Communicate as a Professional

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Communicate as a Professional is largely based on a Dutch communication textbook: Steehouder, M., Jansen, C., Van Gulik, L., Mulder, J., Van der Pool, E., & Zeijl, W. (2016). *Leren communiceren* [Learning how to communicate] (7th, rev. ed.). First published in the Netherlands by © Noordhoff Uitgevers B.V., Groningen/Utrecht, The Netherlands

Foreword

Students across a wide range of programs in international higher education are all preparing themselves for a career in a particular professional field. Learning how to communicate as a professional is an essential part of that preparation. No matter how diverse the professional situations in which graduates are employed, they are always expected to behave professionally in their communication—both within their own organization and beyond.

In order to be able to carry out their communication tasks adequately, professionals must not only possess a large repertoire of knowledge and skills, they also need to be able to deploy that repertoire effectively and appropriately in their communication. They must make the right choices on what best suits the situation in which they are communicating with others and the goals they want to achieve.

During their training, students already come across a variety of tasks that are largely new to them. For these tasks, too, they need a broad knowledge and skills repertoire from which they can make the right choices. *Communicate as a Professional* offers a solid foundation for students to develop the communication knowledge and skills they need, both when working as a professional after they have graduated and when following an educational program that prepares them for this future.

In the first chapters of this textbook, the emphasis is on tools that can be used for the analysis of communication processes and products. In later chapters, the attention shifts to advice on how to apply this knowledge when performing more specialized communication tasks. These tasks can be complicated and demanding. This is the case, for example, when having to carefully and critically read diverse forms of professional literature, or when asked to write a research report. Carrying out such communication tasks is a bit like juggling: It may look quite easy when you see a professional do it, but if you try it yourself you will notice how difficult it is and how much experience you need to keep all the balls in the air.

This book does not offer customized recipes for performing communication tasks. The tasks are too difficult for this, and too much depends on the circumstances in which the tasks have to be carried out. What this volume does offer to the professional (or prospective professional) are tried and tested strategies to bring various communication tasks to a successful conclusion.

Each chapter opens with an image of a work of art that is directly or indirectly related to that chapter. We are grateful to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam for granting us the permission to use these images. More information about the works of art can be found on the website of *Communicate as a Professional*: www.communicate.amsterdam. This website also includes answers to and

The wardens of the Amsterdam drapers' guild, known as 'The syndics', Rembrandt van Rijn, 1662. The master drapers assess the quality of a number of cloth samples that were submitted to them as masterpieces by weavers who wanted to join the guild of the cloth makers.

Nowadays, students also have the ambition to gain entrance into an (informal) guild, when they are preparing for their careers. At the end of their training they, too, will have to deliver one or more masterpieces to show that they possess the knowledge, insights and skills needed to start a professional career.

explanations of the assignments in the book. Furthermore, it contains test questions and additional practice material.

As the editors of this book, we are grateful to the authors and the publisher of *Leren Communiceren*,[1] the Dutch textbook on which *Communicate as a Professional* is largely based. We also thank the many generations of Dutch students who have provided useful feedback on the seven editions of *Leren Communiceren* that have been published since 1979, and who have thus contributed to a textbook that we believe can be of value to students and other communicators not only in the Netherlands, but also in the rest of the world.

Aduard / Stellenbosch / Groningen, December 2018
Carel Jansen, Leon de Stadler, Aline Douma

1   Steehouder, M., Jansen, C., Van Gulik, L., Mulder, J., Van der Pool, E., & Zeijl, W. (2016). *Leren communiceren* [Learning how to communicate] (7th, rev. ed.). Groningen, The Netherlands: Noordhoff.

Contents

On the books at lower left: CICERO, AESCHINES, ISOCRATES, DEMOSTHENES, QVINTILIANVS

On the scroll: RHETORICA

RHETORICÆ GRATOS SERMONI ASTVTA CÓLORES,
QVO DVLCIVS FLVAT IS AD AVREIS ADYCIT.

1 Communication

◀ *Rhetorica*, Cornelis Cort, after Frans Floris (I), 1565. Rhetorica sits on a chair and listens to the speech of a young man sitting behind her. An older man looking over the young man's shoulder inspects his concept. Through the window you can see the square in front of the building where a stage is being built. Rhetorica holds a messenger staff in her hand. The caption reads: 'She cleverly adds the pleasing hues of rhetoric to speech, by which it flows more sweetly to the ears.'

This chapter explains the basics of communication, so that you, through practice, guidance, and training, may embark on your career as a professional—just like the young man in this picture who is about to deliver a speech, and receives feedback from experienced communicators.

An impressive speech

Source: ANP/Andrew Gombert

On 17 July 2014, a plane crashed in the eastern part of Ukraine. Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was on its way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur when an attack from an officially still unknown party took the lives of 298 people, among them 196 passengers from the Netherlands.

Four days later, Frans Timmermans—then Foreign Minister of the Netherlands—gave an impressive speech to the UN Security Council. Among other things, he requested that the Netherlands and the other countries involved be enabled to safely bring home the victims' remains, and that an official international crime investigation be conducted. Below, parts of his speech are reprinted.

