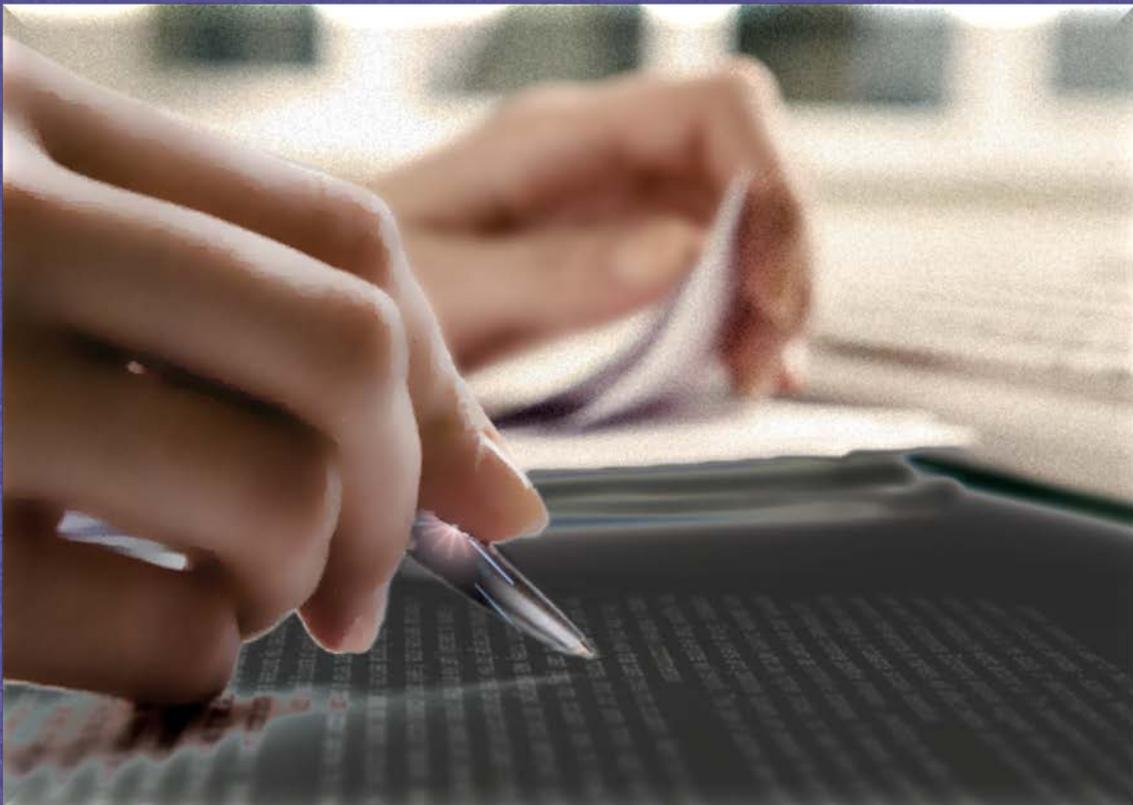


# BUSINESS WRITING

NEELEY DEVELOPMENT SERIES—TOOLS FOR BUSINESS



ACHIEVING RESULTS WORD BY WORD



Neeley School  
of Business

## Importance of Business Writing

As you progress through the Neeley School of Business, it is important to understand that employers consider writing a threshold skill for initial employment as well as promotion. Additionally, you should recognize that unclear writing will reduce the effectiveness of your message, and will represent you poorly to your professors and/or co-workers.

### Your Writing Represents You

*“My view is that good writing is a sign of good thinking. Writing that is persuasive, logical, and orderly is impressive. Writing that is not organized can be a signal of unclear thinking.”*

– Business Executive at a Fortune 100 Company

### What Business Professionals Are Saying About the Importance of Writing

(from National Commission on Writing Survey)

- 28% report they miss key information “often” due to emails from their colleagues who communicate ineffectively
- 70% cite lost productivity as a result of unclear or confusing inter-office communications
- In September of 2004, it was estimated that U.S. companies spent \$3.1B annually just training people in writing skills
- A 2005 survey by BACKDRAFT found that business professionals spend 30-36% of their work day on writing-related activities

### Strong Writing Skills Can Help You Get the Job

- More than half of responding companies say they frequently or usually consider writing when hiring salaried employees
- 86% of responding companies would hold poorly-written application materials against a job candidate, either “frequently” or “almost always”
- When asked about below-standard written application materials, one hiring manager stated: “We’d frequently hold that against the applicant since it reflects on care and attention to detail”

