

**SKILLS FOR CONTEMPORARY SECRETARIAL COMMUNICATION,
BUSINESS WRITING AND DOCUMENT HANDLING**

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ABSTRACT

The Secretarial profession is at the hub of the office, and a significant role of the profession involves business communication, business writing and document handling. As important as these roles and responsibilities are, the secretary seems lacking in techniques to originate effective oral and written communication. Worse still is properly handling official documents. This paper intends to provide 'formulae' as it were to help secretaries. Amongst others, this work opines that secretaries need to be 'word smiths', and give attention, to successfully carry out this pivotal aspect of their job.

Keywords: Skills, Contemporary, Secretarial, Communication, Business Writing, Document Handling

Introduction

The Secretary and the Secretarial professional operates at the heart or core of the office. Chron (2021) affirms that Managers and executives who are fortunate enough to have secretaries – also referred to as administrative assistants in many organizations – will tell you their department or office would be chaotic without them. In fact, the same source further attests that a good secretary is the hub of the office wheel that keeps all of the spokes in place and everything moving forward on the right path.

Amongst the numerous functions of the secretary is the handling of official communication, also known as business communication. Documents of various sorts circulate in the organisation, and the secretary plays a pivotal role in handling these. Arikwandu & Samuel (2021) opine that in every institution, communication plays a significant role.

Such communication is of various types, verbal (encompassing oral and written), and non verbal (para lingual or body language communication). The proliferation of

Information and Communication Technology facilities and equipment has not in any way diminished the Secretary's role when it comes to communication. Instead, it has enhanced this role.

In order to carry out this duty, the Secretary or Administrative Assistant ought to possess skills and other attributes that would enable her effectively carry out this role. Additionally, other principles to enhance effective communication are a must. This paper provides tips and guiding principles the secretary must remember needs in order to have the finesse to deliver on this important job.

Concepts definition:

Communication

A number of authors have defined communication. For instance, the Entrepreneurship Handbook Ltd in Arikwandu and Samuel (2021) defines communication as the sharing of information between different individuals. It includes the sharing of ideas, concepts, imaginations, behaviours and written contents.

No matter the type and nature of communication, whether verbal or non verbal, written or not, including handling and processing of documents, secretaries would need to bear in mind a number of things to produce effective business documents.

Business Writing

Powell (2020) opines that business writing is a type of writing that is used in a professional setting. It is a purposeful piece of writing that conveys relevant information to the reader in a clear, concise, and effective manner. It includes proposals, reports, memos, emails and notices, etc. Business writing falls into four categories, depending on the purpose or reason for writing it. These categories are instructional, informational, persuasive and transactional.

Documents and documents handling

Oxford Dictionary defines a document as a piece of written, printed or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record. Document handling according to PCMag Encyclopedia (1981–2023) states simply that document handling is the procedure for transporting and handling paper documents for data entry and scanning. In its broadest sense, it includes a document management system, which is outside the scope of this work.

Skill

Oxford Dictionary defines skill as the ability to do something well. Synonyms include expertise, prowess, mastery, professionalism, etc. Therefore, within the scope of this paper, it is examining the skills the secretary needs to communicate effectively and handle documents proficiently.

Writing an Effective Business Document

Heaps (1996–2023) suggests the following tips for the secretary to do professional and effective business writing whether they are resumes, cover letters, reports, e-mails, letters, memos, project summaries, etc.

Know the Purpose and Scope of Your Document

Before the Secretary begins writing, it is important that they know the purpose for which you are writing and what you want your document to accomplish. As you write, keep your primary objective in mind (you could even type it at the top of your document and refer to it throughout the writing process, if needed; you can delete it when you are finished with the initial draft), and never stray from it. However, if in the course of your writing you discover that your focus has changed, simply make sure to revise your writing as needed to reflect your new purpose in order to maintain a clear, coherent document.

Identify (and Write to) Your Audience

Knowing to whom you are writing will help you determine the tone and content of your document. If you're not exactly sure who your audience is, ask yourself who you are writing the document for or who is most likely to benefit from what you are writing. If you are writing with the intent of selling a product or service to someone or promoting a cause, you may want to ask yourself: What age are my intended readers? What's their background? Where do they live? What stage of life are they in? What are their interests? What is important to them? These and similar questions will help you to target and write to your audience.

As you write, do be careful of technical and other jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations. Unless you are writing for a very specialized field, it is best to avoid jargon and to spell out acronyms and abbreviations on their first use. No matter your audience, you generally don't need to be overly stuffy or formal; a normal, conversational tone will usually do the job.

Understand the Needs of Your Reader

Once you have identified your audience, try to anticipate the information that your reader will want or need, and identify and include that information in your document as you write. Also try to address any potential arguments or concerns readers might have, and address those, as well.

