

1

Communication and employability skills for IT

IT provides tools (such as word processing software) with features (such as spell checkers) which will enable you to communicate accurately and therefore effectively. This unit will help you to improve your general communication skills by exploiting certain application packages and IT tools.

The employability part of the unit is all about soft skills. These include communication skills, teamwork skills and other positive attributes such as dependability and conscientiousness. It is likely that you already have the technical skills and knowledge required for specific jobs in IT but without soft skills, you may find yourself unemployed and, worse, unemployable. To identify which soft skills you already possess, you will assess your own strengths and weaknesses and, where necessary, work on improving the skills needed to make you an effective employee.

Once you get a job, continual self-development will be essential. The rapidly changing nature of IT makes this particularly relevant for those who work, or aspire to work, in the IT industry. To familiarise you with the self-development process, while working on this unit, you will produce and follow a personal development plan (PDP) to identify and track your training needs and the accumulation of new skills and knowledge.

Learning outcomes

After completing this unit, you should:

1. understand the personal attributes valued by employers
2. understand the principles of effective communication
3. be able to use IT to communicate effectively
4. be able to address personal development needs.

Assessment and grading criteria

This table shows you what you must do in order to achieve a pass, merit or distinction grade, and where you can find activities in this book to help you.

To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that you are able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, you are able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, you are able to:
P1 explain the personal attributes valued by employers See Assessment activity 1.1, page 14		
P2 explain the principles of effective communication See Assessment activity 1.3, page 25		D1 evaluate interpersonal and written communications techniques See Assessment activity 1.3, page 25
P3 discuss potential barriers to effective communication See Assessment activity 1.2, page 19	M1 explain mechanisms that can reduce the impact of communication barriers See Assessment activity 1.2, page 19	
P4 demonstrate a range of effective interpersonal skills [TW1] See Assessment activity 1.3, page 25		
P5 use IT to aid communications See Assessment activity 1.4, page 31		
P6 communicate technical information to a specified audience See Assessment activity 1.4, page 31	M2 review draft documents to produce final versions [EP4] See Assessment activity 1.4, page 31	
P7 produce a personal development plan See Assessment activity 1.5, page 34		
P8 follow a personal development plan See Assessment activity 1.5, page 34	M3 explain how an awareness of learning style can aid personal development [RL5] See Assessment activity 1.6, page 36	D2 review progress on a personal development plan, identifying areas for improvement [RL3] See Assessment activity 1.6, page 36

How you will be assessed

This unit will be assessed by a number of internal assignments that will be designed and marked by the staff at your centre. The assignments will be designed to allow you to show your understanding of the unit outcomes. These relate to what you should be able to do after completing this unit.

Your tutor will tell you precisely what form your assessment will take, but it could be in the form of:

- an information booklet
- observation of your communication skills by your tutor
- detailed witness statements and written explanations of your effective use of IT.



Sam

Where I live, we rely on seasonal trade. At Easter and during the summer months, the town is full of tourists and there are plenty of jobs. Everyone has not one but two or three part-time jobs: serving in restaurants and shops, or working in one of the hotels or around the marina. Come the winter, though, it's dead here and money is short.

I want a career where I can be in work all year round. This unit helped me to look at myself more critically and to identify my strengths and weaknesses. I now have the confidence to promote myself and I'm working on my weaknesses.

I have always been good with computers so the IT side of communication is easy for me. I used to struggle to express myself effectively in meetings but I am now better at noticing how others 'talk' through their body language as well as listening to what they actually say. I am also more conscious of the messages I give out simply by making certain hand gestures or standing in a particular way.

Writing up the personal development plan seemed boring at first; a real waste of time. Then, when I looked back over it and saw the progress I'd made, I realised how useful it was to keep records. I now set myself personal goals and expect to achieve them.

Over to you

- **What areas of this unit might you find challenging?**
- **Which section of the unit are you most looking forward to?**
- **How can you prepare for the unit assessment(s)?**

1. Understand the personal attributes valued by employers



Start up

The perfect employee

Imagine you are keen on working for a particular organisation in a particular role.

- Why should the employer give the job to you?
- What are your USPs (unique selling points)?
- What makes you more suited to fill this post than any other applicant?
- What do you have to offer that the employer might value?
- What kinds of things are employers looking for in an employee?

Compare notes with others in your group. Try to identify some attributes that all employers want in an applicant.

Some attributes are specific to a given job but many apply to all jobs. Some attributes relate to you as a person, while others relate to the type of organisation that you hope to join.

Let's consider each type of attribute in turn.

1.1 Specific attributes

Specific attributes – as opposed to general attributes (which we will look at on page 5) – fall into two broad groups: the job-related attributes necessary to carry out the job and the knowledge of the good working procedures which your employer will expect you to follow.

Job-related attributes

For some jobs, technical knowledge and skills might be necessary.

- A sales representative needs to be able to drive and to have a clean driving licence. The employer may provide a company car but some jobs require you to have your own means of transport.
- It is courteous for airline employees to respond to passengers in the same language that the passengers have used. Therefore, some airlines demand language skills of their cabin crew.

- An IT technician who fixes hardware faults must be able to use hand tools such as screwdrivers, but will also need to be skilled in using electronic testing equipment such as a multimeter.



An employer may need you to be able to drive and to have a clean driver's licence.

You might demonstrate your technical skills by taking and passing academic or vocational qualifications or you might have a certificate to prove that you have a special skill, e.g. you can cook or swim.

If a particular technical skill is essential to an advertised job, it should be made clear to all prospective employees. This will deter candidates without the requisite skills and prevent employers from having to waste time interviewing applicants who are not qualified for the post.

Activity: Technical skills



- 1 Working in groups of three or four, search the local and national papers for examples of job adverts that specify the technical skills needed for particular IT vacancies. List the attributes that employers seem to be seeking in a prospective employee.
- 2 Make a list of the technical skills that you have. Compare your list with others in your group and add to your own list any skills that you had forgotten. Within your group, compile a comprehensive list of technical skills that one or more of you have. For each skill, grade yourself according to your own level of competence.

Good working procedures

Working procedures can be called 'good' when they take into account health and safety and security issues.

- If you are unwell, you should stay off work until you recover. Staggering in with 'flu or a virus and giving it to everyone else in the office is counterproductive.
- The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) requires all employees to 'take reasonable care of themselves and others who could be affected by what they do'. This act also states that if you are an employee who has 'been injured at work, seen a dangerous occurrence, or your doctor has certified that you have a work related reportable disease, you must inform your employer'.
- Information that you find out while doing your job is confidential. This might include personal details of customers or industry-sensitive material about the design of a product. You are expected to respect the confidentiality and security of this material.

Work attitudes

Employees work in return for a wage. However, each employee's attitude to work is important and, from the employer's point of view, a good **work ethic** is required.

1.2 General attributes

Regardless of the job and its particular requirements, there are some skills – called **soft skills** – that everyone is expected to have, to some extent; these skills make you better able to carry out the tasks for any job.

We will look in particular at planning and organisational skills, time management, team working, verbal and written communication skills, numeracy skills and other skills such as creativity. The more competent you are in these areas, the more attractive you will appear to a prospective employer.

Planning skills

Planning involves thinking ahead to decide what you need to do to achieve a **goal** within a given timescale. You might not need to write a plan, but thinking about what you need to do and what could go wrong will help to ensure a measure of success in whatever you set out to do.

The process of planning – establishing goals, deciding on **strategy**, setting **objectives** and then matching your performance against your objectives – is a way of measuring your success. If you fail in some respect, this can help you to plan more effectively in the future.

Key terms

Work ethic – a set of values which expects the employee to arrive on time, to work diligently throughout the working day, to show initiative and to be able to work within a team.

Soft skills – skills that influence how people interact with each other, e.g. analytical thinking, creativity, diplomacy, effective communication, flexibility, leadership, listening skills, problem solving, team building and a readiness for change.

Goal – the end result towards which your effort will be directed; provides general purpose and direction.

Strategy – a systematic plan of action.

Objectives – these are similar to goals. However, goals are broad and general, whereas objectives are narrower and more precise. Goals are intangible (such as, 'improve your general fitness') but objectives are tangible (for instance, 'practise until you can do twenty press-ups in one go').

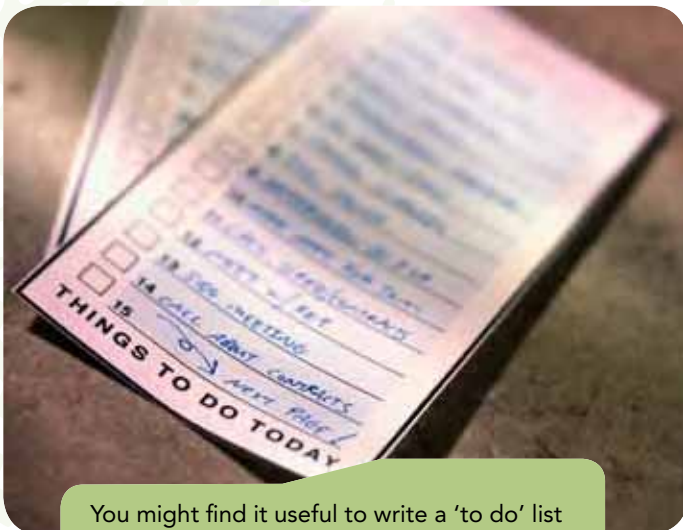
How to... plan



- 1 First, establish your goal: this should reflect your present situation (its shortfalls) and your future needs. Once you have decided on a goal that can be effectively pursued, you may wish to write this down. Some organisations frame their goals in a mission statement.
- 2 Next, decide on your strategy. Consider what might happen if you follow a particular course of action, and remember to take into account the people involved and any constraints such as time-scale and resources.
- 3 Your strategy will guide you as you work towards your goals; this will lead you to a list of objectives.

Planning may involve just you. For example, you might write yourself a 'to do' list and check your progress against this on a regular basis.

- You could review your progress every Monday morning and write a fresh 'to do' list, showing all the tasks you need to complete by the end of the working day on Friday. As the week progresses, you could tick off the things that you have done and think about the remaining tasks on the list.
- You might find it more helpful to rewrite the 'to do' list every day; some tasks may have become irrelevant, while others may have become more urgent. However, your day should be spent doing tasks, rather than thinking about what to do, so the administration of your 'to do' list must not become a major task in itself!



You might find it useful to write a 'to do' list each day.

It might prove impossible to complete all the tasks on your 'to do' list by your Friday deadline. **Prioritising** will mean that you complete the most important tasks first and should help you to make more realistic plans in future. Do not try to fit too much into your day or promise to complete work that will prove impossible given your available time and resources.

Microsoft Outlook's Tasks feature can help you to maintain your list and prioritise your work (see Figure 1.1). Outlook Tasks also offers a reminder feature so regular tasks automatically reappear on the list.

Planning can involve a team of people, with each member of the team agreeing to complete their own tasks within a given time frame so that the entire team achieves its objectives. The organisational skills involved in managing a team are more complex and require more sophisticated tools (see page 11).

Organisational skills

A system or routine can help you to complete everyday tasks efficiently. For example, if you organise your workspace so that the things you need most (pens or pencils, your calculator, a stapler, a dictionary) are within arm's reach, and keep everything tidily in its place, you will not waste time hunting for things. You may need books or folders on a shelf nearby and files arranged alphabetically in a hanging drawer; on your desk, next to the telephone, you might keep your **address book** and a **diary**.

Key terms

Prioritising – identifying which tasks are most important and putting these at the top of your 'to do' list.

Address book – a book with sections for each letter of the alphabet in which addresses and other contact details are recorded under the name (usually the surname) of each person you might need to contact.

Diary – a book in which space is set out – months, weeks, days, hours, time slots – to record events (past or future). Also called an appointment diary, this provides a written record of how you have spent your time and what will be on your agenda in the future.