### Strong Writing Skills Can Lead to a Promotion

- Half of companies surveyed consider writing abilities when making promotion decisions
- More than 40% of firms require training for salaried employees with writing deficiencies

How Important Is	Extremely Important	Important
Accuracy?	95.2%	1.6%
Clarity?	74.6%	22.2%
Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar?	58.7%	36.5%
Conciseness?	41.3%	50.8%
Scientific Precision?	36.5%	33.3%
Visual Appeal?	11.1%	68.3%

## Professional Style and Tone

Everybody talks about style, but almost nobody understands its meaning. Style is largely a matter of tone—it's ***the way we say things***. Each writer uses a style, and the reader infers a tone. Tone comes from what a reader reads into the words and sentences a writer uses.

In business writing, style and tone are especially important. The choice and use of words, sentences, and paragraph format need to be appropriate to the situation and appropriate to both the writer's and the reader's positions with the company. Most employees read business communication two or three times to be sure they understand it. The goal of business communication is not so much to express oneself, but to **produce a desired reaction and result**.

### Positive Attitude

Have the proper mental outlook before putting words on paper. When we communicate our ideas in writing, they become permanent. Our ideas convey impressions of ourselves—we give readers a chance to assess what we are really like.

### Conversational

Use a conversational tone. Make your writing have the effect of a good conversation. Make it sound natural, not stiff. Keep the language simple and to the point. Have your tone show respect for the reader by talking *with* them, not up or down to them.

### Frame Of Reference

Establish a frame of reference. Your writing style will convey whether you are being:

- Appreciative
- Questioning
- Formal/informal
- Expecting something
- Positive/Negative
- Urgent
- Courteous
- Demanding
- Abrupt
- Cautious
- Respectful
- Rude

### “You” Viewpoint

Maintain your viewpoint by writing from the readers' perspective. Keep the reader in the center of things. Emphasize “you” and “your,” subordinate “I,” “my,” and “me.” Most people are concerned with their own interests, so appeal to those interests with words that help you achieve your objective. It also builds goodwill and is courteous.

## Professional Style and Tone

### Words that Distance the Reader

Misinformed	Blame
Questionable	You claim
Overreaction	You neglected
Failure	I demand

### Words that Build a Positive Tone

Agreeable	Benefit
Deserving	Generous
Yes	Satisfaction
Proud	Advantage

### Positive Emphasis

Highlight the brighter aspects and support the more negative ones. Assume that your readers will do and/or understand what you want. Choose your words carefully.

### Paint a Picture

A writer's tone represents, to the reader, who and what kind of person the writer is. Depending on the tone, the reader sees the writer as cultured or common, arrogant or down-to-earth.

When writing a business letter, being concise is important. In the first paragraph, consider a friendly opening and then a statement of the main point. The next paragraph should begin justifying the importance of the main point. In the next few paragraphs, continue justification with background information and supporting details. The closing paragraph should restate the purpose of the letter and, in some cases, request some type of action.

### Avoid Redundant Language (Why are These Words Redundant?)

Absolutely essential	Past memories	Various differences
End result	Basic fundamentals	Free gift
Future plans	True facts	Past history
Irregardless	Unexpected surprise	Sudden crisis

# Professional Style and Tone

## Transitions

Transitions provide clues to the reader and connect your thoughts and ideas.

Therefore	Although	Provided that
Then	While	Since
In addition	Yet	In contrast to
In conclusion	As we have seen	As referenced
However	Next	Also

## Echo Words

Another way to guide your readers from one sentence to the next is to use echo words.

Most sentences contain some word or phrase that recalls to the readers' minds some information they have already encountered. Such words and phrases might be called echo words because they echo something the readers already know. Below are two examples of effective use of echo words.

- Inflation can be cured. **The cure** appears to require that consumers change their basic attitudes towards consumption.
- The company also purchased and retired 17,399 shares of its \$2.90 convertible, preferred stock at \$5.70 a share. **These transactions** reduce the number of outstanding convertible shares to 623,250.



# Guidelines for Writing Business Reports

Carefully choose headings and subheadings to establish a hierarchy of importance. In order to show levels of importance, carefully and consistently use formatting techniques (i.e., underlining, bold, and/or italics).