Organize Your Document

Follow the standard format for the type of document you are writing, whether it be a memo, letter, e-mail, résumé, report, advertisement, project summary, or other

communication.

For longer documents, start with an outline, and work from there. The beauty of word processors is that you can easily restructure your ideas later if necessary. Creating an outline helps you determine early on if you are including all of the information that you need to. To help you be as complete as you need to be, ask yourself *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how*. “Who am I writing to?” “What is my purpose?” And so on. Though you will not always need to answer all of these questions in your documents, you will probably want to include information to answer most of them most of the time.

In your introduction, tell the reader the purpose of your document and what you want him or her to do. In subsequent paragraphs, group related information together, and generally include only one key point in each paragraph or section. When listing information in paragraph format, use *first*, *second*, *third*, and so forth, or use a bulleted list, in order to help your reader easily follow the organization of your document.

For longer works, also use headings and subheadings to indicate the sections of your document. Such visible structure allows readers to find the information that they need quickly and easily.

In your conclusion, restate the main purpose of your document, and tell the reader what you want her or him to do with the information you are providing, whether that be to buy a product or service, change or adopt a company policy, give you a promotion, etcetera.

Identify the Benefits to the Reader

Especially for advertising, sales copy, and other documents meant to persuade, identify and emphasize the benefits of a product, service, or policy, for example, rather than just its features.

Be Concise

Write concisely. Busy people in the workforce do not have time to read any more than they have to. Use short words and sentences rather than long ones when possible, and eliminate unnecessary information. However, do not be so brief that you neglect to include necessary information. Make sure that you do not inadvertently leave out any important instructions, deadlines, contact information, statistics or other evidence, or the like.

Substantiate Your Claims

Make sure that your information is complete and accurate. Check your facts before you submit your information, and use statistics, examples, dates, and similar information to back your claims. However, if you use graphs, charts, tables, or other graphical elements, make sure they add meaningful information to your document and are not just needless filler.

Proofread

After you have used a spell checker and grammar checker (though grammar checkers are not completely reliable), take the time to proofread your document. Look for omitted words, misspelled homonyms (*it's* for *its*), and wrong punctuation. Check that sentences are grammatical. Make sure the document is error free, clear, and concise. It may be helpful to have a colleague, co-worker, or even a professional writer or editor review your work before you deliver it.

If in proofreading you find omissions or organizational problems, do not be afraid to revise your document substantially if needed. Having a more effective document is usually worth the extra time and effort. If possible, leave enough time (a day or more) to set your document aside and come back to it later to review it one more time with fresh eyes and greater perspective before you submit it.

Other established principles have been time-tested and would improve communication of all kinds. Graham (2020) provides the following 10cs of effective communication:

10cs of communication**Be clear**

Use simple expressions and be objective

Be concise

No use of unnecessary words

Be correct

There should be no mistakes in grammar and facts

Be coherent

Ensure logical flow of content

Be complete

Information should be comprehensive for reader

Be creative

Bring interest through varied structure and explanations

Be considerate

Ensure documents are easy to read with bullets, subheads, boldface keywords, etc.

Be concrete

Include specifics like numbers, time, date and address.

Be courteous

Avoid commands, demands and “you”.

Be credible

Use facts not opinions

Communication skills and personality traits that a secretary needs for effective communication

Chron (2021) and Justesene (2021) provide the following comprehensive list of communications skills and personality traits that would assist a secretary in the

Oral Communication

Oral communication skills are among the top skills employers seek in secretaries and administrative assistants. Secretaries are often the first point of contact for their departments, and commonly play the role of gatekeeper. The employment website [indeed](#) emphasizes that a secretary should be able to discern the nature of each phone calls or person to person requests and respond appropriately.. This requires tact and proficiency, as you may need to solicit information to help a caller or visitor properly. Some secretaries provide training to other personnel, such as with new office equipment. Others give high level presentations in board and committee meetings.

Written Communication

Excellent written communication skills are also important among communications skills for an administrative assistant. for a secretary, requiring a broad vocabulary, proper grammar and good spelling. Be prepared to answer correspondence – sometimes preparing and writing letters for the boss. You may take notes at meetings and then compress relevant information into a brief summary. With e mail so common in business, you may also be responsible for superiors' e mail responses, and you need to treat all office e mail as proper business correspondence.

Interpersonal Communication

Good communication skills for an administrative assistant include interpersonal communication. If you want to be a secretary, think of yourself as a level headed ambassador, able to act with diplomacy and get along with diverse individuals. You will be building relationships with other departments and people from all levels – from board chairpersons to cleaning staff. Be prepared to bear the brunt of frustrations from irate callers who have been put on hold, or an unsatisfied customer or investor, while maintaining a professional demeanor.