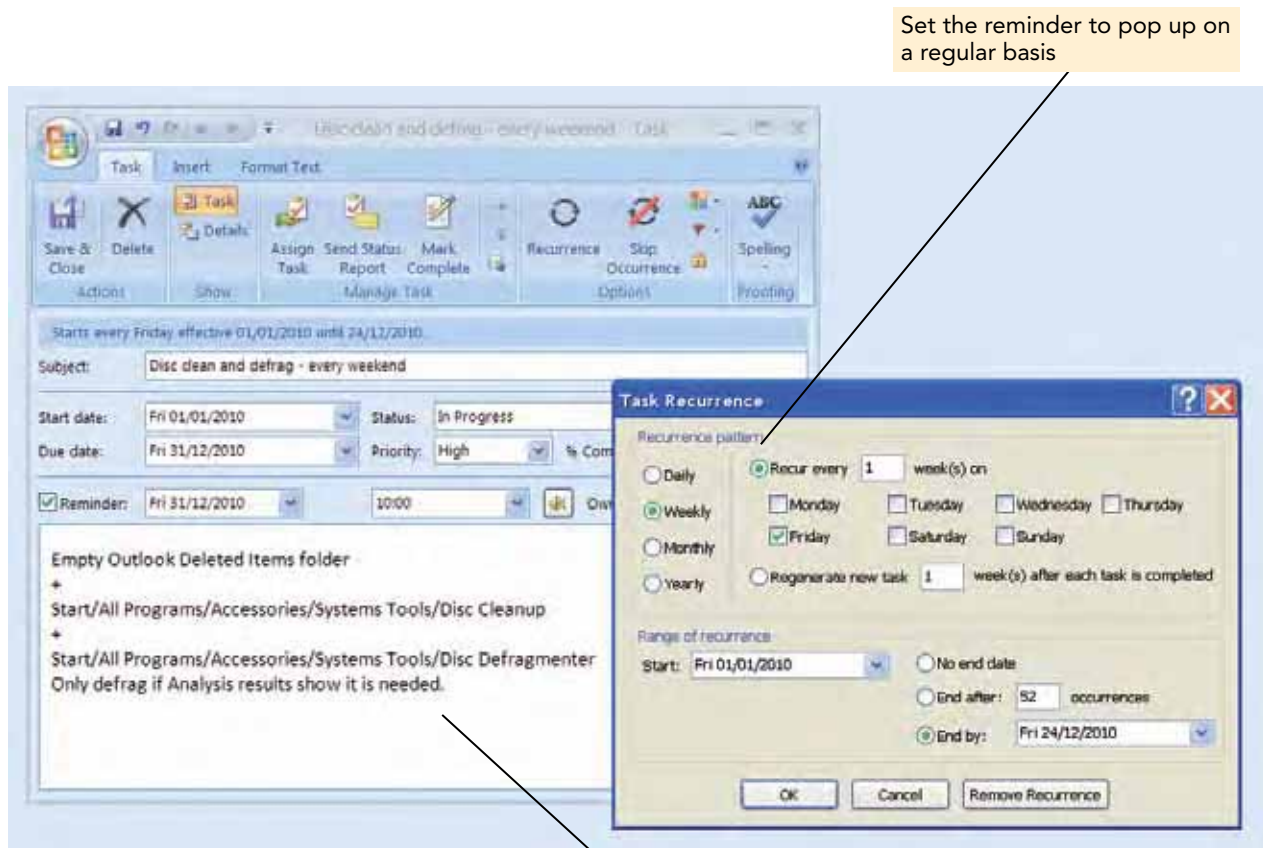


Figure 1.1: Outlook Tasks

Organisational skills can be learnt. First, focus on one aspect of your life that you want to organise (your workspace, your books, your CDs, your wardrobe, a social event). Then consider the purpose of organising and set yourself a **target**.

- A receptionist might write, 'I need to organise my workspace so that when someone asks me a question I can easily and quickly locate the information I need to answer. This will make me a more reliable source of information.'
- A librarian might write, 'I need to organise my books so that I can find a particular book quickly. This will be appreciated by those who visit my library.'
- An events organiser might write, 'I need to co-ordinate everyone involved in this event and ensure that everything goes according to plan.'

Once you have set your target, ask yourself what options you have. In your own workspace, you could arrange your books by type, putting fiction on one shelf and technical manuals on another shelf. By segregating the books, you can reduce the number of books you need to search through to find the one you want.

Key term

Target – an objective or goal; something to aim for.

Time management

To make the best use of your time, you need to manage it effectively. To do this, you must:

- take control of your time – using a diary
- protect your time space – handling interruptions
- toughen up on together-time – making meetings work
- eliminate paper shuffling – getting on top of your in-tray.

People who offer a service (for example, a chiropodist or a piano teacher) rely on a diary to keep track of which clients they are expecting, and to identify gaps where new appointments can be made. Such people need to blank out days when they are not available for work, and be very careful not to double book anyone. If a client rings to change an appointment, this also

has to be recorded carefully, rubbing out the original booking and writing in the new one.

To manage your time effectively, you will need a diary too – either a pocket diary, or the one on your iPhone (if you own one) or computer. As long as you refer to your diary each morning, you should never forget an appointment or arrive late.

- Handwritten diaries can be small enough to carry with you everywhere (such as a pocket diary) or large enough to remain where they belong (such as an appointments book in a hairdressing salon).
- Electronic online diaries are particularly useful in a working environment. For example, Microsoft Outlook has a calendar feature (see Figure 1.2).

Whatever form your diary takes, you should use it to record events that you expect to attend, people

you plan to meet and things you have to do. Looking at your diary will tell you what will be happening in the next day, week or year, and will allow you to keep track of the time you have left to do other things. An overfull diary will warn you not to take on anything extra.

Handling interruptions – from emails, phone calls or people – efficiently is an important aspect of time management because these interruptions can disrupt your work (Table 1.1: Handling interruptions).

Did you know?



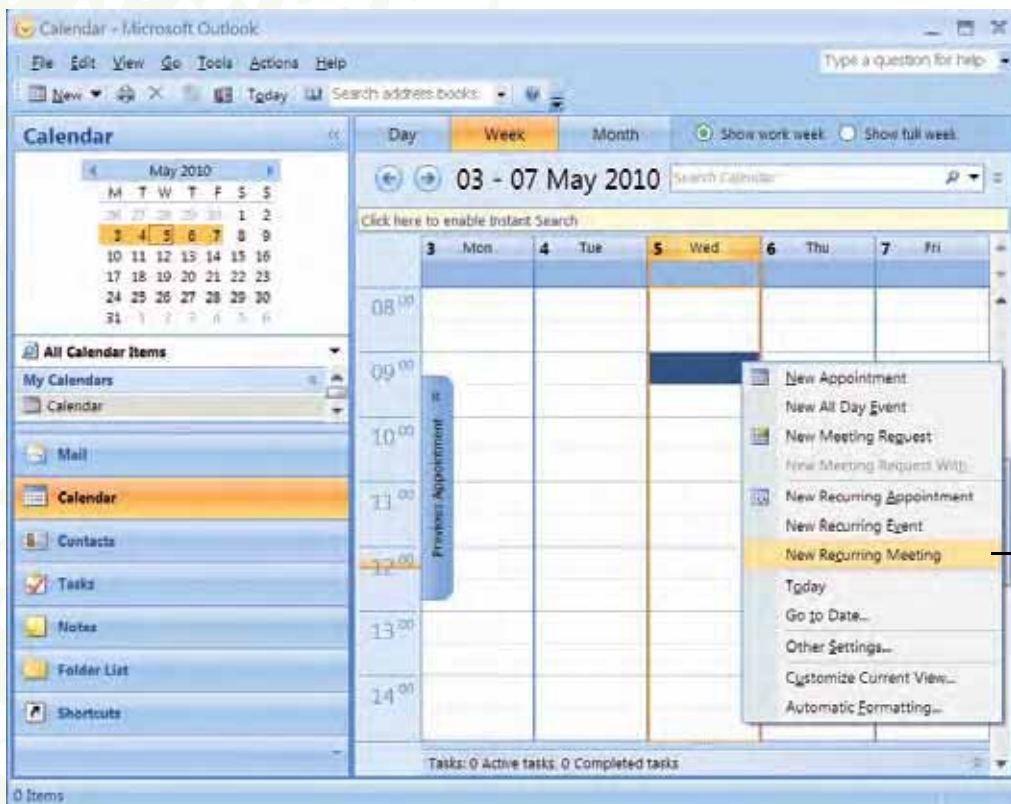
Studies have shown that on-screen interruptions announcing a new email can seriously disrupt a person's workflow.

Did you know?



Most diaries run from 1 January to 31 December, the calendar year. Academic diaries run from July one year to December the following year.

If you let yourself be distracted, you might not complete the list of tasks you'd planned to do in a day. All fresh interruptions have to be weighed against your current list of objectives: are they more important than what you'd already set out to do?



If an appointment is recurring, the calendar can set aside time for subsequent meetings automatically.

Figure 1.2: Outlook calendar

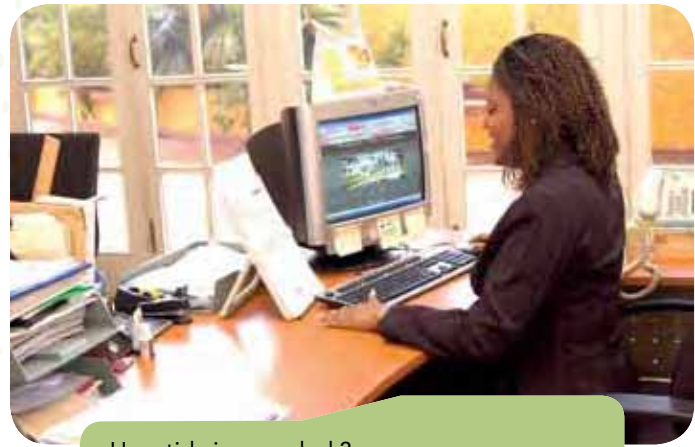
Interruption	The problem	The solution	Notes
Email	It takes time to read and respond to each email, but it also takes time to recover the momentum that was in effect before the interruption.	Batch the interruptions: instead of having an announcement arrive on-screen as soon as a new email arrives, check your inbox at regular intervals, e.g. once an hour. Clear all important emails and then resume other work; resist checking your inbox again for at least another hour.	Since the emails have to be processed at some point and other work needs to be completed too, the best strategy is to batch the interruptions. The time spent responding to emails is not reduced but the quality of time spent on other tasks is improved.
	Batching emails means there might be a longer delay in responding to any one email.	Apply a priority system: deal with the most important emails first.	Leave everything else until you have completed the day's tasks.
Telephone	You have a number of telephone calls to make.	Work through them in one sitting.	List the calls you need to make, ensuring you have all the details to hand (who you are going to call, their telephone number, any paperwork that you want to discuss with them, your diary etc.).
Voicemail	While you are on the phone or away from the office, incoming callers may leave messages on your voicemail.	When you return to the office or finish making outgoing calls, check your voicemail. Prioritise your responses. Which messages need actioning now/today? Could you send an email response instead?	Telephone conversations take up more time than sending an email. Your timing may inconvenience the other person – they may be on the phone or in a meeting – and you might end up having a voicemail conversation. An email provides a written record of your conversation.
People	If people constantly interrupt you, it can be impossible to complete a single task efficiently.	Arrive at the office an hour before anyone else and stay late? No. If you have your own office, close the door. If you have an assistant, tell them to field all interruptions, leaving you in peace for a specified period.	If you arrive early and leave late on a daily basis, there is not enough time for rest and relaxation – an essential part of anyone's day. It is important to handle interruptions in a way that does not offend anyone and yet allows you to complete your work during normal office hours. A closed door may be enough to deter casual interruptions. Some organisations encourage employees to work from home occasionally; this cuts out commuting time and helps to ensure quality working time.

Table 1.1: Handling interruptions

You do not work alone, so meetings are necessary; these may be one-on-one or group meetings. People often complain that meetings are a waste of time, but they needn't be if thought is given to the scheduling of meetings and the way these meetings are conducted.

- The date of each meeting should be agreed by all those attending the previous meeting. Regular meetings can be scheduled for many months ahead.
- Between meetings, an agenda should be drawn up so that everyone knows what is to be discussed.
- The agenda and any discussion papers should be circulated beforehand so that everyone can brief themselves ahead of the meeting.
- During the meeting, the chairperson should stick to the agenda and be aware of the time allowed for the meeting, cutting short discussion on items that are over-running so that the full agenda is covered.
- Off agenda items should not be allowed; they can be postponed and added to the next agenda.
- The minutes of the meeting should show what actions are expected and by whom before the next meeting. These should be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting and again when the agenda is sent out.

Even the handling of incoming correspondence (paperwork or electronic mail) can be organised so that you do not waste time. Your **in-tray** might hold letters from customers or suppliers, reports from



How tidy is your desk?

colleagues, or sample designs for products that you need to look at.

Allocate time – maybe once, twice or three times a day – to check your incoming correspondence to make sure you don't overlook something urgent. Make sure you allow long enough to identify each item's content and establish the urgency of any action you need to take. Categorise your mail into one of three classes – Now, Sometime or Never – as suggested in Table 1.2: Handling incoming mail.

Key term

In-tray – a physical tray for paperwork, or an electronic Inbox such as that provided by email software like Outlook.

Mail category	What to do	What not to do
NEVER No further action required	Bin it (move it to the Deleted Items folder in Outlook or shred if it is paper-based correspondence including sensitive personal details) OR File it (electronically in a folder or physically in a filing cabinet)	Do not leave it in your in-tray! If you don't have time to file material immediately, create a file called 'filing' and put the item in there, under the correct alphabetical letter. This will speed up the eventual filing process and will allow you to find things that you have not yet filed.
SOMETIME Needs time and thought and maybe action	Prioritise each item according to the deadline for dealing with it: today / this week / this month Add it to your 'to do' list	Do not leave it in your in-tray! Put the paperwork somewhere you will easily find it: in your briefcase if you plan to read it on the journey home, in a pending tray, or in the electronic folder called My Briefcase.
NOW Urgent and needs action now	Include this item in today's to-do list	If necessary, demote some other task to make room for this new one.