## Executive Summary vs. Abstract

You can think of an executive summary as a call to action, while an abstract's intent is to give a summary of the information. Executive summaries are generally longer and their tone is more enthusiastic and persuasive than abstracts. Both executive summaries and abstracts try to convince readers to read the whole document.

## Citations

For citations within the text of your report, you will include information such as the author's last name, the year of publication, and the page number(s) on which your citation appeared in the original article. Note that page numbers only need to be included if you quote or paraphrase lists, passages, or figures.

When you use a direct quotation from a source, use quotation marks to differentiate your words from those of the author:

- O'Brien has made the case that "the traditional marketing model should be revised to take into account the unique considerations necessary for marketing services" (1992, p. 36).

When you paraphrase material, your summary must make it clear that you are writing a modified version of another writer's work in your own words:

- A recent study on the effects of atmospherics in service marketing (O'Brien and Davis, 2003) has shown that . . .

## Structure of a Business Report

1. Cover Sheet
2. Title Page
3. Executive Summary or Abstract
4. Table of Contents
5. Introduction
6. Body
7. Conclusion/Recommendations
8. Reference List (alphabetical by last name)
9. Appendix – arranged based on the order of information to which you refer

*Note: Recommendations may be included in the introduction/summary, depending on the purpose of the report.*

## Helpful References

- **Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL @ Purdue)**  
This web-based writing lab includes examples citations in APA, MLA, and Chicago styles.  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

## Guidelines for Writing Executive Summaries

Executive summaries are a tool to highlight key findings in business reports. Having a well-written executive summary can be critical in making sure that your audience actually reads your report instead of setting it aside.

Think of an executive summary as a separate document, able to stand alone from the report and allow the reader to be familiar with the contents. While they are relatively easy to write, it is important to keep in mind that your readers will not be as familiar with the material as you are.

### Structure of an Executive Summary

It is especially important that your Executive Summary be clear and concise because you will have only a brief amount of time to convince your audience to read the full report or business plan. Senior executives receive hundreds of business reports a year, many of them resembling a small phone book, so the executive summary must be clear enough to quickly understand and concise enough to hold the reader's interest.

Try to keep the summary to one page. If you need more pages, make sure you maintain your focus in being clear and concise. One rule of thumb is to limit the executive summary to one-tenth the length of the main report. Remember: you are trying to convince the reader to review your business plan or report, not to explain every detail.

Consider using subheadings if the summary is over two pages. The key is to make sure that the reader can quickly identify the information that they want.

The first paragraph of an executive summary will typically include:

- Background information
- Purpose of the plan/report
- Methodology

If you are making specific recommendations, state them in your executive summary.

If you are seeking an investment, state this in your executive summary, along with the amount required and the percent of equity ownership or ROI offered in return.

When listing the main points that the report will cover, put them in the order they will appear.

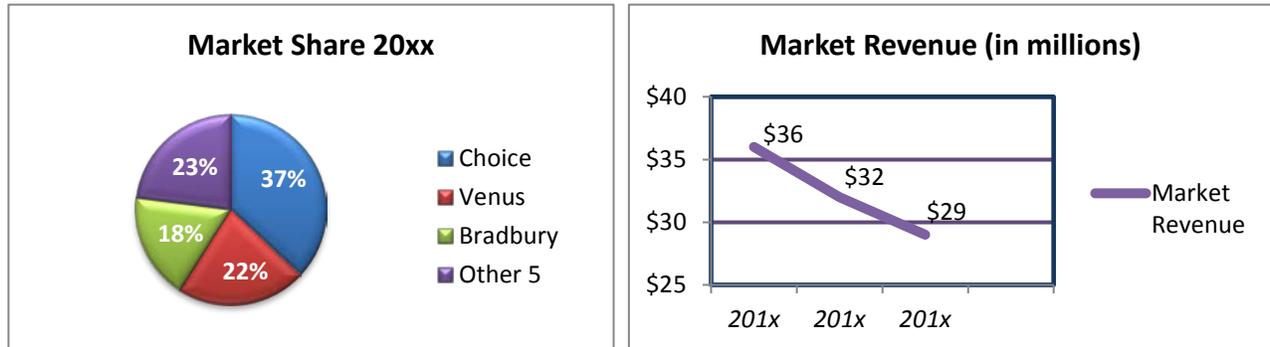
**If the report is technical, keep in mind that readers of the executive summary may not be technical people.** Be sure to understand who your audience is when determining the type of language you will use.

