

Members' Communication Guide

Working Group: Effective Communication



GOAL:
Increase
effectiveness of
communication.



STRATEGY: G1.F1 – Improve, streamline, and expedite internal and external communications.



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Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this guide is to increase the effectiveness of communication within and from The Catholic Women's League of Canada. This guide will help to improve, streamline and expedite internal and external communications.

There are three major facets to communication: **audience**, content and process.



Goals of Communication

The goals of effective communication are:

- To create a relationship and emotional engagement with audience.
- To convey information and instructions in a clear, concise and timely manner.
- To assign and distribute tasks.
- To establish a way to receive feedback.



Content

When creating content consider the following:

- What is the purpose of the content being created?
- Is it for information only? For example, a report on an event that took place.
- Is it background for a decision that will need to be made?
- Is it a call to action?
- Anticipate and answer common questions on the content.

Process

Process may include the following:

- How will this information be communicated?
- When are emails sent and who is included?
- When an email is received, is an acknowledgement returned?
- Who will reply to questions such as:
 - o how often is a newsletter published?
 - o when are the submission deadlines?
 - o who is given a copy for review before a newsletter is finalized and sent out?
 - o is there a mailing list and who maintains it?

Principles of Effective Communication

Audience

An audience is a person or group of people who read a particular communication or attend a presentation. Before preparing any communication determine the audience and decide on the communication style.

Types of Audience

Types of audiences are:

- Those with no special or expert knowledge. They may need more background information and will expect more definitions, examples, graphics or visuals. They may need less information at one time but more frequent communication.
- Those with specific or expert knowledge. The style and content may be specialized or technical. **Jargon** may be appropriate with experts.

Know your Audience

To communicate effectively, know the needs and expectations of the audience.

- Who are they?
- What demographics do they belong to?
- What level of information do they have about the subject?
- What is the context of the information?
- What is the benefit for the audience?



- What format do they prefer to receive information in? (E.g., memo, email, text message, magazine, formal presentation, etc.)

Other Areas to Consider

- Be aware of the customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of the different cultural groups within the community.
- Ask members for their preferred communication methods and balance that with the time, skills and energy available.

Written Communication

These principles apply to any written communication including reports, communiqués, memos, newsletters, emails and text messages:

- Keep it clear and simple.
 - Use simple sentence structures and vocabulary.
 - Be specific by using precise terms and being factual.
 - Use short sentences that contain one complete thought.
 - Keep to one topic in each paragraph.

- o Omit words that do not convey valuable information.
 - o Use an active voice when possible.
 - ◇ Example:

Incorrect: The meeting was called to order by the president.

Correct: The president called the meeting to order.
 - o When speaking to those outside the League, avoid **jargon**, **idioms**, **acronyms** and **cultural references**.
 - ◇ Example:

Incorrect: “Within the League (jargon) actions speak louder than words (idiom), especially when the CWL (acronym) advocates Catholic social teaching (cultural reference).”

Correct: Within the Catholic Women’s League, members live their Catholic values and reach out to those in need.
 - ◇ When acronyms are to be used, the first reference in the document should have the name written in full and the acronym following in parenthesis. For example, Catholic Women’s League (CWL).
 - Structure the writing.
 - o Put important things first.
 - o Develop a clear and logical structure.
 - o Ensure the opening sentence engages the reader and explains the importance of the message.
 - o In simple terms, introduce the topic, give a detailed explanation of it including any required action, then summarize it.
 - o Include who, what, where, when and why.
- Avoid **strong claims** and **hype**.
- o Do not use absolutes like always or never.

- Pay attention to spelling and grammar.
- Use proper punctuation.
- Use formatting to aid understanding.
 - o **Fonts** should be easy to read.
 - o Limit to one or two commonly used fonts.
 - o Tables and figures are valuable for organizing and communicating data in a way that makes it easy for a reader to understand, analyze and interpret.

Please refer to the Style Guide for Publications in the *National Manual of Policy and Procedure* for further information. It is available on the national website at cwl.ca/manuals/.

Verbal Communication

How something is communicated is as important as the content of the message.

- **Tone:** vary voice strength, tone or pitch according to the subject and audience (formal, informal, enthusiastic, humorous).
- **Volume:** use appropriate volume for the space and audience.
- **Speed:** use moderate speed, slightly slower than conversational speech.