Table 1.2: Handling incoming mail

This strategy will prevent material piling up in your in-tray and should reduce the amount of time spent thinking about what to do with each item. It will also mean you spend less time hunting through your in-tray trying to find things.

'Do it once and do it right' is a simple adage to use that avoids duplication of effort.

Team working

Some people work in isolation but most people work as part of a team.

Every team has a team leader and others in the team have specific roles to play. It is important that everyone understands exactly what roles are undertaken by each team member, and that everyone in the team works well together.

Being a member of a team brings responsibilities. You need to report to others in the team about what you're doing and to keep up to date with what they're doing. This flow of communication helps to prevent situations where 'the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing'.

Team spirit, once established, is a motivating force that can help everyone in the team to perform better.

Verbal and written communication skills

Communication within a team and within an organisation is essential for the flow of information. This communication may be verbal (within a meeting or a one-to-one discussion) or written (an emailed memo or the minutes of a meeting).

Effective communication relies on verbal and written communication skills. Throughout this unit, you will be set tasks to stretch these skills.

Numeracy skills

Although few jobs require a high degree of mathematical skill, all jobs require some numeric skills. If you need to do calculations, you must be able to do them accurately. You should be able to use a calculator and to check your working by estimating the answer. During this course, there will be occasions when you need to analyse data and then your numeric skills will be put to the test.

How to... work well within a team

- 1 Make sure you understand your contribution to the team. You might be given a written brief, but if not, write down what you believe to be your role and check this with the team leader.
- 2 Find out who else is in the team and what roles they have to play. This will allow you to approach the right person directly if you need help, saving time and reducing unnecessary interruptions for others in the team.
- 3 Respect the working space of others in your team. If they need peace and quiet to think, make sure you do not invade that space.
- 4 If you have special requirements, make sure these are known to others. If these are sensitive issues, consult the team leader who should know the team members well enough to know how to handle any tricky situation.
- 5 If you have a problem concerning another member of the team, try to overcome this by reconsidering your own behaviour as well as that of the other person. You could mention your problem to your team leader, but be aware that others may also have a problem with you. It works both ways!
- 6 The team leader needs your support. If you have concerns about his/her leadership style, discuss it with him/her. There may be facts unknown to you which result in decisions that may seem strange to you. The team leader may be able to explain why a course of action has been taken – but you may just have to accept that your team leader knows best. Do not discuss your concerns with other team members or try to undermine the team leader.



Why is communication so important in a business context?





All jobs require some numeric skills.

Creativity

Creativity is needed in all lines of work, not just those involving an 'artistic' output. Employees who can dream up ideas and think laterally and 'outside the box' can make major contributions to the success of an organisation. Some companies have a suggestions box – if you make a suggestion that helps to improve productivity, reduce waste or make the customers happier, you will be rewarded.

Creativity involves original thought and, for this, your mind needs space to let these ideas flow. Artists – writers, painters, musicians – have rituals to prepare themselves for creative activity. Often, they can choose when and where they work, e.g. going to a desert island or locking themselves away in a studio. Some writers work best early in the morning but spend time sharpening pencils before they write the first word of the day. Some fuel their creativity with fine wine or have loud music playing in the background. Each has his/her own way of working.

The creative process requires discipline and practice. In a team-working environment, creativity has to be channelled despite background noise such as

machinery or conversation. To allow ideas to come through, you might need to create your own space within this busy environment.

1.3 Attitudes

Some skills can be learned, such as the technical skills and soft skills mentioned already. Other soft skills – such as determination, **independence**, integrity, tolerance, dependability, problem solving, leadership, confidence and self-motivation – are part and parcel of a person's temperament.

Key term

Independence – someone who has independence is able to act without depending on others, e.g. for financial support, approval or assistance in completing a task.

As each day passes, your attitudes may change.

- You may come into contact with people from different backgrounds and, by interaction with them, learn more about the motivations of others. This may give you a greater tolerance but it may harden your existing attitudes too.
- You may find yourself giving way to peer pressure. Within any group, norms are established regarding acceptable ways of behaviour. What people wear and how they speak to each other can be influenced by peer pressure.
- You may see things differently as you grow older. It is difficult to think in the same way as a 60-year-old when you are only 30 and, to a teenager, people over 30 may seem ancient and old-fashioned in their thinking. It is only as the years pass that people change their attitudes to certain situations, simply because they are older – and maybe wiser.

The attitudes an employer expects depend very much on the job specification and conditions of working. They also depend on the people already employed – a new employee needs to fit in.

Determination

Personal attitudes are difficult to learn. Instead, if you consider yourself to be lacking in some respect, you can try hard to overcome your natural inclinations. For many attitudes, there is a spectrum ranging from 'very much so' to 'hardly at all' that might describe you.

Determination is one such attitude. How determined are you?

- Are you so laid back that you are happy to go along with whatever anyone else suggests?
- Or are you so determined that you cannot see anyone else's point of view and simply railroad through objections?

Neither extreme is healthy! However, employers might prefer to have someone who is keen to see a job through, with the determination to overcome difficulties on the way.

Independence

An employer might advertise for 'someone who can think for themselves'. They will be looking for someone who is not totally dependent on being told what to do next, someone who can show some initiative. However, they will not want a new employee to act without checking first or consulting others as to what's normally done. Instead, common sense and a degree of flexibility should prevail.

Integrity

Integrity is essential for most jobs; for example, honesty is important when handling money. However, in some jobs, you might be more successful if you can blur the truth, put a spin on things, and say what people want to hear rather than telling the complete truth. In a management role for example, a mix of kindness and sensitivity is needed when telling employees unpalatable news, such as details of the impending closure of a workplace.

Tolerance

Tolerance might be considered essential in all walks of life. To accept that each person has his or her own way of doing things, and that some are more (or less) successful than others in meeting targets, shows a level of tolerance that might be summed up as 'live and let live'. This is especially important in team working situations.

However, in positions of authority, you cannot always be tolerant and you might be expected to show no tolerance at all in certain circumstances. For example, someone who behaves in a way that might present a hazard to others must be stopped from doing so, and someone who fails to hit a deadline may be jeopardising the jobs of fellow workers.

Dependability

Reliability is a measure of how dependable you are. Most employers would prefer a worker who is reliable: who always turns up for work on time, does what is expected and makes no waves.

Problem-solving

In any situation, some people will see only the problems they face and will be weighed down by them. Others may be quick, perhaps too quick, to see a solution. They may not appreciate the full extent of the problem.

Having an open mind and an optimistic attitude can be helpful when problem solving. If you assume that something is impossible, nine times out of ten you will prove yourself right. Similarly, if you take the attitude that nothing is impossible and are keen to look for a solution that works, you are likely to find one.

How to... solve problems



- 1 Identify the problem. Write down the current situation and what is wrong. Note also what is good about the current situation – your solution must try to preserve the best aspects of the situation.
- 2 Identify what you are trying to achieve with the solution. This may be a long-term goal and you may need to set some intermediary targets.
- 3 Think of all the things you could do and what their effects might be. Will they help or hinder progress?
- 4 Consider known methods of solving this problem that you have seen work before. If these seem to be suitable, you might adopt them, but first set aside time to consider alternative solutions.
- 5 Having established your options, measure each in terms of some cost. This could be time, effort, inconvenience to others, etc.
- 6 Review your options again, taking into account the pros and cons of each.
- 7 Make a decision and carry it through as planned.
- 8 Review the results of your decision and note any situation that surprised you or any unexpected positive or negative outcome. Keep this review for future reference.

Leadership

Everyone is a potential leader and opportunities for leadership occur daily. However, many people lack confidence or leadership experience – they doubt that they can lead and so they do not even try. Learning how to lead includes learning how to follow, so recognising the roles and responsibilities of leaders and followers is a must for those who work within a team.

To lead well, you need to be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses. Before others will respect you as their leader, you must respect yourself. You must understand people, so that you can identify what motivates them, what rewards and values matter to them and how, as a team leader, you can inspire them with your vision of what the team can achieve.

Confidence

If you lack confidence, your approach to problem solving may be too cautious – you may not have the courage to try the best strategy. Confidence in your ability to meet the challenges you face can help you to achieve your goals. Other people's confidence in your abilities can also make a difference to how your ideas are accepted.

However, over-confidence or arrogance may mean that you do not think things through carefully enough while planning your strategy. You may miss a vital clue or skim over an important aspect, resulting in problems at some point.


So, confidence is important but it must be based on genuine skill levels.

Self-motivation

Some people are described as self-starters – they do not need anyone else to motivate them to do something as they have their own internal drive.

People who are not self-motivated either do very little or use up their team mates' precious energy to keep them going. Such people are not welcome in a team.

Assessment activity 1.1

- 1 You are on work experience with the Right-On Recruitment agency and the manager that you have been job shadowing asks you to create a first draft of a leaflet to explain the personal attributes valued by employers. 

Grading tip

To achieve P1, you do not need to describe the attribute; just name it and explain why it is valued. Make sure you include a range of attributes including at least one of each of the following: specific attributes, general attributes and attitudes.

PLTS

As you research the different personal attributes required by different employers, you will develop your skills as an independent enquirer.

2. Understand the principles of effective communication

2.1 Principles

The principles of effective communication depend on the type of communication that you are using. There are some that apply in general, some that relate only to interpersonal communication and others that apply specifically to written communications.

- General communication skills apply regardless of the form of communication.
- Interpersonal communication skills come into play when you are talking to someone face to face or when your message is being communicated so that the audience can see and / or hear you (even if you cannot see or hear them).
- Written communication skills apply only when you commit a communication to paper (for example, in a letter, email or press release), to a slide in a presentation, or to a webpage (for example, in a blog).

Let's first look at general communication skills; we will then focus on interpersonal skills and how best to communicate in writing.

2.2 General communication skills

For communication to take place, there must be an audience for your message to be communicated to. Who that audience is will determine the type of language you use, the way you put your words together and how you deliver your message.

Cultural differences

Any cultural differences between you and your audience, or within your audience, will need to be addressed. Some words or signs that are acceptable in one language or culture may be misunderstood or considered offensive in another, so you might choose to use different words or gestures from the ones you would usually use.

Adapting to suit an audience

The age and composition of your audience can impact on the way you communicate with them.



You must be sensitive to cultural differences or age differences in your audience.

- You might raise your voice (or use a microphone to be heard) or vary your tone of voice – to modulate it – to maintain the interest of your audience.
- You might be selective in your choice of terminology, to make sure that everyone in your audience understands your message.
- You might present your message in a particular format (for example, using rhyme or music) or deliver it electronically.

Accuracy

Having adapted the content and style of your communication to meet the expectations or needs of your audience, you should next focus on the message that you are trying to convey. To win the hearts and minds of an audience, you may be tempted to stretch the truth or to make emotive statements to whip up feelings for or against some political or social issue. For some audiences, these tactics may work; however, it is usually best to stick to the truth and to include

only **facts** in your message. Otherwise, you risk being shown to be a liar: if this happens, you will lose credibility and no one will listen to you – no matter how conscientious you claim to be.

When aiming to provide accurate information, you must differentiate between facts and **opinions**. Day-to-day decision making is often based on opinions, so you must make sure that you are fully informed before making any decision – especially one that may affect other people as well as yourself.

Key terms

Facts – these can be proved: they are either true or false. Data can be collected and hypotheses tested.

Opinions – these are more complex: they vary from one person to the next and can change within the same person from one day to the next. Opinions can be strong or weak and may be influenced by knowledge – or the lack of it – of relevant facts.

Engaging the audience

To maintain the interest levels of your audience, whether they are reading a report you've written or listening to a presentation, you need to apply various techniques.

Imagine listening to a speaker whose voice never varied in tone – it would soon put you to sleep! When delivering your message, written or oral, make sure that you vary your tone.

In an oral presentation, you can create interest by pausing from time to time – long enough to let the audience take in what you have said, but not so long that they think you have forgotten what you were going to say next. You can create a similar effect in written communications if you:

- vary the sentence length, using longer sentences to carry a train of thought, and short punchy sentences to make a point
- use headings or bullet lists to section off or break up the message into manageable chunks.

In a face-to-face situation, you might use multimedia to hold the interest of the audience and keep their eyes from wandering to their surroundings. For example, you could show presentation slides, play music or hold up an object to illustrate a point. You could also say that there will be an opportunity to ask questions at the end

of your talk: this may encourage your audience to pay attention, thinking about what they might like to ask.

In written communications, diagrams and pictures can be used to good effect; in a presentation, animations can be used to enliven a slideshow. However, you need to apply caution, since too much activity can detract from your message. Similarly, staying completely still while delivering your message may unsettle an audience, but continually pacing up and down can also be distracting. A balance is needed.

Question and answer

Question and answer sessions can be particularly useful for clarifying points that you might have skimmed over in your presentation. You can't be sure how much your audience have understood until you hear their questions. Apart from satisfying their curiosity, you can use this feedback to improve your presentation for the next time around.