Personality and Secretarial Communication

Be a 'Wordsmith'

The authors are of the view that secretaries should be 'wordsmiths'. Just as goldsmiths have a mastery in the use of metal, same principle should be application for secretaries. A voracious appetite for reading good materials in English Language

will stand them in good stead in this regard.

A secretary must be properly educated and have the necessary skills for the job, such as typing, computer skills, writing skills and knowledge of filing systems. Personal characteristics of a secretary, on the other hand, are not something you learn in school, yet they have a large impact on your ability to be effective in your work. For example, a secretary who cannot keep important information confidential is not trusted by the boss. Some important personality traits for a secretary include the ability to manage time wisely, excellent judgment and interpersonal skills that facilitate working relationships.

Keep Things Confidential

The ability to keep information confidential might be one of the most important qualities of a secretary. A breach of confidentiality could mean giving away business secrets to a competitor, allowing rumors to affect employees in an organization or cause a legal case to go awry. Medical secretaries may be entrusted with private patient information that could cause harm if it became public, and which must be kept confidential under the law.

Staying Organized

The ability to organize daily tasks is another important personal characteristic, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Secretaries routinely have to keep track of many tasks and projects, such as scheduling meetings and appointments, taking and transcribing minutes, handling phone calls, making travel arrangements for one or more superiors, filing and many other responsibilities.

A disorganized secretary can create chaos in an office. Board members who don't have the necessary information to review prior to a board meeting cannot make good decisions. When the boss arrives late at the airport and misses a plane – because the secretary gave the wrong information about the flight time – that secretary is likely to face disciplinary action or even termination.

Communication Is Critical

Secretaries deal with many different people and must be adept communicators, according to AI Accountant. A secretary should have the ability to make visitors feel at ease by being gracious and welcoming or able to smooth the ruffled composure of someone who must wait because of a temporary emergency. You need to be able to communicate important facts quickly and logically, while creating a positive working environment.

You also need the judgment to share only what is appropriate in a given situation. Executive secretaries, for example, may have complex responsibilities across several departments in an organization and be privy to information that should not be shared with a junior secretary..

Be a Team Player

You must be a team player to be effective as a secretary. Your job is to support your boss in any way you can, and this calls for flexibility. You may need to work late from time to time or come in early, take on a project you've never done before or generally go the extra mile. Your ability to anticipate the needs of your boss or other people to whom you provide secretarial support promotes their success. Make sure you keep your boss informed of important matters and give her all the information necessary to do her job well.

Principles of communication is effectively is vital in the world of marketing. Whether it's emails, blog posts, or client meetings, good communication skills are a necessity. Understanding how to express yourself clearly and effectively is critical for any business.

Additional ten simple principles to remember for effective communication are:

1. Create A Goal

The first step is determining how you want to impact your audience. Are you positioning yourself as a thought leader, or are you persuading them to take action? Figuring out your ideal outcome at the start and intentionally crafting your communication to reach for that goal will make it much more effective. [Deciding which KPIs](#) can help you keep track of your goals is also important, whether it's clicks, social shares, sign ups, or purchases.

2. Listen to Feedback

Good communication is never a one way street. This is why no one enjoys being stuck with someone constantly talking about himself without giving you a chance to respond or even say a few words. A one sided conversation can make anyone lose interest in the topic at hand.

Likewise, if you never listen to what your audience is saying or give them a chance to engage, you'll struggle to effectively connect with them. The better option is [always to do your research](#), read what they're writing, ask for their feedback, and incorporate what they're looking for into what you're trying to communicate.

3. Adjust To Your Medium

Understanding the context of your communication is vital to success. For example, you wouldn't say certain things through written communication because the tone and inflection of the spoken word isn't there. On the other hand, you would communicate much differently on the phone than face to face because the other person can't see your face, hand gestures, or body language.

Once you decide on the [most appealing format](#) to reach your audience, make sure your content and messaging are both tailored for that medium. For example, if it's for

Twitter, you'll want something that's short, visually appealing, and will maybe even start a conversation. However, you'll want to go into more detail on a mobile optimized and easy to read page if you are writing a blog post.

4. Stay Organized

Staying organized is not easy for most people. One way to stay organized is to create a high level outline before you attempt to communicate with your audience.

An outline includes:

- Your goal.
- Your main point(s) to get across.
- The different ways you're going to illustrate them for your audience.

Breaking things down into small tasks will help you remain focused on this plan while being methodical in your research, and avoiding any scope creep.

5. Be Persuasive

One of the primary goals of effective communication is to remain persuasive. Of course, people are persuaded in different ways. Using relevant facts to back up your main argument is a great way to appeal to many people.

However, it's even more important to appeal to your audience's emotional side, as research shows that our [emotional brain processes information much faster](#) than the logical side of our brain. In other words, using images or telling stories that bring happiness, hope, or humor can greatly impact how you communicate with your audience.