Body Language

Body language is the use of physical behaviour, expressions and mannerisms to communicate nonverbally. This is often done instinctively rather than consciously. Facial expressions can communicate a wealth of emotion. When people interact with others, they continuously give and receive wordless signals. Be aware of the messages being sent.

Eye Contact

- Make occasional eye-contact with different audience members.

Gestures and Movement

- Be aware of gestures and movement and use both appropriately.
- Finger pointing at people should be avoided.
- Large gestures may be used to make a specific point.

Physical Space and Touch

- It is important to respect everyone's personal space and boundaries.
- Ask permission before touching someone.

Presentations

When presenting information, be aware of the following:

- Match language level to audience.
- Be aware of body language, tone, volume and speed when speaking.
- Be well prepared.

Presentations are a large topic on their own and are covered in additional detail through other League guides and training modules.

The *Train the Trainer Guide* is available at cwl.ca/manuals/.

Presentation information is also included as part of the Executive Orientation, in the *Public Presence and Member Development* module. The entire program is available on the national website at cwl.ca/executive-orientation-program/.

Listening Skills

Active listening includes responses that demonstrate an understanding of what the other person is trying to say about his or her experience. Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding. It is used to gain information and perspective.

When communicating, practice using active listening skills.

- Give the speaker undivided attention.
- Maintain appropriate eye contact.
- Nod and smile occasionally.
- Keep posture open and interested.
- Encourage the speaker with small verbal comments like yes, and “uh huh.”
- Provide feedback by paraphrasing. “What I’m hearing is...” or, “Sounds like you are saying....”
- Ask questions to clarify “What do you mean when you say...” or, “Is this what you mean...?”
- Respond candidly, openly and honestly.
- Assert opinions respectfully.

Note: If finding yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so and ask for more information. For example, “I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is _____. Is that what you meant?”

Types of Communication

There are many types of information you may want to give to members. The following are different types of information and possible ways to communicate them.

Event Announcements

These could be meetings, bazaars, spiritual retreats or other gatherings. Event information can be conveyed in any combination of the following:

- calendar of events
- emails
- flyers/brochures
- meetings
- newsletters
- newspaper advertisements
- parish bulletins
- posters
- social media
- telephone trees

When conveying event information, remember to include the date, time, location, a summary of the purpose of the event and any directions that may be needed to find the location.



Event Reports

These reports summarize an event that has been held. Event reports are typically standalone written documents. They may also be included as an appendix to a meeting agenda if the information will be discussed during a meeting.

An event report may contain the following information:

- budgeted costs and revenue versus actuals
- estimated schedule versus actual project schedule
- event summary including what worked and what did not
- suggestions for the next event

If the event is going to be reviewed during a meeting, provide the report before the meeting so interested individuals can review it and bring any questions they may have.

Policy and Procedures

A policy is a set of general guidelines that communicate the organization's plan. Policies provide the connection between the organization's vision and values and its day-to-day operations. A procedure provides a guideline for executing a policy. This information can be communicated in the following ways:

- communiqués
- meetings
- memos
- policy and procedure manuals for each level

Volunteer Opportunities/Requests

There are many opportunities for members to be involved in short- or long-term projects. Volunteers can be requested through any of the following:

- email
- meetings
- newsletters
- parish bulletins
- telephone

When requesting volunteers, include the purpose, time commitment, specific location and any special skills if required.

Member/Event Stories

These are personal experiences of events, meetings or recollections of League involvement and can include personal history when relevant to a topic. These stories can be used to promote ongoing events and the League. They can be included in:

- archives
- history books
- meetings
- membership drives
- newsletters
- social media
- special events
- websites

Spiritual Lessons, Articles, Prayers

Sharing interesting materials among members spreads the news far and wide. They can be included in:

- archives
- **ecumenical** events (e.g., World Day of Prayer)
- history books
- meetings
- newsletters
- social media
- special events
- websites

Best Practices

Email

When addressing an email:

- The address line (TO:) should include the primary audience of the message.
- The carbon copy (CC:) line should include anyone who doesn't need to act on the content of the message but needs to know the message was sent and should be aware of the content.
- Blind carbon copy (BCC) is used when sending an email to an address list—everyone should be blind carbon copied to preserve privacy. For example, when sending a newsletter by email, all recipients should be blind carbon copied.
- Use “reply all” only when everyone needs to know your response.