A question and answer session can also give the impression that the audience can throw any question to the speaker, and that the speaker will answer it. This is not always the case.

- In broadcast Q&A sessions, the questioners often have to submit their questions beforehand so these can be vetted, and the questioner may be told of the questions that will be asked so that they have time to prepare an answer.
- In face-to-face Q&A sessions, this level of control cannot be managed. However, the questioner may resort to saying what he/she wants to say – toeing the party line, so to speak – rather than actually answering the question.



Be prepared to answer questions after a presentation.

2.3 Interpersonal skills

For communication to happen, two or more people must be involved. One person expresses a message through words (spoken or written), signs, signals, facial and bodily expressions or even silence. The other person uses his/her senses (mostly sight and hearing) to gather aspects of the message.

Let's now consider how you might communicate your message to an audience and look at possible barriers to communication.

Methods

Verbal exchanges work for most people but those who cannot speak may sign a message, while someone who is deaf might rely on lip reading. The recognised signing system also acts as an aid for communication with the deaf.

Techniques and cues

To express emotion in verbal communications, some change of tone is needed.

- A raised voice can indicate anger or impatience.
- A lowered voice can show fear or insecurity.

In face-to-face discussions, the tone of voice may be accompanied by some body language.

- A fist being thumped on the table conveys more force than hands that are held together as if in prayer or hanging meekly at the speaker's side.
- Folded arms across the chest may show indifference or obstinacy.

Someone who is sighted, or at the end of a telephone line, doesn't have the extra dimension that body language offers during face-to-face communication. This person can still hear pauses though, and will identify any emotion conveyed through intonation.

Positive language

The word 'Yes' is a positive response to a question. Your facial expressions – such as a smile – can also convey a positive reaction. Nodding your head, or leaning towards the speaker, conveys your agreement or willingness to listen to what is being said.

Negative language

Cutting in while another person is speaking, depending on how you do it, can convey enthusiasm



Negative body language.

or may be seen as antagonistic. Finishing other people's sentences can be irritating and may indicate insensitivity on your part.

If you decide not to react at all and remain impassive, this also communicates a clear negative message to the speaker: you are bored and have no intention of listening.

Body language that indicates a negative attitude can act as a barrier to communication. For example, you are unlikely to persuade someone to open up and communicate with you frankly if you use closed body language and an aggressive stance.

Active engagement

Communication doesn't just happen when you are speaking: you can also communicate in several ways while the other person speaks. By paying attention and reacting to what the other person is saying (for example, with a nod or a frown) you are communicating that you hear what is being said and that you are taking note.

Once the other person has finished speaking, they may signal that you are expected to respond. They might end with a question (such as, 'Don't you agree?') or they might use body language to indicate that it is your turn to contribute to the conversation, by turning their body or inclining their head towards you. You can confirm your understanding of what has just been said by **summarising** it, before going on to make your own comments. You might also **paraphrase** what has been agreed between you.

Key terms

Summarise – to sum up the most important points of a communication.

Paraphrase – to say again but using different words.

Open question – one that could be answered in a variety of unanticipated ways

Closed question – one that expects a limited range of answers such as Yes/No.



Forgetting to turn your mobile phone off during a meeting is rude, and may be very distracting.

Barriers to communication

To communicate effectively, you need to prevent or reduce the effect of communication barriers as much as possible. For example, for an audience to hear you, your voice should be clear and loud enough, without any distortion or interference. Therefore, it is important not to position the mouthpiece of a telephone under your chin and, in direct communication, you should face your audience.

Background noise should not be underestimated. Even a slight continuous noise, such as the humming of an air conditioning unit or the ticking of a clock, can distract an audience.

Distractions (such as someone walking into a meeting late or leaving unexpectedly, the arrival of the tea trolley or a mobile phone beeping) can interrupt the flow of thought of an audience and, momentarily, they could stop listening to you. As soon as that happens, communication will falter and you, as the speaker, might feel the need to repeat part of the message.

Lack of concentration from your audience will also hinder communication. It is important to maintain concentration levels despite any distractions. The length of a conversation or communication is important – the recipient can only take in so much information at a time and anything beyond that is

counterproductive. For example, a short verbal rebuke might prove useful but the recipient is likely to lose concentration if this turns into a lecture on behaviour.

This also holds true for written communications. If you can convey your message on one page of A4, then do so. The recipient of a two-page letter will have lower concentration levels when they turn the page.

Types of question

Communication is not just two people speaking in turn. There needs to be a link between the people and questions can help to create such a link.

- An **open question** is an invitation to the other person to pick up the conversation and take control. For example, if you ask 'How are you today?' there are a multitude of possible responses. The conventional response is 'I'm fine, thanks. And how are you?' whether or not this is true. During a debate on an issue, a constructive open question might be 'What do you think about this?' This invites the other person to express their views.
- **Closed questions** are expressed in such a way that the options for a reply are limited, perhaps only to 'yes' or 'no'. 'Would you like a cup of tea?' is a closed question. The question can be made less specific: 'Would you like something to drink?' but this may still result in a yes/no answer. To find out exactly what is required, you would need a follow-up question: 'What would you like to drink?'

Either form of question is acceptable during most conversations. With open questions, you may not find out what you want to know; in this case, you will need to follow up with additional questions – called **probing questions** – to extract the information you want. In personal conversations, such questions might be considered unacceptable because they delve too deeply into a person's private space. In some circumstances, it may be effective to repeat questions, but this may be considered aggressive or impolite.

Key term

Probing question – one that seeks out further information and narrows the responses down to the required answer

Even closed questions can be threatening if used during an argument. 'You agree with me, don't you?' expects a yes or no answer and forces the other person to declare his or her position. A cautious response that shows diplomacy might be 'yes and no', followed up with some explanation about the points of agreement or disagreement.

Speed of response

Questions can be answered in a number of ways:

- quickly and maybe with passion
- slowly after what looks like consideration of all the issues
- something in between or not at all.

Answering a question with a question is a delaying tactic that is often used in discussions. Repeating the question back to the questioner is another delaying tactic that sometimes works.

Assessment activity 1.1

P3 M1 BTEC

- 1 You will take part in a group discussion, under direction from your tutor. During the discussion, the potential barriers to communication are to be discussed and demonstrated. **P3**
- 2 You will observe a group discussion and then write a brief report explaining mechanisms that can reduce the impact of communication barriers. **M1**

Grading tips

- To achieve P3, you must describe at least one barrier from each of: general communication skills (e.g. a diverse audience); interpersonal skills (e.g. background noise); and written communications (e.g. using an inappropriate structure).
- You will have witnessed at least one barrier from each of: general communication skills; interpersonal skills; and written communications. To achieve M1, you should explain – not just describe – the mechanisms which may be used to reduce the impact of these barriers and why you think each may work.

PLTS

As you take part in a group discussion, you will develop your skills as a team worker and an effective participator. In your explanation of the ways in which barriers to communication can be overcome, you will demonstrate your skills as a creative thinker.

2.4 Communicate in writing

Written communication is fundamentally different from other forms of communication. It requires special skills in the construction of the message – not least, the ability to handwrite or type. It also requires a good knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language (such as English) so that the written word conveys the intended message to the audience. You cannot use visual cues such as body language or oral cues such as tone of voice.

Writing something can seem very easy, but effective written communication is another matter. You need to understand how you can best communicate in writing and what constraints might be imposed by your working conditions. We will identify how you might use the tools at your disposal to communicate a message to your audience, minimising the risk of misunderstandings.

Guidelines

As an employee, you will be expected to follow organisational guidelines and procedures.

- You will be allocated space in which to work, and you will be given notice of the times you should attend the office and/or be available for others to contact you. You will be supplied with the communications equipment you will need in your day-to-day work, such as a computer, a telephone

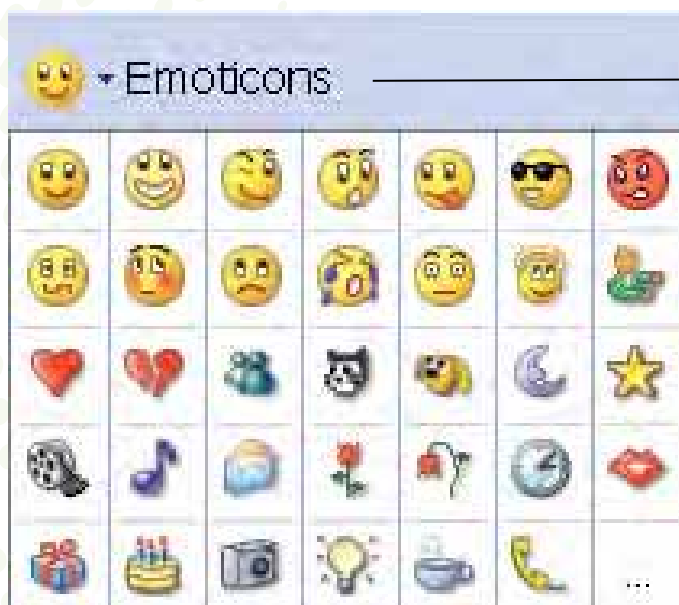
and stationery, and you may be given access to other essential materials such as a shared fax facility.

- There may be guidelines restricting the ways computer equipment is to be used. For example, there could be rules relating to the use of emails and faxes and the type of information that can be sent by email or fax (for reasons of confidentiality).
- There could be templates that you are required to use for your written communications, with style sheets that determine the look of any document. For example, in emails you might be required to use a standard footer with the company name and your job title, or there could be a standard disclaimer.

Organisational guidelines are created to ensure a consistent and secure style of communication from those within the organisation to those outside the organisation. As a representative of the organisation you will be bound by these guidelines.

Smileys or emoticons

Smileys – also called emoticons (see Figure 1.3) – can be used to express a frame of mind. These are used in text messaging and on Internet forums and social networks like Facebook. They are not suitable for serious communications and would be frowned upon in the workplace.



A range of emoticons is available with most forms of 'chat' or private messaging system.

Figure 1.3: Examples of emoticons

Key messages

Whatever form a written communication takes – report, letter, fax or email – there will be a key message to be conveyed. Within a letter, this may be flagged by the inclusion of a heading, immediately after the salutation (see Figure 1.4); electronic faxes and emails use a subject line to convey the key message (see Figure 1.5).

The heading is centred and appears just after the salutation.



Figure 1.4: Key facts in a letter heading

The Subject column indicates what the email is about.

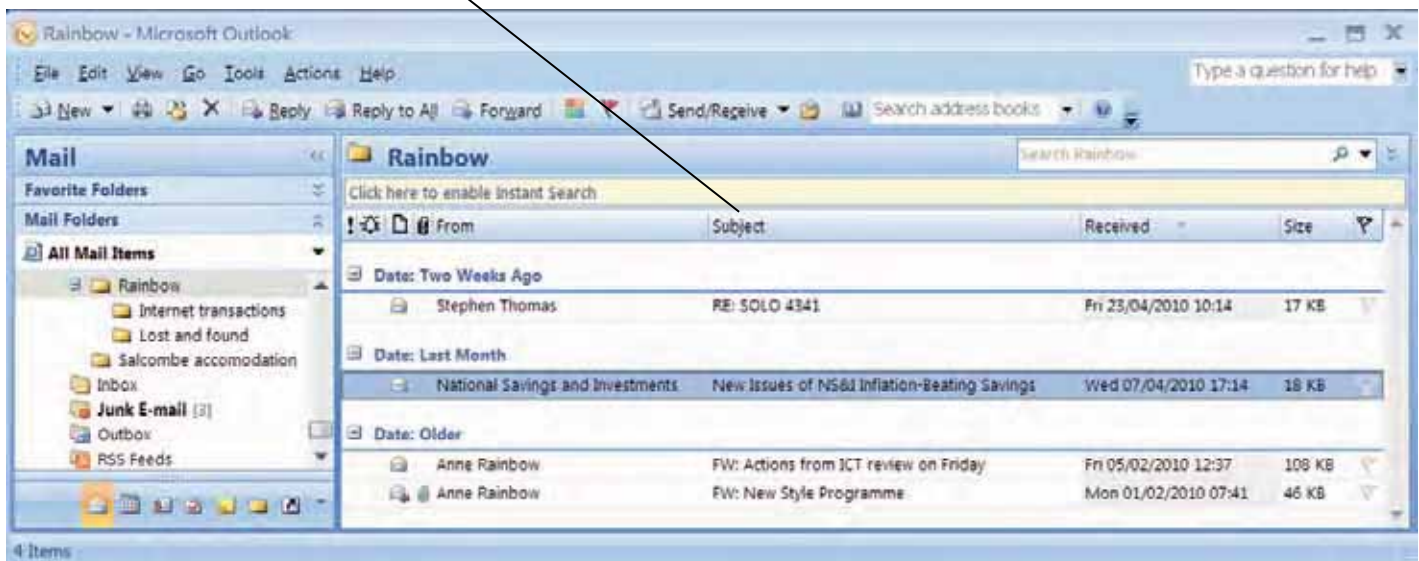


Figure 1.5: Key facts in the subject line of an email

Grammar and spelling

The body of a report, letter, fax or email will add substance to the key message.