Mr. President,

We are here to discuss a tragedy: the downing of a commercial airliner and the death of 298 innocent people. Men, women and a staggering number of children lost their lives, on their way to their holiday destinations, their homes, loved ones, their jobs or international obligations. How horrible must have been the final moments of their lives, when they knew the plane was going down. Did they lock hands with their loved ones, did

they hold their children close to their hearts, did they look each other in the eyes, one final time, in an unarticulated goodbye? We will never know.

[…]

For the Netherlands, one priority clearly stands out above all others: Bring the victims' remains home. It is a matter of human decency that remains should be treated with respect and that recovering victim's remains should be done without any delay.

The last couple of days we have received very disturbing reports of bodies being moved about and looted for their possessions. It must be unbearable first to lose your husband and then to have to fear that some thug might steal his wedding ring from his remains.

To my dying day, I will not understand that it took so much time for the rescue workers to be allowed to do their difficult jobs and that human remains should be used in a political game. I hope the world will not have to witness this again, any time in the future.

Images of children's toys being tossed around, luggage being opened or passports being shown are turning our grief and mourning into anger. We demand unimpeded access to the terrain. We demand respectful treatment of the crash site. We demand dignity for the victims and the multitudes who mourn their loss.

I call on the international community, on the Security Council, on anyone with influence on the situation on the ground: Allow us to bring the victims' remains home to their loved ones without any further delay. They deserve to be home.

[…]

I also welcome the setting up of a proper investigation into the cause of the tragedy of MH17, as envisaged in today's resolution. […]

Once the investigation ascertains who was responsible for the downing of the flight MH17, accountability and justice must be pursued and delivered. We owe that to the victims, to justice, to humanity. I call on all relevant countries to provide full cooperation.

My country will not rest until all facts are known and justice is served.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Source: Timmermans (2014).[2]

Timmermans' speech was a great success. The UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution condemning the attack that had caused the downing of the aircraft, ordered the United Nations Civil Aviation Agency to perform an international investigation, and urged armed forces in the area to give access to the crash site. The speech also received a very favorable response from the general public, both in the Netherlands and around the world—although later there was also some criticism of Timmermans' striking depiction of what must have taken place in the plane in the final moments before the crash.

2   Timmermans, F. (2014, July 21). *Speech at the UN Security Council*. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/frans.timmermans/posts/765080793514782

The immediate effectiveness of this speech can, of course, partly be explained by the tragic event it referred to. But there is more to it than that. Frans Timmermans succeeded in reaching not only the minds but also the hearts of the people he addressed. He clarified what he wanted and why he wanted it. More importantly, he supported his demands by showing his emotions and by sketching a detailed and moving picture of what in his view had happened to the innocent people on the aircraft. It is hardly possible to listen to or read the speech without imagining the picture that is sketched and without being touched by it. Frans Timmermans proved to be a very proficient communicator by not only conveying factual information but also evoking emotions in his audience that contributed to the acceptance of his request.

Not every professional communication situation involves including such heavy emotional components in the messages exchanged by the communication parties. But as the *four-sides communication model* discussed in this chapter will show, messages that only convey factual information simply do not exist. Communication messages always reveal other information too—information that is often less explicit but that nevertheless can be decisive for their effect.

Analyzing communication

In order to see the strengths and weaknesses of a communication message clearly and to find possibilities for improvement, it is useful to have an analysis model. A model can also be useful when you develop effective messages yourself or when you discuss a particular message with someone else. In the analysis model that will be introduced in section 1.1, communication is understood as a goal-driven exchange of information between two parties. One party acts as a sender (writer, speaker, developer of a website, and so on); the other party acts as a receiver (reader, listener, user of a website, and so on).

When person A sends a message to somebody else, that person is called the sender *at that moment*, and person B who receives this message is called the receiver *at that moment*. We explicitly say 'at that moment' because the roles of sender and receiver can change very quickly. In fact, especially in oral communication, people are often both sender and receiver at the same time. Person A says something, and at the same time he or she notices how person B responds, with or without words—for instance by showing a facial expression. And vice versa: Person B hears or sees the message from person A and person B reacts immediately, often even before person A's message comes to an end.

The model presented in section 1.1 is called the *four-sides model of communication*. It was introduced by the German psychologist Friedemann Schulz von Thun. The model is based on the principle that a communication message always has four sides. Apart from the factual content, messages also always include information about the image created by the sender of him- or herself, the relationship between

the sender and the receiver, and the goals that the sender and the receiver are trying to achieve.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the factual content of the information that is exchanged. In this chapter we discuss the other three sides of a communication message. The final section of this chapter will discuss how communication parties can let each other know how they are experiencing each other's messages.