***While it is the first part of the business report that your audience will read, it should be the last part that you write.***

## Example: Executive Summary

This report examines why the sales volume of Choice Chocolate has dropped over the past two years since its peak in 20xx, and recommends ways to increase volume.

The research draws attention to the fact that in 20xx, the market share of Choice Chocolate was 37%. The size of the chocolate market then was \$36 million. Over the next two years, although Choice Chocolate retained its market share, the volume of sales in the whole market decreased to \$29 million.



Data from 20xx Chocolatier Association Survey – Östersund, Sweden

Further investigations reveal that this market shrinkage coincided with an increase in health awareness among consumers who regard the milk and sugar ingredients in chocolate as negative; moreover, since the second half of 20xx, an increasing number of rival 'health candies' had appeared on the market. These claimed to offer the consumers a healthy alternative. These factors appear to be the major causes of the decreased sales volume of Choice Chocolate.

Slim Choice is the latest chocolate variety put forward by the R&D Department of Choice Chocolate. The report evaluates Slim Choice and concludes that it would be an ideal candidate to meet the challenge in the market. Slim Choice could also satisfy new consumer demand since it uses significantly reduced milk and sugar ingredients and renowned health experts have endorsed the product. According to 97% of the 2,000 subjects tested recently, it also retains the same flavor as the original Choice Chocolate.

We recommend the following actions:

- Choice Chocolate should take immediate measures to launch and promote Slim Choice alongside its existing product
- Slim Choice should adopt a fresh and healthy image
- The launch campaign contains product endorsement statements by renowned health experts
- Slim Choice be available in health food stores, as well as in traditional chocolate retail outlets

## Guidelines for Writing Business Letters

### Format and Font

When you write a business letter, you must pay special attention to the format you use. The most common layout of a business letter is known as block format. Using this format, the entire letter is left justified and single-spaced except for a double space between paragraphs.

Another important factor in the readability of a letter is the font you choose. The generally accepted font is Times New Roman, size 12, although you can use other fonts such as Arial and Calibri.

### Salutation

Use the appropriate personal title of the individual you are writing, favoring a professional title over a personal title (for example, use Dr. instead of Mr.). If you know the person and typically address them by their first name, it is acceptable to use only the first name in the salutation. In all other cases, however, use the personal title and full name followed by a colon. Leave one line blank after the salutation.

If you do not know a reader's gender, use a nonsexist salutation, such as "Dear" with their full name. **Never use "To Whom It May Concern."**

### Closing

Capitalize the first word only (for example, "Thank you"). Leave four lines between the closing and the sender's name for your signature. A comma should follow the closing.

### Enclosures

If you have enclosed any documents with the letter, indicate this simply by typing "Enclosures" one line below the closing. As an option, you may list the name of each document you are including in the envelope. It may be a good idea to list the title of each enclosure if you have included several documents and need to ensure that the recipient is aware of each one.



## Example Business Letter: Full-Block Format

Your Name  
1324 Shelby Lane  
Chicago, IL 60632

October 16, 20xx

1-6 spaces here, depending length of letter. The goal is to align the information vertically on the page.

Ms. Angela Cunningham  
Director of Marketing  
132 North Main Street  
Dallas, TX 75413

Dear Ms. Cunningham:

The first paragraph of a typical business letter is used to state the main point of the letter. Begin with a friendly opening; then quickly transition into the purpose of your letter. Use a couple of sentences to explain the purpose, but do not go in to detail until the next paragraph.

Beginning with the second paragraph, state the supporting details to justify your purpose. These may take the form of background information, statistics, or first-hand accounts. A few short paragraphs within the body of the letter should be enough to support your reasoning.

Finally, in the closing paragraph, briefly restate your purpose and its importance. If the purpose of your letter is employment related, consider ending your letter with your contact information. However, if the purpose is informational, think about closing with gratitude for the reader's time.

Sincerely,

3-4 spaces before your name and/or title

James Thompson  
Director of Operations

3-6 spaces at the bottom margin, following name/title. Again, the goal is to align the information on the page.

## Guidelines for Writing Business Memos

A well-written memo will first, *bring attention to a problem*, and second, *offer solutions or recommendations*. The purpose of most memos will be either to persuade a reader to take action or inform them about a change in the organization.