- It may provide an explanation or apology.
- It may contain further information, such as directions or an itinerary, or it may request action.

Whatever the content of the communication, it is important that it is written using correct grammar and spelling. Mistakes convey an unprofessional image to the reader; they can also create confusion if the mistakes result in the message being difficult to understand.

Word processing software offers grammar/spell checker options. Use them, but with caution; see page 30.

Structure

If the message runs to more than a line or two, make sure you structure it in a way that aids the reader's understanding.

- A logical framework with material presented in a sensible order – using headings and perhaps bullet lists – should help the reader to take in the information without a struggle and without having to read the material more than once. You might decide to number your points, or present some material in bold so that it stands out.
- An illogical framework will mean that the reader has to work harder to interpret your meaning, and this could result in misunderstandings.

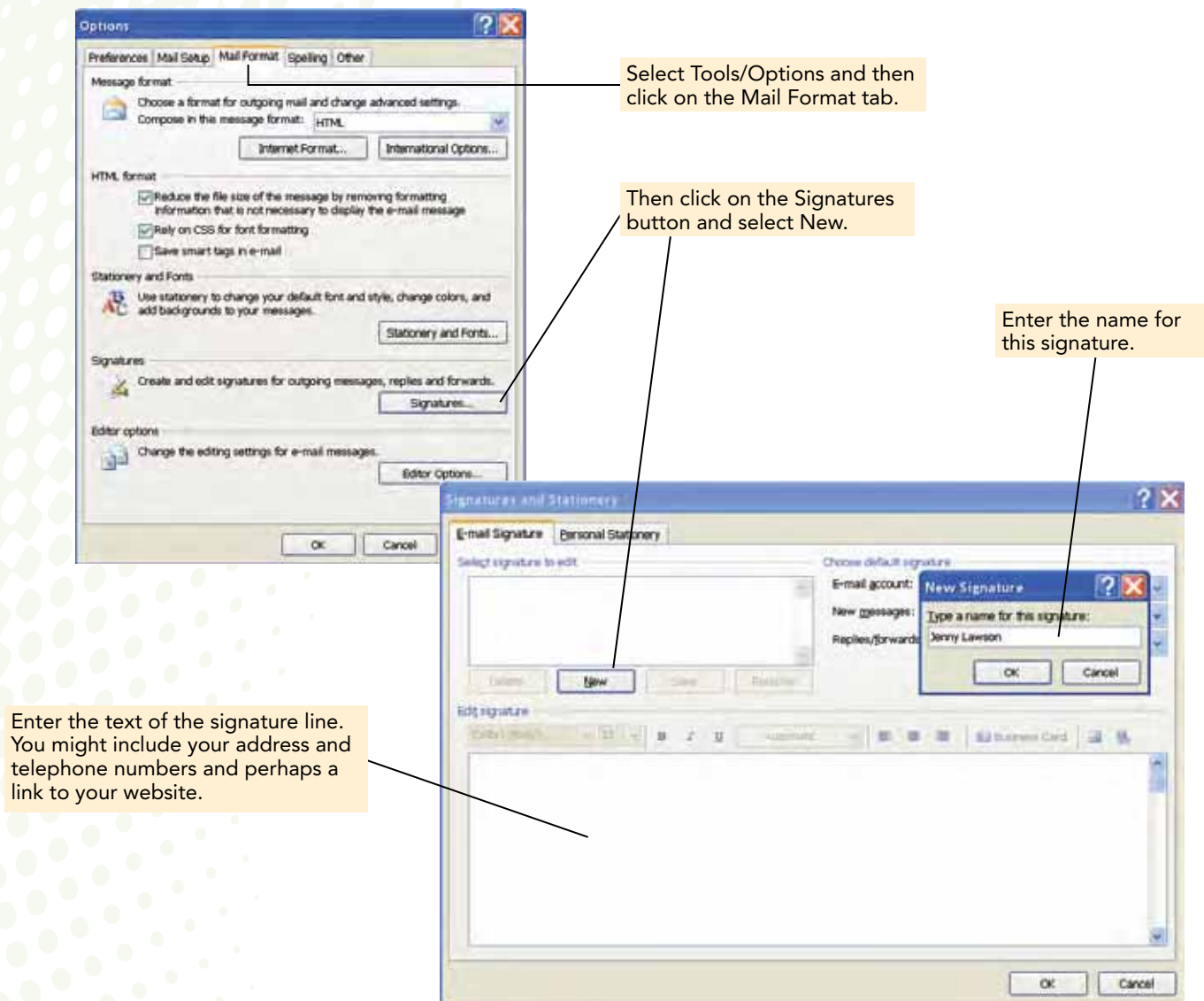


Figure 1.6: Setting up a standard signature for an email

You may be presented with templates for letters and emails, with standard wording that you are expected to adapt for specific communications with suppliers, customers and colleagues. If not, it is a good idea to reuse and adapt communications that you have used previously to convey a similar message.

Identifying relevance

When reading your report, letter or email, the recipient will try to identify relevant information within it. In a structured message, this task is made easier. However, if you have hidden relevant information within a mass of other details, the reader may miss important facts.

Underlining or boldening important relevant information – such as the date of a meeting – is one way of ensuring that such facts are not missed. However, pruning the message so that it contains only relevant information is even more helpful to the reader.

There may be a standard way of signing off a letter that includes your official title and full contact details, e.g. telephone number, email address and/or postal address. If not, adopt your own standard way (see Figure 1.6) which makes it clear that the communication is from you.

Proofreading

Key term

Proofreading – a process of checking, looking for errors within a written piece of text.

Before you send a written communication such as a report, text message, email or letter, it is essential to review and check your work for accuracy.

When you first create a written communication, the document is called a draft. Each time you redraft your document, you should **proofread** the text to check that you have not introduced errors. This is in addition to the use of tools such as a spell checker (see page 30).

Finding errors in your own work is tricky; your eye reads what your brain thinks you planned to write and compensates for it. Even when there are spelling errors, your brain can make sense of the text.

There are various techniques you can try to improve your proofreading ability.

- Arrange with someone else that you will proofread their work and they will proofread yours. Some

people are better at spotting errors anyway, and each pair of fresh eyes is a bonus. Your reading of their work will improve your ability to spot mistakes.

- Allow time to pass before you proofread, so that you have distanced yourself from what you wrote. Look at it with fresh eyes yourself.
- Read your piece more slowly than you normally would, out loud, focusing on one word at a time.
- Read the piece line by line, backwards.

Alternative viewpoints

Some documents can be used to present alternative viewpoints (for example, a report or a letter), and the structure of such documents must make it clear where each viewpoint starts and ends. The structure may include an introduction to explain the purpose of the document and a summary to précis the main points covered.

For example, a report may consider the effects of two different courses of action – a table may prove useful in presenting the pros and cons of each situation and graphs may help to show alternative results.

Note taking

You will not be alone in generating written communications in your workplace.

- Colleagues will be sending you documents, which you might need to edit before they are circulated. Alternatively, you could receive a document before a meeting which you need to review so that you are fully informed and ready to discuss the content at the meeting.
- You may receive documents from external sources, which you will need to review. For instance, a supplier might present a quotation or you might commission some research to help you make a decision regarding new equipment or a course of action.

When reviewing a communication, you may find it helpful to take notes. This is especially useful when the communication is long and contains a lot of information. Note taking may involve:

- handwriting key points on a new sheet of paper
- annotating a hard copy of the message: writing in the margin, underlining key phrases or using a highlighter pen for important facts, dates or times
- using reviewing tools to annotate the electronic document with your comments (see Figure 1.7).

Highlight the text you want to comment on and click on the New Comment icon.

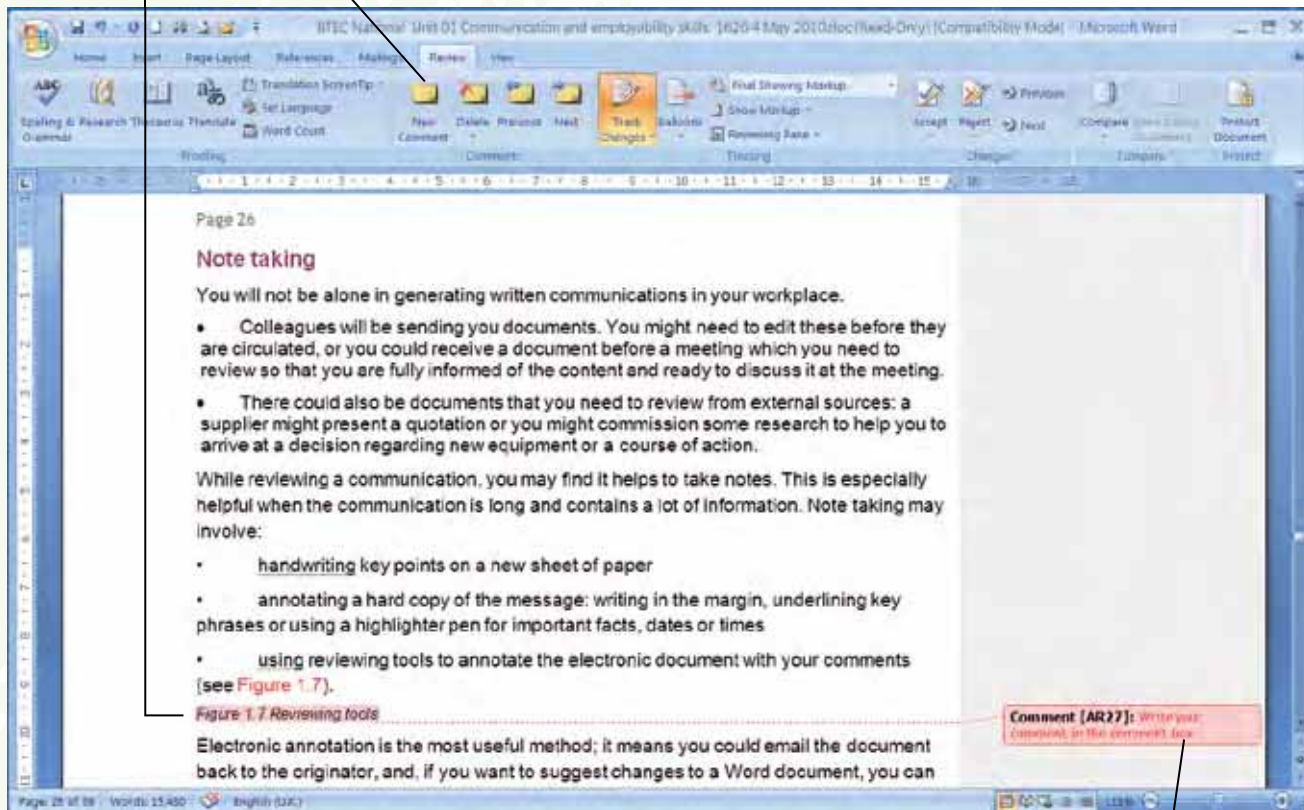


Figure 1.7: Reviewing tools

A numbered comment box will appear. Click within the comment box and write your comment there.

Electronic annotation is the most useful method. It allows you to email the document back to the originator, and, if you want to suggest changes to a Word document, you can use Track Changes. When you email the document back to its originator, he or she can accept or reject your suggestions (see Figure 1.8) and the document can be revised in accordance with your combined wishes. Progress is made.

Capitalisation

Capital letters are used at the start of a sentence (like the C in this sentence) or for proper nouns like James and Portugal. They are also used for abbreviations like UK and USA and for acronyms like WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get).

In written communications, especially text messages or emails, capitalisation of entire words or phrases is taken to mean shouting, and is therefore to be avoided (unless you intend to shout).