1.1   The four-sides model of communication

What do we mean by the word *communication*? Studies in this field have proposed all kinds of descriptions and definitions. In this book, we stick to the basics. We regard communication as a goal-driven process in which messages are exchanged between two parties: senders and receivers. Communication messages include not only written or printed texts but also oral presentations, photos, videos, website pages, e-mails, messages on social media, and so on. In a conversation, we consider each individual contribution ('turn') of a participant as one short message.
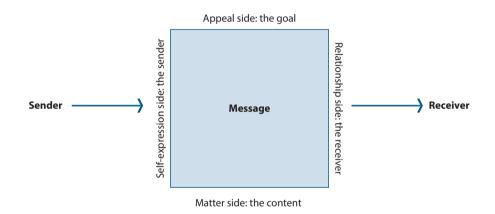
A verbal message (an oral or written message in *words*) may consist of a single sentence, but it may also contain a number of sentences. If the sender uses signals other than words (posture, gestures, signs, images), we speak of non-verbal communication. Most forms of communication include both verbal and non-verbal elements.

Communication is more than simply exchanging messages. Communication always takes place with certain *goals* in mind. People who communicate always want to achieve something—even if that is only creating, establishing, or ending a relationship. Not only *senders* but also *receivers* have certain goals that lead them to pay attention to the messages they receive. One goal that cooperative senders and receivers always have in common is *mutual understanding.* Communication parties need each other in order to make progress on what they want to achieve. The content and form of a message are primarily determined by the goals of the sender, but sensible senders will also take the goals of their receivers into account.

When we consider the *content* of a message, we tend to primarily think of the factual information that is provided. To give some examples: A policy document sets out plans and proposals, a technical document describes an apparatus or a system, and a quotation presents the nature and costs of services offered to the potential customer. There is more to communication messages, however, than just factual information. Messages always present a certain image of the sender to the receiver, whether the sender wants to or not. Consciously or unconsciously, senders always provide information about themselves and about the organization they may represent. Communication messages also always show how the sender perceives the relationship with the receiver. When problems arise with a particular

message, the causes often lie in these non-factual aspects of the communication at hand. In order to do justice to the complexity of communication, we distinguish four different sides of a communication message.

- The *matter side* concerns the actual subject of the message and the factual information provided about this subject.
- The *appeal side* concerns the purpose of the message: the goal or goals that the sender wants to achieve with the receiver.
- The *self-expression side* of the message concerns the image it reveals of the sender—his or her person, norms, and values.
- The *relationship side* concerns the way in which the sender views the receiver and also the relationship between the sender and the receiver, as attested by the message.

Appeal side: the goal

Self-expression side: the sender

Sender ⟶   **Message**   ⟶ **Receiver**

Relationship side: the receiver

Matter side: the content

The four sides of a message.

Successful communication requires that the communication parties—both senders and receivers—consider the interplay of the four sides of their messages. Senders try to choose the content and form of their messages in such a way that their intentions in each respect are well understood by their receivers. And receivers try to interpret the sender's messages in each respect properly so that they can respond adequately.

Each message contains all four sides. The emphasis placed on the different sides may differ, however. The sender is always faced with the choice of whether to place the emphasis on the matter side, the appeal side, the self-expression side, or the relationship side. This choice is decisive for both the content and form of the message.

In the next three sections of this chapter, the focus will be on the appeal side (1.2), the self-expression side (1.3), and the relationship side of the message (1.4). The matter side will be further explored in chapters 2 and 3.

In the educational program *Advertising Psychology* at an Irish university, there have been multiple cases of plagiarism. Many students seem to habitually copy long parts of articles they found on the internet without proper references to the sources of their information. The program board has now decided that a clear warning is appropriate. They have asked George Wilbury, the program coordinator, not only to write an article for the university's digital newsletter, but also to design some posters that may draw the students' attention. The posters will be displayed in places where students often come. George is now faced with the question of what the emphasis in those posters should be on.

The first option is to provide a brief explanation of the concept of *plagiarism*, including the sanctions for students who get caught. In this option, the emphasis will be on the *matter side* of the message: What is plagiarism and which rules apply in our educational program?

George could also choose to let the students know that they have to keep away from everything that smells of plagiarism, and to refer them to a manual where they can find concrete advice on how to use sources carefully and prevent plagiarism. In this option, the emphasis will be on the *appeal side* of the message: the behavior that the staff wants to achieve among the students.

A third possibility is to make it clear that the staff members in this program despise every form of plagiarism and regard it as a form of deception. Now the emphasis will be on the *self-expression side* of the message: the image that the poster creates of the norms and values of the program staff.

Finally, George could use the posters to make it clear that the staff does not regard students as potential fraudsters but as prospective professionals who may not yet know how to prevent plagiarism. In this case, George puts the emphasis on the *relationship side* of the message: What view does the staff have of the students who participate in the program?

Differences in emphasis in a message about plagiarism.

It is important to distinguish between different communicative goals. Often, the first aim of a message is to change the knowledge of the receivers. Sometimes the communicative goal is limited to this knowledge aspect, for example in the case of news items that are only meant to provide information. However, most messages also aim to achieve other goals: in the case of the CDC (see the next page), influencing the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of the receiver (safe sex) and ultimately improving the public health situation. Whether or not these goals are achieved often depends on more than just the quality of the communication.