Use meaningful subject lines. The subject line should convey the intent of the message.

Possible examples include:

- Agenda Sacred Heart CWL Member Meeting January 23
- Request for Muffins for Coffee Sunday May 5
- Action Required Meeting Minutes and Action Items Seniors Tea Planning Meeting May 2
- For Your Information (FYI) Meeting Minutes Executive Meeting September 8
- Time Sensitive Feedback on Action Plan due February 23



The salutation addresses the group the message is being sent to. For example, “Dear members.”

The body of the message should include important information. For example, when sending meeting minutes, include the action items in the body of the message. Keep messages short. For longer emails, add an explanation of purpose and required response at the beginning of the email body.

The signature should include a closing salutation and contact information if needed.

When attaching documents to an email:

- Create a list of all attachments in the body of the email. This ensures the recipient can tell if any attachments are missing.
- Attachments should be in commonly used formats. The most widely readable format is portable document format (PDF). Most can also read Microsoft 365 formats (Word, Excel, PowerPoint).
- Respond to action emails within 24-48 hours if possible. It is not necessary to have an answer, but it is considerate to give a timeline within which an answer will be supplied.

Note: The use of all capitals within an email is the equivalent of shouting.

Letters

Letters are generally used for formal communication, including formal invitations, requests for donations or sponsorship, formal thank you letters and congratulatory letters.

The president should always sign letters from the League. If expecting a response, consider the time required to receive mail.

Email can be used to send formal letters as an attachment that includes the president's signature.

Notes and Cards

These are primarily used for informal communication, including an informal thank you, congratulating a special celebration or an event invitation.

Newsletters

Newsletters can be formal or informal and are a great resource to share news, showcase activities and promote the League.

- A newsletter template is available for download from the national website at cwl.ca/crest-stationery-and-other-council-supplies/.

Social Media

The term social media refers to a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts and information through virtual networks and communities.

- Examples currently being used by the League include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube.
- Social media is a public forum.

- Any information posted to social media may last forever.
- Keep posts short and simple.
- If interested in using social media, do your research.

The *National Manual of Policy and Procedure* includes Council Facebook Guidelines. The manual is available on the national website at cwl.ca/manuals/.

Pope Francis has written "Towards Full Presence. A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media" for further reflection on this topic. It is available on the Vatican website at: press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/05/29/0404/00890.html.

Telephone

These are guidelines to follow when leaving a voice message:

- Speak slowly and clearly and remember to smile.
- Introduce yourself.
- Mention why you are calling.
- Make sure the details are clear.
 - o Is the message to convey information only (i.e., date and time of a meeting)?
 - o If you need a call-back, slowly repeat the telephone number twice.
- Telephone trees are optional for members. Ensure you have permission to share information and are specific about who will get it.

Meetings

Virtual Meetings/Webinars

Agendas should be provided for all formal meetings. Both the *Handbook for Secretaries* and *Guide to Simplifying Meetings* contain examples of agendas and minutes. They are available on the national website at cwl.ca/manuals/.

Guide to Simplifying Meetings also includes further information on meetings.

Virtual meetings can be used in place of or combined with in-person meetings.

A best practice for virtual meetings is to run through any presentation before the meeting to ensure technical issues have been resolved.

People may be unfamiliar with the application being used. More detailed information may need to be included in the invitation to support all members.

For virtual meetings, highlight which time zone the meeting time is in.

It may be helpful to resend meeting information as a reminder either the day before or the day of the meeting. It ensures the information is easily found at the top of someone's inbox.

Text Messages

Text messages are used for informal communication, mostly between individuals.

- Be aware of the time of day when you send text messages.

Barriers to Communication

The following are some barriers to effective communication.