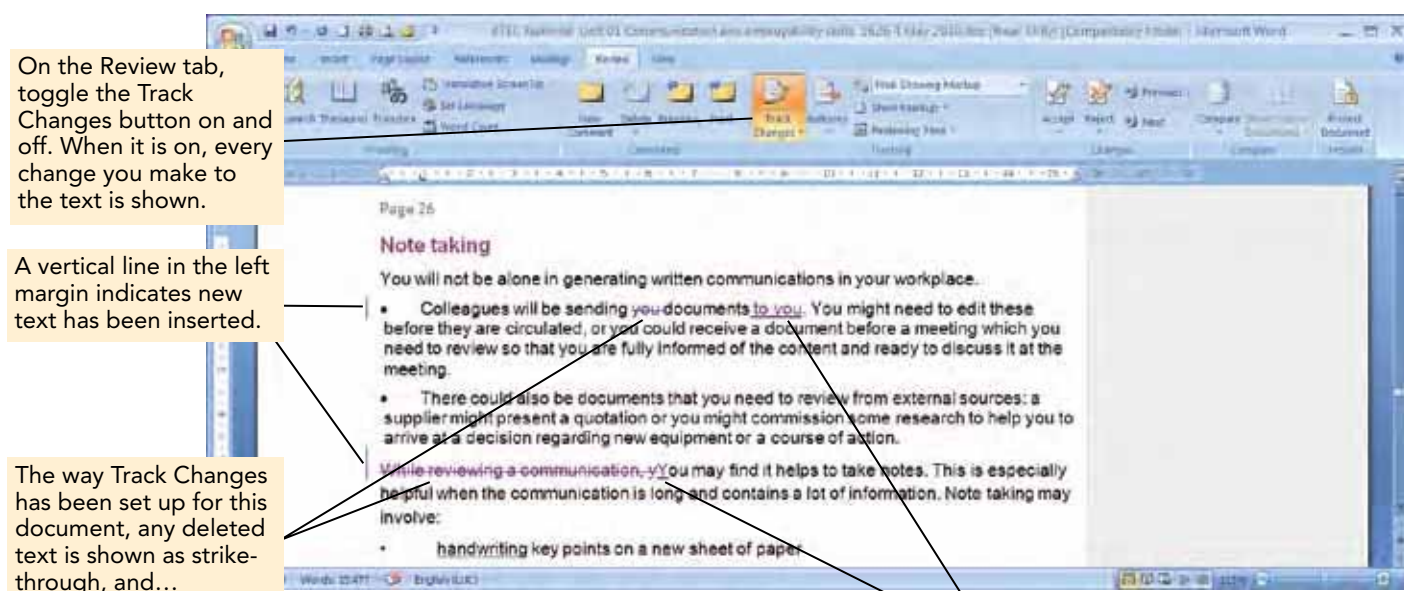


Figure 1.8: Using Track Changes

Assessment activity 1.3

P2 P4 D1

BTEC

- 1 The manager at Right-On Recruitment has asked you to expand the leaflet you produced for Assessment activity 1.1 (detailing the personal attributes valued by employers) to include advice on the principles of effective communication. **P2**
- 2 Under direction from your teacher, demonstrate a range of effective interpersonal skills. **P4**
- 3 Having observed others demonstrating their interpersonal skills, write an evaluation of their communication techniques. Exchange copies of your evaluations and then write an evaluation of the written communication techniques employed in their evaluation of your interpersonal skills. **D1**

Grading tips

- To achieve P2, you need to discuss two or three relevant principles from each category: general skills, interpersonal skills and written communication skills. You do not need to go into great detail.
- To achieve P4, you will need to undertake a variety of interpersonal communications, from normal day-to-day interactions with your group to giving a short presentation which your class may be asked to assess. Your early attempts may reveal lack of confidence on your part so practise until you can communicate with ease.
- When analysing the interpersonal and communication techniques of others, be sure to refer to all aspects studied in this unit: this is your opportunity to show strong insights into the ideas explored to date. Most importantly, make sure your report demonstrates your own ability to communicate effectively. This will enable you to achieve D1.

PLTS



As you work with other members of your class to demonstrate your interpersonal skills and assess the communication techniques of others, you will develop your skills as a team worker and an effective participator.

3. Be able to use IT to communicate effectively



Activity: In the good old days

In the good old days, politicians canvassed for support by standing on a soapbox in the town square and declaring their intentions, if elected.

Later, prospective MPs used cars with loudspeakers on the roof to tour their constituency, urging their supporters to come out and vote.

In 2008, US President-Elect Barack Obama used email to reach voters during his campaign for office; in 2010, UK politicians followed suit.

- Look back over the past 100 years and identify changes in communication methods – radio, television, mobile technology and the Internet – and consider how these developments have impacted on politics.
- In what way can the social networks of today, such as Facebook and Twitter, be deployed to create momentum in an election?



How have developments in communication affected political campaign methods?

3.1 Communication channels

A number of communication channels are available, each one suited to a particular type of message

(see Table 1.3: Communication channels).

Communication channel	Description/Examples	Benefits	Disadvantages
Word-processed documents	Presented on paper and/or on screen Can include text, tables and still images Reports, business letters, newspapers and magazines	Hard copy is portable: you don't need to have access to a computer Hard copy can form a permanent record (e.g. for minutes of a meeting that need to be authorised as true) With on-screen documents, you can use the search option to locate particular information within the document	For a hard copy, the document has to be printed, which uses costly resources: paper and ink You need a computer to view the document on screen Some people find it more difficult to navigate through an electronic document – they cannot memorise where something was on a page
Presentations	A slide show Can be viewed with or without a presenter being there	Usually a short and snappy way of conveying key points, especially when used to illustrate a verbal presentation	Requires presentation hardware: a computer screen, whiteboard and/or projector

Communication channel	Description/Examples	Benefits	Disadvantages
Email	Electronic message Can include attachments such as a Word document	Can be sent to more than one recipient at the same time Speedier than snail mail	Sender and recipient both need to subscribe to an email service Need access to the Internet while sending/receiving emails
Web pages	Can include audio and moving images Written in HTML code and/or scripting language such as Java	Available online to all Internet users Interactivity may be provided, giving the visitor to the site a more rewarding experience while accessing the information Updating a website can be achieved very quickly, compared to the time it might take to republish a book (for example)	Requires skill in creating the elements of the web page and knitting them together to build a coherent, user-friendly website Computer with Internet access is needed to upload updated web pages
Blogs	An online journal, displaying frequent and chronological comments and thoughts for all to see	Offers the same benefits as a web page, and provides insight into one person's view of life Individuals can access a worldwide readership without going through the medium of a publisher or the complexities of setting up a website	Same disadvantages as web pages except that software is available to help the blogger
Vlogs	A medium for distributing video content Usually accompanied by text, image and metadata to provide a context or overview for the video	Offers the same benefits as a web page Allows individuals with little web development experience to air their views on the Internet	Same disadvantages as web pages
Podcasts	A method of publishing files (especially large audio files) to the Internet	Subscribers receive new files automatically Allows subscribers to decide what they hear and/or watch and when	Internet access is necessary for downloading files Users need to subscribe to a feed
Video conferencing	A way for many people, located in different places, to communicate 'face-to-face' without actually leaving their desks	Saves travelling time Costs of setting up and maintaining video conferencing are more than recouped by savings in travel and subsistence costs of delegates	Technical expertise is required to set up the audio and video links

Table 1.3: Communication channels

Key terms

Blog – stands for weblog.

Vlog – a blog which uses video as its primary presentation format.

Podcast – a media file distributed over the Internet for playback on portable media players and personal computers. The term originates from Apple's iPod and the word broadcasting.

3.2 Software

Let's now review four types of standard software that you'll use to communicate your message: word processing software, presentation packages, email software and specialist software for the visually impaired.

Word-processing software

With word processing software, you can enter, edit, format, save and print out text-based documents.

- Text can be entered via the keyboard and you can also adapt materials from secondary sources: you could copy and paste text from another document or from a webpage or you could scan in text and convert it into a Word document.

- Editing involves inserting, amending or deleting text to reword the document. It is achieved by inserting new text (keying it in or pasting it into place from elsewhere), amending the text (typing over it while using Overtyping mode or pasting over existing material) or deleting text.
- Text can be formatted on one of two levels: **character formatting** or **paragraph formatting**.

Key terms

Character formatting – affects only those characters selected and can be used to highlight individual words. For example, to make important material stand out, you could change the font colour or present the material in italic, bold or underlined.

Paragraph formatting – affects the entire paragraph and is used to control the spacing of lines within, before and after the paragraph. It sets the basic look of the text (font style and size) and may be incorporated into a style sheet or template.

- Because you can save your work, you can begin a letter or report one day and then work on it again at some later date. You can retrieve the finished document at an even later date and use it to create another document. For example, an annual report has the same basic structure each year; it is just the details that change. Having set up a report in the required style, the following year's report should take less time to produce.
- A word processed document can be printed. You can preview the document before you print it, so you can proofread what you have written on screen without wasting paper. You can also fine tune the settings for margins and horizontal/vertical spacing to create the best visual effect on the page.

Presentation packages

A presentation package facilitates the construction of a sequence of slides, in the order you want to display them, with notes. Templates for a range of slide layouts let you incorporate bullet lists, tables and images. You can also incorporate other media (sound and video) or animations (see Figure 1.9).

On the Animations tab, click on Custom Animation.

Select the text you want to animate, and then choose what effects you want for it.

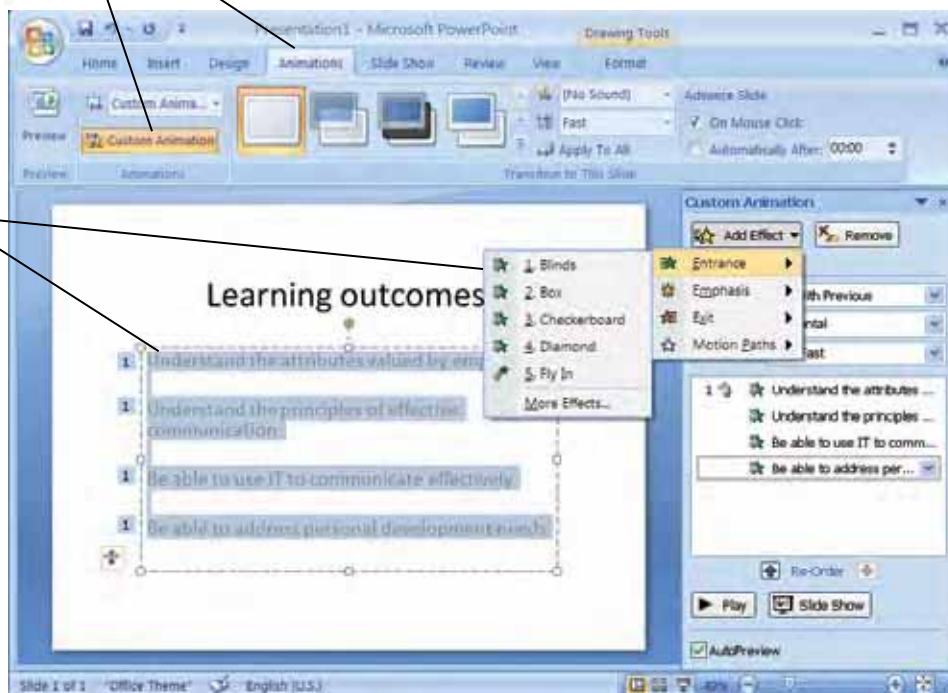


Figure 1.9: Options for animation

The presentation package then offers various ways of running the presentation:

- on a whiteboard, with you controlling the transition from one slide to the next while you talk
- running continuously at a pace to suit most viewers, so that you do not need to be present
- with interactivity, allowing the viewer to decide when to view the next slide.

Email software

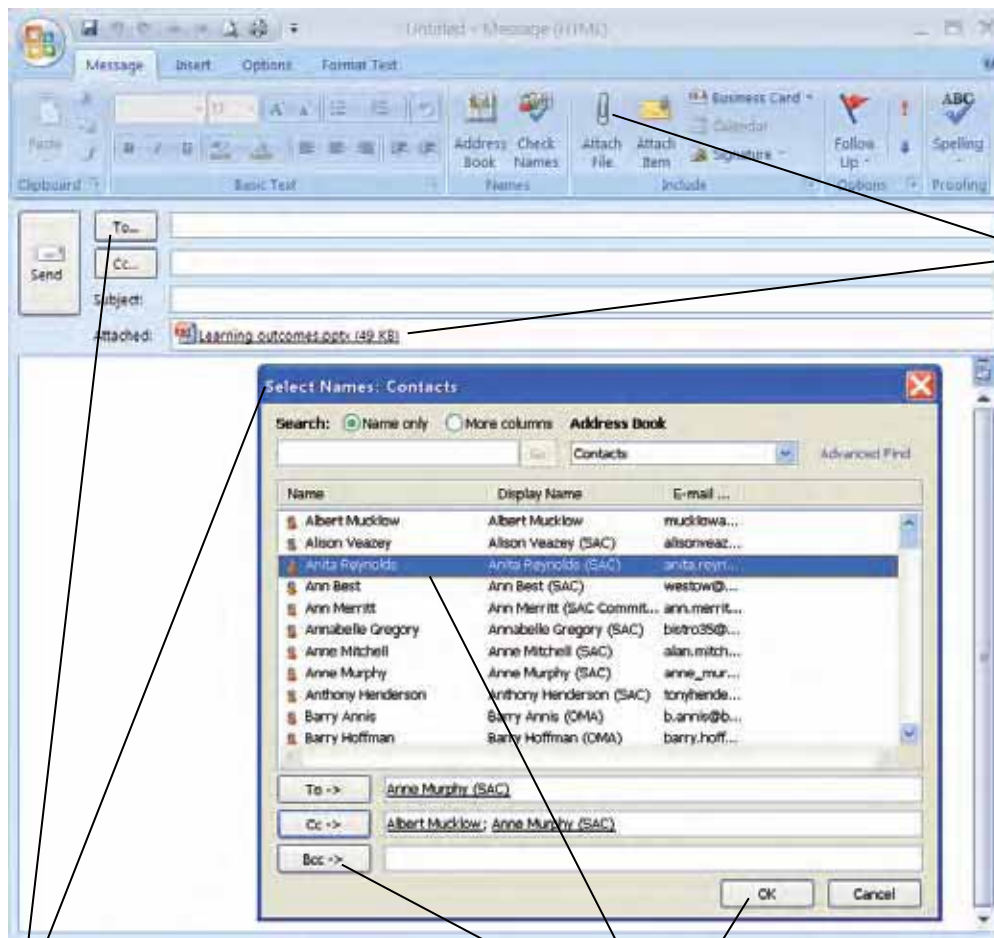
Email software is provided by ISPs who offer email as part of the Internet connection deal. You can also install an email client on your computer, such as Microsoft Outlook, which – while you are online – downloads incoming emails into your Inbox and uploads outgoing emails from your Outbox.