6. Be Clear

Writing concise sentences is essential to keeping things clear. On the other hand, writing large blocks of text with lengthy sentences is one of the quickest ways to lose the attention of your audience.

Replacing longer phrases with shorter ones, making things simple, and keeping most of your sentences below 30 words are all key aspects of communication. Usually, this entire process goes through a few rounds of editing to eliminate unnecessary content and improve readability.

7. Visuals Are Important

Variety can often go a long way while communicating with an audience. People can comprehend new information in numerous ways, but the vast majority are primarily visual people. In fact, people can [understand visual data in as little as 13 milliseconds](#).

Understanding how to use compelling visuals is a great way to draw in your audience, and you can use text to further demonstrate your point. Visuals are also a

fantastic way to appeal to the emotional side of your audience.

8. Use Stories

Another way to connect with your audience and [communicate your ideas is with powerful stories](#). People are natural storytellers and listeners. This inborn trait stretches across cultures and is especially evident with how kids are so quickly drawn to storybooks.

Stories are great ways to make ideas more tangible to people and can also humanize what you're communicating. Stories are also more likely to be remembered than the other elements of what you communicate due to their appealing to your audience's more emotional side. So, if you really want people to understand and remember your point, add in a story that illustrates it.

9. Less Is More

Your audience is likely busy. So don't waste your (or their) time with irrelevant tidbits, repeated information, or details that don't help you with your main communication goal. It will lead to disengagement, less information being retained, and take away from the effectiveness of your efforts. When in doubt, err on the side of clarity.

10. Be Curious

Finally, resolve to always be learning. While some things remain the same, the world of communication is constantly evolving. Continue to read, talk to mentors, and never assume you know everything when it comes to good communication. For your individual efforts, test different formats and styles to see what works best when [connecting with your unique audience](#), and always be open to feedback.

Always Recall the KISS Acronym

Kiss is an acronym for 'Keep it Short and Simple'. Bearing in mind these principle always no matter the nature of communication, will make the secretary more proficient communication wise.

Practical Documents handling tips

There is no gain saying that the secretary is the alpha and omega as it were of office documents. In addition to generating documents, the secretary receives and processes all sorts of documents, including electronic documents. Imagine a scenario where you search papers for hours on your cluttered desk, or struggle with your timeline because you lost or cannot remember the name of a vital computer file? Whichever be the case, the following tips would be helpful document/file management methods that would save our resources:

Mindtools.com (n.d) suggests the following:

1. Avoid saving unnecessary documents
2. Follow a consistent method for naming your files and folders
3. Store related Documents together, whatever their type
4. Separate ongoing work from completed work
5. Avoid overfilling folders
6. Organise documents by date
7. Make digital copies of paper documents

Organising files and folders on the computer

Lau, J. (2023) provides these file management tips on our computer:

- a. Establish a clear hierarchical folder structure
- b. Use a consistent naming convention:
 - i. Include keywords
 - ii. Use Pascal Case – If using compound words, capitalise the first letter of each word to make it easier to read. For example, Lau_AmendedContract
 - iii. Add a date. By putting a date at the beginning of your file name, it will automatically be listed in chronological order
 - iv. Include the version. If you are working with multiple versions of a file, include the version number (e.g V3). This will make it easier to identify the most /recent version and avoid costly mixups if there are multiple iterations of the same file.
 - v. Sequential numbers: To arrange your files in a specific order, add leading zeros 01, 02, etc, rather than just 1, 2, etc.
 - vi. Add “AA”. By adding “AA” at the beginning of your file, it automatically stacks it at the top of your list, making it easily accessible
 - vii. Keep it concise. To keep your file and folder names consistent, include only necessary information and cut anything superfluous (e.g 'a', 'and', 'the', etc)
- c. Add tags. In addition to your file folders, you may add sub folders with descriptive tags for groups of items.
- d. Delete and archive unnecessary files. You may reserve some minutes to organise your folders, deleting files that not needed anymore.

5. File as you go: If you work with a lot of files, organizing your folders once a month may result in a lot of chaos. To prevent this, give every file an accurate name and home as soon as you create it.

Conclusion

Effective writing is essential in the business world. It is important that your writing be clear, coherent, and targeted to meet the needs of your intended audience. Sloppy, careless, unprofessional, or incomplete communication can potentially detract from your professional image, cost you sales or investment money, prevent you from being hired or promoted, or even make you legally liable. For these and other reasons, it is imperative that you take the time and exert the effort to make your written communication as good as possible. Good Communication is Effective Communication. Communication is the cornerstone of our profession. These principles of communication will help you focus your thoughts, whether you are selling a product, trying to convince a group to act, or getting your team aligned to reach specific goals.

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