Language Barriers

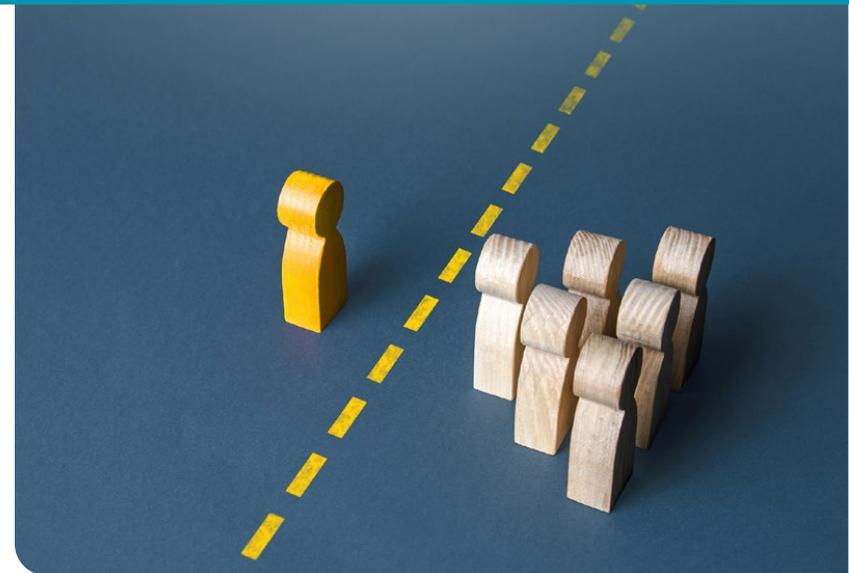
- Do not use jargon, slang or acronyms unfamiliar to the audience.
- Be aware that English may not be someone's first language.

Psychological Barriers

- Be conscious of your mental state and be as calm as possible. Visible stress or anger affects how you communicate and how your communication is perceived.

Physiological Barriers

- Be responsive to the audience's physical state.
 - o Someone who is hard of hearing may not fully grasp spoken communication.
 - o Someone with reduced vision may have difficulty with written communication.
 - o Ensure you share information using multiple methods. For example, presentations should have both a spoken and visual component.
 - o Include breaks as appropriate.



Systematic or Structural Barriers

- Make sure communication policy and procedure supports communication goals.
- Certain institutional processes, procedures or **cultures** may create barriers to communication. For example, requiring all communications to be sent to one individual may cause an unnecessary bottleneck if the recipient becomes unavailable for any reason.

Attitudinal Barriers

- Certain behaviors, perceptions or attributes can prevent people from communicating effectively. These include:
 - o personality conflicts
 - o resistance to change
 - o lack of motivation
 - o mental or emotional state

Being shy or introverted may make it more difficult to communicate in a group setting while extroverts may take over the conversation. When facilitating a group, you may need to encourage some members to talk and limit the time for others.

Reducing Barriers to Communication

Here are some tips to reduce barriers in written and verbal communication:

- Make ideas clear before communicating.
- Ensure communication is at an appropriate time.
- Use language that is mutually understood.
- Make the message short and concise.
- Check that the message is understood and ask for feedback.
- Take care of body language, tone and content.
- Listen before speaking again.
- Do not interrupt if someone else is speaking.
- Remove all judgement, be curious and respect other people's opinions and perspectives.

A Final Prayer

“May the Lord Jesus, the pure Word poured out from the heart of the Father, help us to make our communication clear, open and heartfelt.

“May the Lord Jesus, the Word made flesh, help us listen to the beating of hearts, to rediscover ourselves as brothers and sisters, and to disarm the hostility that divides.

“May the Lord Jesus, the Word of truth and love, help us speak the truth in charity, so that we may feel like protectors of one another.”

† Pope Francis

Glossary

Acronym: An abbreviation formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word, for example CWL (Catholic Women’s League), WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations).

Active Voice: The focus of the active voice is the person who performs an action. For example, the president chaired the meeting.

Audience: The people likely to give attention to the information being communicated.

Cultural References: Ideas that relate to a specific culture; things that only someone who understands a specific culture could understand. For example, the League’s reference to Catholic social teaching.

Cultural Sensitivity: Knowledge, awareness and acceptance of other cultures and their cultural identities.

Culture: The customs, arts, traditions, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or another social group.

Ecumenical: Used to refer to the collection of Christian churches.

Font: Set of letters, numbers and symbols in a specific style and size. For example, Times New Roman, 12pt.

Hype: Exaggerating the importance, quality or benefit of something. For example, The Catholic Women’s League of Canada is the *only* organization of *women* in Canada.