Whichever version of software you use, there are functions for composing a new email, replying to an incoming email and forwarding an incoming email. Having set up an email, you can attach documents to it and send it to one or more people (see Figure 1.10).

You can set up an address book to hold the email addresses of people you want to send emails to. You can set this up using data which arrives with the email (the email includes the address of the person who sent it). You can also set up distribution lists: these allow you to send emails to a particular group of people.

Specialist software

Specialist software is available, for example, for the visually impaired. You might think that the visually impaired cannot see a computer or presentation



To attach a file, click on Attach File and browse to locate the file. It will appear in the Attached field.

To send an email to more than one contact, click on To: to open the Select Names: Contacts window.

Click on names to highlight them. Click on To: or Cc: or Bcc: to add them to the list. Click OK when you have selected all intended recipients.

Figure 1.10: Sending an email to more than one person

screen or a hard copy of a document; however, visual impairment covers a whole spectrum of sight problems.

- Some individuals are only slightly affected, while others are totally blind and cannot distinguish light from dark.
- Some people lose their sight through trauma, as a result of war or through disease. Most people are affected by deteriorating vision with advancing age.

Whether visual impairment comes about quickly or over time, IT can offer solutions to those who need help.

- Text readers, for example, can be used to convert material that has arrived in text form (by email or as an attached document) into an aural output which can be heard.
- Hardware has also been developed to help: a Braille printer has an embosser that punches dots on to paper rather than printing characters in ink. Braille printers connect to the computer in the same way as text printers, using a serial or parallel port. You can also buy Braille translation software that translates printed text into Braille.

3.3 Review documents

Having written the first draft of a document, the review stage begins.

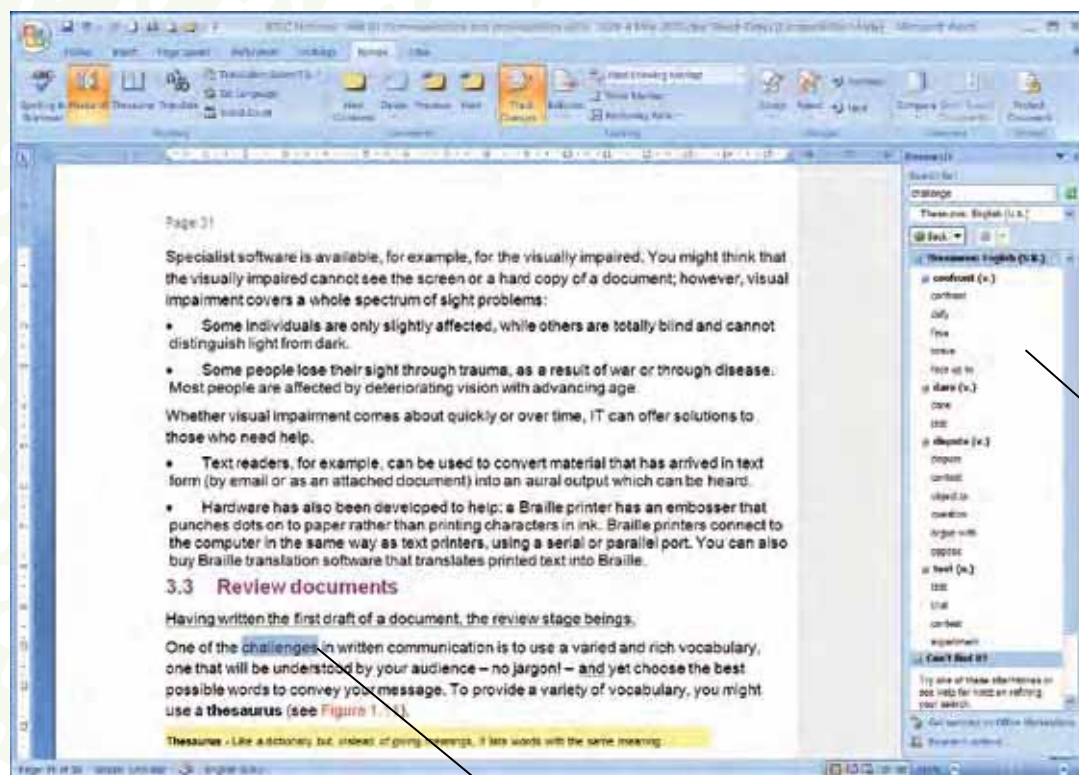
One of the challenges in written communication is to use a varied and rich vocabulary: you need to be understood by your audience – no jargon! – and yet you need to choose the best possible words to convey your message. To provide a variety of vocabulary, you might use a **thesaurus** (see Figure 1.11).

To make sure that you spell words correctly, you might use a **spell checker** (see Figure 1.12) which will flag a mistake like 'hwere' instead of 'where'. However, it is important to note that a spell checker will accept 'were' instead of 'where' because both words appear in the dictionary.

Key terms

Thesaurus – similar to a dictionary but, instead of giving meanings, it lists words with the same meaning.

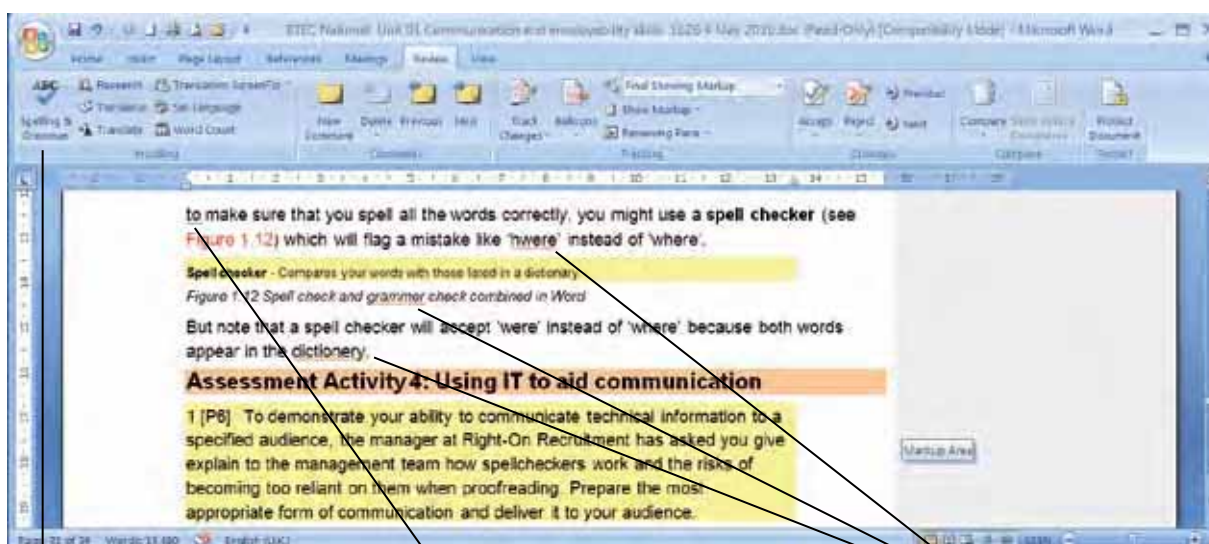
Spell checker – compares your words with those listed in a dictionary, to ensure that they are spelled correctly.



Because 'challenges' is plural, you are offered 'challenge' and, if you click on that, then the panel offers alternative words, dividing them into verbs and nouns.

Figure 1.11: An electronic thesaurus

Highlight the word you want to replace, right click and select Synonyms/Thesaurus [or press the Thesaurus button, or key Shift/F7].



Click on Spelling & Grammar to identify errors and fix them one by one.

Mistakes in grammar are underlined with a green zigzag line. This word starts a sentence so should have a capital T.

Words underlined with a red zigzag line are not spelled correctly.

Figure 1.12: Spell check and grammar check combined in Microsoft Word.

Assessment activity 1.4

P5 P6 M2

BTEC

- 1 To demonstrate your ability to communicate technical information to a specified audience, the manager at Right-On Recruitment has asked you to explain to the management team how spellcheckers work and outline the risks of becoming too reliant on them when proofreading. Prepare the most appropriate form of communication and deliver it to your audience. **P6**
- 2 Demonstrate your technical skills by using IT as an aid to the communication for Question 1, or for some other communication. **P5**
- 3 Your manager at Right-On Recruitment has asked you to review the draft leaflet created for Assessment activity 1.1, to produce a final version for distribution to fellow students. **M2**

Grading tips

- The technical information you provide for P6 does not have to be IT-related, so you could communicate on a topic relevant to another course you are studying, or on some aspect of your life outside school. Choose the form and style of communication carefully to ensure it is appropriate, considering the subject material and your audience.
- To achieve P5, you should use at least two proofing tools (such as spell check and thesaurus), plus one other tool that your software offers.
- When reviewing the document, you do not need to use the standard proofreading marks but you must annotate your early draft(s) to show what changes were to be made. Evidence for M2 could come from the review of another document altogether, one of your own creations or someone else's work.

PLTS

As you review your own and others' draft documents in order to identify improvements, you will develop your skills as an effective participator.



4. Be able to address personal development needs

Activity: Strengths and weaknesses



When you're in full-time employment – when your boss is deciding who to promote and how much of a rise you deserve – you will most likely be put through an appraisal system that identifies your plus points and minus points, and monitors and reviews your progress formally on a regular basis.

Now, though, you have an opportunity to find out how your personal learning style might have helped or hindered you in the past and to address your personal development needs – without risking a salary freeze!

Personal development means building on your strengths and managing your weaknesses.

- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?

you agree to meet. If you then fail to meet agreed targets, you may be dismissed.

- **Customer feedback:** some organisations encourage customers to provide feedback about employees. Guests of a hotel chain, for example, may be invited to complete a questionnaire about the levels of service experienced during their stay. This can reflect well or badly on specific groups of employees, such as the reception staff, the housekeeping team or the bar/restaurant staff.
- **Performance data:** some organisations collect data to record the performance of individual employees. A supermarket, for example, can record how quickly a checkout worker scans products, how many customers are served during one shift and what turnover is taken during that shift. Each of these measures, taken in isolation, may not seem very fair. One customer might buy a lot of low-priced items, all of which are bulky, resulting in a slower scanning process. Another customer might find that an egg has broken and the completion of the transaction will be delayed while a fresh box is fetched. As with any statistical analysis, the sample group must be large enough to represent the entire population if the data is to prove useful. Over a long enough period of time, one checkout operator can be compared against another.

4.1 Identification of need

Development needs are, by their very nature, personal. They apply to a single individual and each individual may have completely different development needs from his/her neighbour.

To discover your personal development needs, the first step is self-assessment.

This section also considers assessment by others, such as a formal report from a line manager, customer feedback and other performance data that an employer may choose to collect.

Formal reports

Formal reports provide your employer with an opportunity to record your progress within the organisation.

- **Appraisal meeting notes:** a properly conducted appraisal, and the notes recorded from this, can help people to progress in their job and make improvements in their work, adding to increased self-esteem and job satisfaction. The appraisal report could list any decisions that are made to train you or to redirect your energies through promotion, demotion or sideways moves. If your behaviour or performance is less than satisfactory, this may also be recorded, together with targets that you are expected to achieve and that, by negotiation,

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is an essential part of personal development planning.

During this course, you will have had opportunities to consider your own strengths and weaknesses, your best and worst traits, and those of others in your group. There should also have been opportunities for others to express their opinion of you and for you to assess others and tell them what you think of them.

What others see in you tends to be what you choose to reveal about yourself. You have the option to hide certain traits and to promote the ones that you want others to recognise in you. The same goes for other people. So, in assessing someone else, you should be aware that you are only seeing what that person chooses to reveal. They may have hidden qualities that are revealed at certain times – perhaps in times of stress or when that person has the confidence to be more honest with you.

For personal development planning to be successful, you must be honest with yourself. If you cannot see your own faults, you cannot overcome them. Enlisting the help of others might help you to see yourself differently and more objectively.

