Other names:			
Name of course or conference:			
Provider:			
Address:			
Date(s):			
Number of hours attendance:			
What I hope to achieve for attending:			
Costs (excluding GST)			
Course/conference fees:		Airmiles:	
Accommodation and expenses:		Total:	
Minus other funding applied for/granted:			
Total applied for:			
Signature of applicant:			
Supported by –			
Supervisor:		Date:	
Approved by:		Date:	

Topic 3

Communicate in a way that responds positively to individual differences

In the workplace, you work with people from a range of backgrounds. To work effectively with all of your colleagues, customers and providers, you need to be able to identify and understand the way their backgrounds influence how they communicate and interact with others.

Cultural background and language skills are two of the individual factors that affect how well you can communicate with others. To be sure you are treating other people with respect, you need to consider and value these factors when you are communicating.

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Value all individuals and treat them with respect, courtesy and sensitivity
- 3B Consider cultural differences when communicating
- 3C Communicate to build positive relationships
- 3D Make efforts to use basic strategies to overcome language barriers
- 3E Ensure behaviour is consistent with requirements, guidelines and protocols

Verbal communication

The way we communicate verbally is influenced by our culture. It may be the words we use, our tone, or how formal or informal our language is. In French, for example, there are two different words meaning 'you'. Many languages have different ways of speaking between men and women, to children and among employees. English has less 'inbuilt formality' so the close links between culture, language and communication sometimes cause problems.

When you know that words and actions mean different things in different cultures, you can choose your words and actions carefully to reduce the risk of offending or upsetting others. No-one is expected to understand the details of cultures across the world, but you need to be aware of people's reactions when you communicate. Reactions can signal when your listener is hearing a different message from the one you are trying to give.



3C

Communicate to build positive relationships

You spend a lot of time at work so you want your time in the workplace to be enjoyable. You want as little stress as possible. You also want to do your job well so that you are contributing to the achievements of the organisation. To make these things possible, you need to build and maintain positive relationships with your colleagues and managers. Positive relationships lead to a happy and effective workplace.

Positive relationships usually start with a shared understanding of each other's roles. When you know the value of each other's jobs, you can accept others as they accept you. You can give and receive help and support when you need it because everyone is valued and respected. Like everyone you work with, you can offer your opinions and be listened to.



Some of the best features of a positive relationship include:

- two-way communication
- honesty
- feedback
- acceptance
- support
- respect
- trust.

Language barriers

Recognising the way language can become a barrier to effective communication takes time. You may think you have made a simple request. You may be wondering why you have not received an instant response. This can be frustrating if you don't understand what is going through your colleague's head. It may be frustrating and frightening for them too.

Firstly, they need to ensure they have understood correctly. Secondly, they know you are waiting. Finally, they want you to believe they are quick and capable workers. Sometimes, simple tasks become complicated when you need to translate across languages and cultures.



3E**Ensure behaviour is consistent with requirements, guidelines and protocols**

The way we behave and communicate with others in the workplace is guided by legislative requirements. Legislative requirements are laws that the government (at state and federal levels) have put in place for the wellbeing of the community.

In addition to legislation, there may be other documents in your organisation that govern behaviour. Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (sometimes called EBAs) are a set of conditions that employees and their union representatives have negotiated with management. Both legislative requirements and workplace or industry guidelines, together with the social protocols discussed in the previous sections, aim to ensure appropriate standards of behaviour are maintained in the workplace.



Example: not following social protocols

Joe was late for a meeting, interrupting the person who was speaking. When he entered the meeting he quickly took a seat and began to discuss the recent success of a project he had been working on with his team. Joe neglected to mention the other team members' contributions, and only described his work on the project.

After the meeting, Mary expressed concern about Joe's professionalism to another attendee, Rajiid, saying she felt he had let the team down. Finally, Rajiid told Mary, 'I'm not particularly happy with him either. He betrayed a confidence by letting others know about a personal issue I'm having at home'.

Joe has neglected social protocols by:

- failing to be courteous and punctual
- failing to be professional with co-workers
- not acknowledging the contribution of others
- betraying the confidence of a colleague.

Joe should have:

- been on time for the meeting
- not interrupted others while they were speaking
- acknowledged the contribution of his co-workers on the project he was discussing
- not betrayed Rajiid's confidence by speaking about his personal business with others.



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