Make sure that you only address your memo to people who need to read it. For issues involving only one or two people, do not distribute the memo to the entire office. It is also important to understand that memos are often not appropriate for sensitive material. In these instances, a face-to-face conversation, or sometimes a phone conversation, is more appropriate.

In the first paragraph of a memo, briefly state your purpose and provide context for the problem that you will address. It is also important to provide a brief synopsis of what you cover in the memo.

### Rules of Thumb

Heading should include the following information:

TO:

FROM:

DATE:

SUBJECT:

Keep the total length of your memo less than one page, if possible. If the memo is over one page, include a summary segment at the beginning or end of the memo. This segment should provide bulleted key points and recommendations.

Use lists or tables for organizing important points or details instead of paragraphs. This will make your memo easier to read quickly.

Sentences should average fewer than twenty words, and paragraphs should average fewer than seven lines. This rule will help to ensure that you stay focused on being clear and concise.

If you are distributing a hard copy, sign your initials next to your name on the "From" line.

Close with a courteous ending that states what action you want your reader to take. It is important to close a memo with an invitation for feedback or further discussion along with contact information.

When there are multiple recipients, list their names in alphabetical order according to last name.

A "CC" line can be included to list the names of your secondary audience - people who may be interested in the memo but are not directly responsible for responding to it.

## Example: Business Memo

TO: Kelly O'Brien, Marketing Executive

FROM: Jonathon Fitzgerald, Market Research Assistant

DATE: June 14, 20xx

SUBJECT: Fall Clothes Line Promotion

Market research and findings from focus groups and surveys have made it apparent that we need to update our advertising efforts to align them with the styles and trends of young adults today. No longer are young adults interested in sitcoms as they watch reality television shows. In addition, it has become increasingly important to use the internet as a tool to communicate with our target audience to show our dominance in the industry.

### Internet Advertising

XYZ Company needs to focus advertising on internet sites that appeal to young people. According to surveys, 72% of our target market uses the internet for five hours or more per week. The following list shows in order of popularity the most frequented sites:

- You Tube
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google

Shifting our efforts from our other media sources such as radio and magazine to these popular internet sites will more effectively promote our product sales. Young adults are spending more and more time on the internet downloading music, communicating and researching for homework and less and less time reading paper magazines and listening to the radio. As the trend for cultural icons to go digital, so must our marketing plans.

### Television Advertising

Young adults are tuning into reality television shows for their entertainment. Results from the focus group show that our target audience is most interested in shows like *American Idol*, *The Apprentice*, and *America's Next Top Model*. The only non-reality television show ranked in the top ten most commonly watched shows by males and females 18-25 is *Game of Thrones*. At Blue Incorporated, we need to focus our advertising budget on reality television shows and reduce the amount of advertising spent on other programs.

By refocusing our advertising efforts of our new line of clothing, we will be able to maximize the exposure of our product to our target market and therefore increase our sales. Tapping into the trends of young adults will help us gain market share and sales through effective advertising.

## Example: Business Memo

TO: Kelly O'Brien, IT Manager  
FROM: Mariam MacGregor, IT Director  
DATE: August 23, 2014  
SUBJECT: **DEVELOPING NEW SOFTWARE TO ASSIST CUSTOMER SUPPORT**

An increase in customer sales over the past year has resulted in a higher tech support call volume and longer customer wait time. This has resulted in a 15% decrease in customer satisfaction scores. The IT department needs to adopt a virtual network controller to handle the increasing demand for technical support.

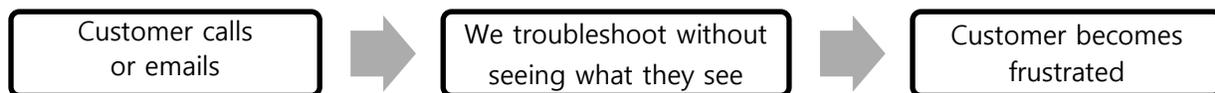
### SUMMARY

A virtual network controller (VNC) allows secure methods of fixing problems remotely directly on a client's computer. Three reasons we should implement this software into our customer service program include:

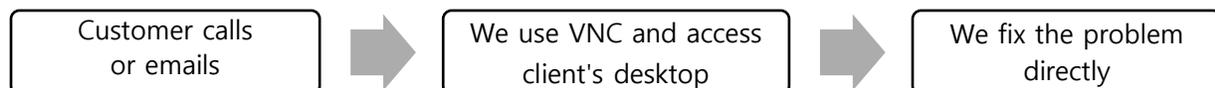
1. Our tech specialists will save 25 minutes per ticket in resolving customer problems
2. Customer satisfaction will increase after implementation
3. The cost to develop the software in-house is affordable

### RATIONALE

Currently, when a client needs support for a problem they call or email our IT department. Our tech specialists will provide the customer with instructions on how to fix the problem. Since customers do not always understand what we are asking them to do, they become frustrated.