4.2 Records

This section reviews two types of records: personal development plans (PDPs) and appraisal records.

Target setting

While completing this unit, you should have produced and followed a PDP. The process of thinking about your future and your plans (and setting short-term, medium-term and long-term goals) should have given you an insight into how useful PDPs can be. It is essential to think about what to do and to plan how you will achieve your goals. It is also important to record these goals and any objectives that you establish, and to note the progress that you make: this will enable you to monitor your progress and set more realistic targets in future.

Appraisal records

For an employer, appraisal records are important as a way of recording what you and your manager plan for the coming year. They are useful for recording work and training goals and for identifying areas for improvement. See also the section on Formal reports on page 32.

4.3 Addressing needs

There are a range of options open to an individual to address needs that have been identified during an assessment process.

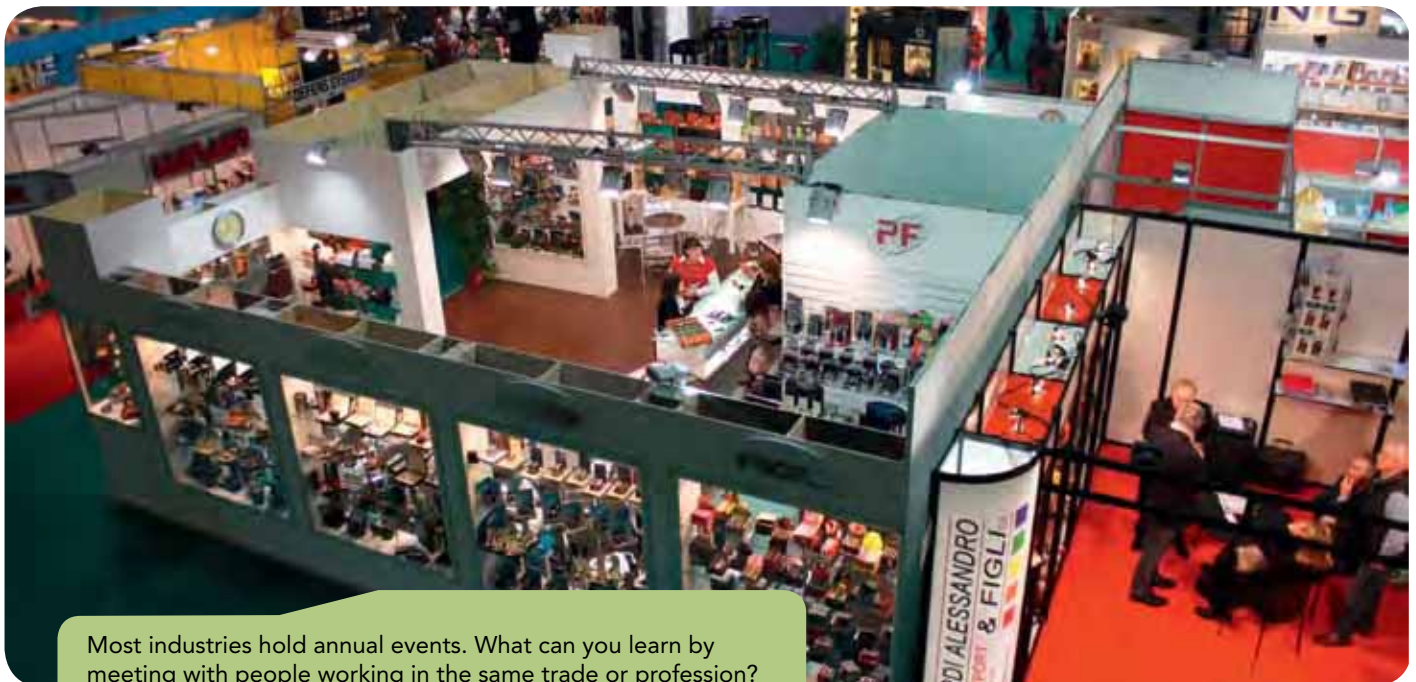
Job shadowing

Job shadowing is particularly useful for work experience, when you are trying to decide what career path to follow. It involves accompanying someone throughout their working day, observing what they are doing at all times. This provides useful insights into the stresses and strains of the job and how the person doing it copes with their workload and any interruptions.

If there is time, the person who is being shadowed can give a running commentary on what is happening. Sometimes, though, this is not practical, especially if other people – such as a customer or supplier during some delicate negotiation – could overhear what is being said. If this is the case, a debriefing session can be used afterwards to explain what was going on.

Team meetings

Some learning comes from talking with colleagues and watching them at work. This can happen during team meetings or while attending events outside the organisation such as conferences.



Most industries hold annual events. What can you learn by meeting with people working in the same trade or profession?

Attending events

Most industries hold annual events in which people in the same trade or profession gather at some central venue. These events provide an important opportunity to catch up on the latest developments, to share expertise and to find out what competitors are doing.

Assessment activity 1.5

P7 P8

BTEC

- 1 Having completed an analysis of your strengths and weaknesses, produce a personal development plan. **P7**
- 2 Follow your personal development plan and keep a record of what you do, when you do it, and the levels of success or failure experienced. **P8**

Grading tips

- To achieve P7, you must be completely honest in your analysis of your strengths and weaknesses. Only then can you produce a plan that suits you. Include realistic timescales within your plan so that you can expect to be successful in whatever it is you are planning.
- To achieve P8, make a note of your progress on a regular basis. Writing everything up at the end of the course would be a terrible chore and your experiences would no longer be fresh in your mind. Instead, try to write something each day, as you would a blog, and make a note each time you experience something new. This will allow you to produce a lively and honest record.

PLTS

As you evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses and produce a personal development plan, you will develop your skills as a reflective learner.



Training

If your job requires knowledge and skills that you don't yet have, you may be asked to attend a formal course. This course may be delivered within your organisation – **internal training** – or you may be sent off-site for **external training**.

The training may lead to qualifications for which you have to pass an examination. Examinations, such as those taken by bankers and those in insurance, are set to establish a standard of knowledge and performance expected of those within the industry. Within the IT industry, Microsoft offers a number of certifications that can confirm your understanding of one or more of their products. Holding such a certificate can prove your level of expertise.

4.4 Learning styles

Learning styles vary from one person to the next and no two people learn in the same way. However, studies of groups of individuals and learning styles have resulted in terms being coined to describe different types of learners, such as: active/reflective, sensory/intuitive, visual/verbal, sequential/global.

- **Active learners** enjoy working in groups and like to try various solutions to problems in order to find out what works. They prefer to handle objects and to do physical experiments. **Reflective learners** prefer to figure out a problem on their own. They think things through, evaluate the various options, and learn by analysis.
- **Sensory learners** look for facts first and prefer concrete, practical and procedural information. **Intuitive learners** look for meaning and prefer conceptual, innovative and theoretical information.
- **Visual learners** understand drawings (e.g. a spider diagram) that represent information. **Verbal learners** like to hear or read information and understand best explanations that use words.
- **Sequential learners** need information presented in a linear and orderly manner. They piece together the details to understand the bigger picture. **Global learners** see the big picture first and then fill in the details systematically. This is called a holistic approach to learning.

A number of models have been developed to describe how people study: how they perceive information, how they process it and how they organise and present what they have learnt.

The perception stage relies on:

- sight (visual cues)
- hearing (auditory cues)
- other sensations, including touch, temperature and movement (kinaesthetic cues).

Each of these three types of cue (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) appeals to some people but not to others, so the way in which information is presented can affect how people perceive it.

- An auditory learner is most comfortable absorbing information that they have heard or discussed.
- A kinaesthetic learner prefers to learn through practical classes and hands-on activities, rather than by reading books and listening to lectures.

Most people can learn using a mixture of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic cues.

Having acquired information, how you process it mentally (by thinking about it and memorising it) can also vary. When grasping facts, you might prefer to deal with concrete, practical examples or you might be happier with abstract concepts and generalisations.

In ordering information, some people prefer to receive facts in a logical, sequential way so that they can build up a picture one step at a time. Others prefer an overview straightaway, so they can grasp the big picture first and then focus on the details. Some people engage with the information they have gathered by active experimentation, while others prefer to let things sink in through reflective observation.

In organising what you know, you may adopt a holistic overview or engage in detailed and logical analysis. When presenting information to share with others, you might tend to give verbal explanations, while someone else might use images.

Identification of preferred style

A number of quiz-type analyses have been devised to help people to identify their preferred learning style. Your answers to a number of seemingly simple questions build a profile of you and you can then be given feedback as to what learning styles suit you best.

Knowing your own preferred learning style

Tutors are trained to recognise learning styles and should present information to their classes in a variety of ways so that all learners benefit, regardless of their preferred learning style. However, if you find it difficult to grasp a subject, or find a lesson boring, you might need to adapt your way of listening or note taking so as to make the best of the lesson. For example, if your tutor presents you with a handout that you find hard to understand, try transferring the facts into a tabular format or a spider diagram, or present the data in some other way that makes it clearer to you.

The onus is on you to make the most of whatever your tutor presents, but giving feedback to the tutor may help them too. Ask questions if anything is not clear. Offer the tutor your version of the data – they may suggest giving a copy of what you have produced to other learners. Similarly, you might learn from how others take notes or represent the information they get from the tutor.

Understanding others' preferred learning style

Because each individual has his or her own preferred learning style, the way in which a team of people learns can be quite complex. Presented with a brief, such as an A4 sheet of written instructions, some of the team will very quickly grasp the facts of the problem to be solved. Others will need it explained differently, perhaps by using a diagram or talking it through.

So long as each person understands what is expected before work commences, the team should prove effective. However, any communications between team members need to take into account variations in preferred learning style. Otherwise, misunderstandings can occur which may hinder progress.

Assessment activity 1.6

M3 **D2****BTEC**

- 1 Explain how an awareness of learning style can aid personal development. **M3**
- 2 Review your progress on your personal development plan, identifying areas for improvement. **D2**

Grading tips

- To achieve M3, answer the question: 'If you know your preferred learning style, how can this help you to make your learning more effective?' You may offer a personal perspective or a more general perspective.
- Identify one particular weakness and focus on improving your technique in that area to provide evidence for D2. Choose a weakness you genuinely want to overcome and set yourself realistic targets. Your review can then close with a note of your success.

PLTS



This assessment activity will allow you to develop your skills as a reflective learner, as you evaluate your experiences (showing an awareness of learning style) and review your progress, highlighting areas for improvement.

Helen

Accounts Executive



Helen using her Blackberry

Helen is an accounts executive working for Slick, a marketing company based in South Devon. Slick runs marketing campaigns for local businesses, creating press releases and placing adverts in local and national newspapers. Helen spends her days in meetings with clients and talking to representatives from the press; these meetings are organised by Helen's PA, who chooses a convenient time and location for each appointment.

Helen travels a lot, visiting clients, and may be out of the office for days at a time. She uses her Blackberry to keep in touch with colleagues. Whenever Helen has access to a computer, e.g. via her laptop in a hotel room, or at an Internet café, she synchronises the diary on her Blackberry with that held electronically at the office.

When she is in the office, Helen looks at her emails only every two hours, so that she has blocks of uninterrupted time during which she can concentrate. She also has a 'closed door' policy which means colleagues are not able to interrupt her when she needs to be at her most creative.

Think about it!

- How do you create the best working space for yourself?
- How might you streamline the way in which you handle incoming emails and correspondence?
- How do you deal with appointments?
- How do you cope with deadlines?

Just checking

1. Give three examples of soft skills.
2. Describe a strategy for problem solving.
3. What is a key message? How can you draw attention to it?
4. How can you maintain the attention of your audience during a presentation?
5. What are the differences between open questions, closed questions and probing questions? Give an example of each type of question.
6. Explain the purpose of proofreading. How else can you ensure the accuracy of written text?
7. Give three examples of performance data.
8. What formal reports could an employer use to monitor and record your progress and development?
9. Briefly outline some of the main communication channels and give one advantage and one disadvantage of each.
10. Describe at least three different learning styles. How can you adapt your communications to suit people who learn in different ways?

Assignment tips

Research tips

- Keep up to date with the games industry by watching video podcasts like *Bonus Round* on the GameTrailers website. Go to Hotlinks and click on this unit.
- Read magazines like *Edge* and *Gamer*, which cover both new games and job-related articles.
- Visit your local games shop and talk to the people who work there. They are bound to have lots of informed opinions about current games and can let you know what is selling well.

Get playing

- Try playing lots of games from different genres, especially genres that you haven't tried before. This will increase your understanding of the games that people buy and why they enjoy them.
- Play a game and then its sequel. Try to see how the game has been improved from the first game to the second game. Are there just graphical improvements or have the control systems changed, the characters or something else?
- Try different gaming platforms to gain an understanding of what capabilities each platform has and how that affects the game.

Designing games

- Try to create some storyboards for a game that someone has made and published in order to practise the process of drawing them.
- See if you can find any websites or books that show concept art for popular games.
- Write some pseudo-code for a game that you have played.