Idiom: Phrases established by usage as having a meaning different from the literal meaning of the words or phrases, such as “raining cats and dogs,” meaning raining heavily or “when pigs fly,” meaning never. Within the League, we have sometimes heard “actions speak louder than words” or “leave no stone unturned.”

Interfaith: Used to refer to all people or groups from different religious or spiritual worldviews and traditions.

Jargon: Special words or expressions used by a particular profession or group that are difficult for others to understand, such as due diligence” or hard copy. For example, within The Catholic Women’s League of Canada, we often refer to the League. This may not mean anything to anyone outside the organization.

Passive Voice: The passive voice emphasizes the recipient of the action or the action itself. For example, the meeting was chaired by the president.

Strong Claim: Making a claim that is specific and debatable. For example, The Catholic Women’s League of Canada is the *largest* Catholic women’s organization in Canada.

Further Resources

National Website Resources

National Manual of Policy and Procedure, cwl.ca/manuals/

The Train the Trainer Guide, cwl.ca/manuals/

Handbook for Secretaries, cwl.ca/manuals/

Guide to Simplifying Meetings, cwl.ca/manuals/

Executive Orientation, cwl.ca/executive-orientation-program/

The Public Presence and Member Development module, cwl.ca/executive-orientation-program/

Newsletter template, cwl.ca/crest-stationery-and-other-council-supplies/

Other References

“Towards Full Presence. A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media,” press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubbl-co/2023/05/29/0404/00890.html

“Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 57th World Day of Social Communications,” vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20230124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html

Books

Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance. Dhawan, E., 2023. amazon.ca/Digital-Body-Language-Connection-Distance/dp/1250852625/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_o?encoding=UTF8&qid=1673981273&sr=8-1

How to Win Friends and Influence People. Carnegie, D., 1998. amazon.ca/How-Win-Friends-Influence-People/dp/0671027034/ref=sr_1_1?crid=18WCJ9XWNK-JRA&keywords=How+to+win+friends+and+influence+people&qid=1655146993&prefix=how+to+win+friends+and+influence+people%2Caps%2C157&sr=8-1

On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction. Zinsser, W., 2016. amazon.ca/Writing-Well-Classic-Guide-Nonfiction/dp/0060891548/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3D2QS6YK8PJ3Q&keywords=on+writing+well+william+zinsser&qid=1673981008&prefix=on+writing+well%2Caps%2C142&sr=8-1

The Chicago Manual of Style. The University of Chicago Press, 2009. amazon.ca/Manual-Style-Chicago-Press-University/dp/1434102831/ref=sr_1_2?crid=18U1UYBI6D5PK&keywords=the+chicago+manual+of+style&qid=1655146560&s=books&prefix=the+Chicago+m%2Cstripbooks%2C331&sr=1-2

The Elements of Style. Strunk, W. and White, E., 1999. [amazon.ca/Elements-Style-William-Strunk-Jr/dp/020530902X/ref=asc_df_020530902X/?tag=googleshopcoc-20&linkCode=dfo&hvadid=312865754052&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=3878408947768809911&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9001419&hvtargid=pla-405693442765&psc=1](https://www.amazon.ca/Elements-Style-William-Strunk-Jr/dp/020530902X/ref=asc_df_020530902X/?tag=googleshopcoc-20&linkCode=dfo&hvadid=312865754052&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=3878408947768809911&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9001419&hvtargid=pla-405693442765&psc=1)

The Only Grammar Book You'll Ever Need: A One-Stop Source for Every Writing Assignment. Thurman, S. and Shea, L., 2003. [amazon.ca/Only-Grammar-Book-Youll-Ever/dp/1580628559/ref=sr_1_1?crid=57WK2P78B779&keywords=the+only+grammar+book+you%27ll+ever+need&qid=1673981137&srefix=the+only+grama%2Caps%2C153&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.ca/Only-Grammar-Book-Youll-Ever/dp/1580628559/ref=sr_1_1?crid=57WK2P78B779&keywords=the+only+grammar+book+you%27ll+ever+need&qid=1673981137&srefix=the+only+grama%2Caps%2C153&sr=8-1)

All links last accessed August 2, 2023.





The Catholic Women's League of Canada

C-702 Scotland Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3M 1X5

Tel: (204) 927-2310
Website: cwl.ca
E-mail: info@cwl.ca

Inv. #645