Let’s talk:
Effective communication

Bryan Alary, Communications Associate
During his first visit to NASA in 1961, President John F. Kennedy met a janitor in the hallway.

Kennedy: “And what’s your job?”

Janitor: “Mr. President, I’m helping to put a man on the moon.”
We are part of a team with a common mission.

*Every* task we do is part of this *mission*.

It all starts with *communicating* with each other.
Department of Medicine’s Mission:

To improve the health and health care of current and future generations through excellence and innovation in education, research and clinical care.
How do we communicate?

• Face-to-Face
• Written
• Phone
• Email
• Voice mail
• Paging
• Faxing
• Text Messaging
• Instant Messaging
With whom do I communicate?

• Patients
• General public
• Physicians

• Key stakeholders (funding agencies and companies, donors, partnering universities, scientific colleagues, journal editors)
• Co-workers
• Other university staff
• Media
"The greatest problem with communication is the assumption that it has taken place."

- George Bernard Shaw
The written word: Be clear and concise

• Less is more
• Cut to the chase
• Use plain English
• Avoid jargon and acronyms
1. Conclusion or most important information

2. Supporting information

3. Details
Choose your words carefully

Avoid weak and vague words like *might, maybe, hopefully, I think, I guess, sort of, kind of.*

These words will weaken your message.
Choose your words carefully

Not:

“I was hoping we could talk about this issue and perhaps come up with a solution.”

But:

“Let’s discuss this issue and find a solution that benefits us both.”
Email

Do everyone an favour:

Cut to the chase
You've got to check this out

Hey Freddie!

This is a really long opening sentence that fails to get to the point in a clear, concise manner, thereby frustrating its intended target audience which has to take the time and wade through verbal diarrhea that meanders and rambles across the computer screen like incoherent gibberish, a situation that leads to workplace dissatisfaction and poor work performance that could imperil the Department of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, the university as a whole and even Canada and beyond. Wow, the only way to make this email worse after such a dreadful 79-word introductory sentence would be to avoid the ‘enter’ key after each sentence, thereby creating massive blocks of text that are difficult to read and off-putting to the addressee who has to make a judgement call about whether it’s worth investing the time and effort to figure out what this email is all about and then ponder a reply, or whether it’s best to ignore it altogether. Actually there is a way to make this email worse and that’s to forget about basic rules of punctuation and sentence structure meaning stringing together successive thoughts in one long run-on sentence is a problem exacerbated by utter refusal to have the human decency to use a comma semi-colon or dash indeed this is shaping up to be the worst email ever the only way this non-sense could get worse is through unprofessional touches like WRITING STRINGS OF TEXT IN CAPS LOCK THAT ARE THE WRITTEN EQUIVALENT OF SHOUTING AND ARE MUCH HARDER TO READ THAN REGULAR TYPEFACE speling and gramer errrs is the other ways to sound pullish. Of course the icing on the cake is if your unprofessionalism extends to the use of a ‘funny’ fonts, emoticons, graphics, ‘texting’ acronyms and inappropriate quotations that put your character into question.

Thanks! LMAO!

Lisa, if you don’t like your job you don’t strike. You just go in every day and do it really half-assed. That’s the American way.”

- Homer J. Simpson

PS – Don’t say the message is urgent unless it’s true.

Bryan Alary, Communications Associate
Department of Medicine – Administrative Services
Please respond ASAP

Bryan Alary

Sent: Monday, October 17, 2011 3:05 PM
To: Bryan Alary

This message is high priority.

John

Please respond ASAP.

Thank you.
Bryan

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Department of Medicine

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Email

Don’t:

1. Write a vague or lengthy subject line.
2. Let punctuation and spelling go out the window.
3. Let the attachment do the talking.
4. Write in excess.
5. Reply all unless it’s necessary
Please Do:

1. Write a pointed subject line.
2. Make your first sentence count.
3. Put important information in the email body.
4. Keep paragraphs to a sentence or two (and hit enter!)
5. Carbon copy (CC) your doc’s administrative assistant
6. Check spelling and grammar.
7. Archive.
Approval needed for newsletter publication

Bryan Alary

Sent: Monday, October 17, 2011 3:19 PM
To: Bryan Alary

Dr. Smith,

I've attached an updated draft of your newsletter submission. The changes I made are bolded below. Please review whether these are acceptable or if additional changes are needed.

Regards,
Bryan

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Are you an academic staff member who is contemplating retirement?

Health Promotion and Wellness Services is pleased to sponsor a full-day Academic Pre-Retirement Workshop to assist you in preparing for the next stage of your life. Partners are encouraged to attend.

People are living longer and more healthfully than ever before. This year the first “baby boomers” will reach the age of 65.

Over the coming decades those people born between 1946 and 1965 will dominate and transform society, as they have at each stage of their lives. Boomers are reshaping the way we view aging — breaking down the negative stereotypes and ageist attitudes that have predominated.

Today’s boomers are fit and active. Many are continuing to work, starting their own businesses or shifting to contracting or consulting. Some are retraining. Lots are travelling the world. What are you going to do with the next 30 years of your life?

Attendance at this workshop will assist participants in making more thoughtful, informed and satisfying life planning choices and in facilitating quicker, smoother transitions.

What’s Next? will include time for personal assessment and reflection, work with one’s partner, small and large group discussions, written exercises and dynamic interaction in a lively forum.

Topics of discussion include: dispelling the myths of aging, making successful transitions, self-assessment, exploring lifestyle options, health promotion, fulfilling relationships, housing options and relocation, and envisioning a preferred future.
Face-to-face communication

Whether you’re talking to a patient or co-worker, be:

1. Polite and respectful in communication
2. Sincere
3. Professional
4. Patient
5. Empathetic
Be an effective communicator

• Talk less, hear more.
• Don’t shoot the messenger.
• Avoid mind reading.
• Seek clarity.
• Stop pushing.
Let’s meet
Let’s meet

**Doodle**: fast, simple way to request and manage meetings.

1. Schedule event
2. Pick a day
3. Pick time(s)
4. Poll your attendees and manage in one place
Talking to the media

• Be a relay, not an information source.
• Refer them to FoMD media relations.
• Give your doc a heads up. If possible, provide reporter’s name, publication, story angle, deadline.
Questions?