*Using a VNC, we will no longer have to rely on the customer to explain their problem in detail*



Eliminating miscommunications on the phone and reducing the number of email exchanges will save our Tech Specialists 25 minutes per ticket which allows our customers to receive better service times.

We have a team of software developers in-house with the skills needed to develop the VNC, which means we can avoid licensing and other fees involved with using a commercial brand VNC. Estimated cost for development is \$15K and the time to develop the software will be three months.

### CONCLUSION

Using a VNC to support our customers will expedite problem resolution and lead to increased customer satisfaction. Development time is short and the cost of development will be recouped by the end of year one. To maintain a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace we need to implement new solutions to service customers so they remain satisfied with our services.

## Using Email in a Business Environment

As a student in the Neeley School of Business, the expectation is that you will present yourself professionally. Writing professional emails and being careful to not sound too casual plays a role in how you represent both yourself and the Neeley School. When you send an email from your TCU account, it is important to keep in mind that you may be making someone's first impression of TCU students.

The etiquette guidelines for emails are very much the same as for any type of professional business writing.

Using the subject line effectively is becoming increasingly important. With the volume of emails professionals now receive daily, it is important that your subject line clearly state its purpose.

**Bad Subject Line:** NOT HAVING ONE!

**Example Subject Lines:** Interviewing Question / Interview this Wednesday / Contact at Alcon

In addition to proper business etiquette, below are some guidelines specific to email.

- Do not address your email to anyone as "Hey,"
- Keep your email length to one screen (so the person does not have to scroll)
- Consider attaching a document or making an appointment if your email is longer than one screen
- Respond within 12 hours
- Label your attachments
- Check spelling
- Do not write in all CAPITALS
- Avoid using URGENT and IMPORTANT – unless it absolutely is
- Do not leave out the message thread if replying to an email with a history
- Refrain from using emoticons
- Do not use email to discuss confidential information
- Use "Reply All" very carefully and seldom
- Avoid emotional words (i.e., "I'd love to go to lunch...")
- Limit your use of contractions (I'd, don't, can't, We're, We'd, etc.)

***Remember, you can have no expectation of privacy when you use any of your employer's communication systems.***

## Notes

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**Neeley**  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

## NEELEY STUDENT SUCCESS SERVICES

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Tandy Hall, Room 190  
Neeley School of Business  
Texas Christian University  
TCU Box 298530  
Fort Worth, Texas 76129  
817-257-7539  
[www.neeley.tcu.edu/PDC](http://www.neeley.tcu.edu/PDC)

### ALCON CAREER CENTER

Tandy Hall, Room 380  
School of Business Texas  
Christian University TCU  
Box 297300  
Fort Worth, Texas 76129  
817-257-5572  
[www.neeley.tcu.edu/acc](http://www.neeley.tcu.edu/acc)

### About the Neeley Professional Development Center

The Professional Development Center (PDC) provides the strategy, support, and resources for student talent development. Succeeding in today's dynamic workplace requires an ability to effectively manage interpersonal and team relationships on a global scale. With an emphasis on self-awareness, the PDC equips students with the skills necessary to establish themselves as business professionals capable of communicating their thoughts, ideas, and opinions to influence others and achieve goals. M.J. Neeley established the center, originally called the Center for Productive Communication, in 1987. He owned many businesses and had the foresight to understand the critical role communication has in business.

*Director:* Kelly T. O'Brien ([k.t.obrien@tcu.edu](mailto:k.t.obrien@tcu.edu))

*Associate Director:* Mariam MacGregor ([mariam.macgregor@tcu.edu](mailto:mariam.macgregor@tcu.edu))

*Office Manager:* Jayna Elam ([jayna.elam@tcu.edu](mailto:jayna.elam@tcu.edu))

### This publication is part of the *Neeley Development Series – Tools for Business*

Other titles in this series include:

- *Résumés and Cover Letters*
- *Neeley Teaming*
- *Interviewing*
- *Productive Group Meetings*