E-mail Characteristics, Guidelines, and Integration with Business Communication Education in the U.S.A.

—E-mail instructional consideration in order to introduce e-mail into Business English classes in Japan

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At the beginning of the 1980's, electronic mail, or e-mail,[1] was a relatively rare and specialized communication medium, unfamiliar to most people in business and academia. By the early 1990's, e-mail had become an important mode of communication for many people in firms and in universities. Its use continues to grow rapidly.

E-mail is an important communication breakthrough and must be regarded as an opportunity to advance communication theory and practice in business communication education. When I am back in Osaka University of Foreign Studies, I intend to utilize e-mail in business communication classes, especially in intercultural communication class, for presenting technology in messages and also for introducing research strategies.

Because most universities and colleges in the U.S.A. have e-mail capability, American business communication teachers are rapidly integrating this technology into business communication courses. A survey of the program session titles of the Association for Business Communication (1995) Annual Convention held in Orlando indicated that 22 (8.3 percent) of the 265 conference session titles included the

words of "e-mail," "electronic mail," "Internet," or "Information Highway." Other session titles containing more inclusive terms such as "telecommunications" were not counted, even though such programs very well may have included information about "e-mail" or "Internet." There are estimates that 30 million people worldwide have e-mail access to the Internet, and use of the Internet alone is increasing by 10 percent per month. Dr. Vinton Cerf, one of the developers of the Internet's data transfer protocols, testified to the U.S. House of Representatives that "there is reason to expect that the Internet user population will exceed 100 million by 1998."[2] As more and more individuals, firms, and organizations utilize e-mail and connect with the Internet, business communication instructors must adapt their class instruction to include this technology as part of the communication process.

In order to give e-mail instructional consideration to business English classes in Japan, this paper discusses the following on e-mail as used in the U.S.A.: (1) e-mail characteristics from the view points of (i) e-mail as a communication medium and (ii) the great equalizer, and individual, task and organizational factors, (2) e-mail interpersonal communication guidelines, (3) a survey of 15 business communication textbooks in terms of number of pages and topics covered for e-mail, and (4) instructional applications.

1. E-MAIL CHARACTERISTICS

Each additional communication medium allows further choices to the communicator in deciding which medium to use and how to use it. In order to make these choices intelligently, communicators must

understand how e-mail compares to other available communication media. In addition, they need to understand how other factors—such as the personal preferences of sender or receiver, the demands of the task at hand, and organizational factors—may affect use. Because e-mail is so new, widespread norms for its use have not yet solidified.[3] Local norms and individual practices may vary widely. Thus the following discussion of factors shaping the use of e-mail is intended to be more descriptive than normative.

(i) E-mail as a Communication Medium

The many avid users of e-mail find it a rapid and convenient medium for conducting business and for socializing. Although e-mail messages are written, they share characteristics with telephone calls as well as with correspondence; e-mail has a few advantages, as well as some disadvantages, in comparison with each alternative. While e-mail may be used to displace some telephone or paper-based communication, it is also used for some new types of communication that did not previously exist.

E-mail is a form of asynchronous communication. Information does not flow in both directions at once as it does in a telephone conversation. As with postal mail, a "conversation" is made up of a series of messages and replies. This asynchronous method makes communication across time zones much easier. E-mail, however, combines advantages of synchronous and asynchronous systems: Like letters, e-mail messages can be composed, sent, and read at any convenient time and at many locations; and, as on the telephone, messages travel quickly (sometimes they are delivered within seconds).

E-mail is often used for quick exchanges of news, information, and schedules that would otherwise occur over the telephone. While it lacks the added richness of vocal inflection and the immediate and interactive qualities of a telephone conversation, e-mail messages are often informal and conversational in style and tone. E-mail avoids, however, the annoyance of telephone tag, which can sometimes drag out for days. Moreover, both parties to an e-mail exchange can deal with the communication at times convenient for them, thus avoiding intrusive interruptions when they are involved with other business. E-mail messages arrive with little or no notice (some systems beep if the recipient is on-line to notify him or her that a message has arrived). Assuming that both parties check their electronic mail reasonably frequently each day, an exchange can usually be completed within a few hours and with minimum inconvenience.

Some users also argue that less time is wasted on polite chit-chat in this medium than on the telephone. When people visit someone's office or call someone on the telephone with a quick question, they often feel that they cannot just blurt the question out as soon as they reach the other person and leave or hang up as soon as they get the answer. Social norms of politeness require some general conversation before or after the message of question itself. While some people see this social conversation as important to relationships and worth the time it consumes, others see it as a waste of time in many cases. Because e-mail dose not have settled norms that require socializing, it is often used for brief questions and answers with no surrounding conversation. On the other hand, e-mail can also be the medium for much purely social, rather than task-oriented, communication. Some firms have been dismayed by such e-mail traffic, perceiving it as a

waste of time. However, such communication is an important socializing force in an organization and, therefore, to be welcomed rather than discouraged.

Because e-mail messages are written rather than oral, they also share some characteristics with more traditional genres of written communication in organizations, such as memos, letters, and notes. Most obviously, because an e-mail message is recorded, it is not ephemeral like a phone conversation. The fact that e-mail can be stored and retrieved for later use offers the advantages of paper documentation and filing, providing a reliable back-up to human memory. The relative permanence of e-mail messages has its disadvantages, as well. Once it is sent, an e-mail message, like a paper document, has a life of its own. Consequently, in some situations, users may be wary of sending highly confidential messages by e-mail, just as they may be of committing them to paper, for fear that the message might be forwarded to others, saved indefinitely by the system, and even read by system administrators or others gaining unauthorized access to the files. (This will be discussed later in the section on e-mail security.)

The advent of rapid and inexpensive photocopying, with the introduction of the first Xerox machine in 1960, led to proliferation of paper copies; similarly, the even greater ease of sending or forwarding many copies of messages in e-mail often encourages proliferation of electronic documents. This proliferation may lead to electronic junk mail (unneeded or unwanted copies of messages or announcements) that clogs the system and wastes users' time. While storage of electronic messages takes up less space than storage of paper documents, even electronic storage has its limits. Of greater

concern are the associated problems of information overload for message recipients. Individuals receiving a large amount of excess e-mail may be overwhelmed by it and may spend all their time dealing with it. Alternatively, they may learn to discard or ignore electronic junk mail, although, in doing so, they run the risk of accidentally discarding important messages.

In spite of these similarities between paper-based and electronic correspondence, there are also many differences. While local norms vary, e-mail messages are often informal and conversational in tone, less polished in format and style, and less correct in spelling and grammar than letters or memos. These differences derive, in part, from the fact that e-mail messages are generally created more quickly and with less human mediation than are most paper-based messages in organizations. Letters and memos are often written by one person but produced in final form by a secretary or member of a word-processing pool. Producing documents takes time, which slows the course of written exchanges but gives the originator of a message time to review and revise it. In e-mail, managers and professionals are frequently compose and send messages themselves. Rapid exchanges yield greater speed but often reduce the amount of time people spend thinking about their messages and the amount of revision the messages receive. While improvements in editing and formatting capabilities of systems are removing some of the barriers to revision, the future evolution of norms for use is less clear.

Another difference often noted between e-mail messages and traditional memos and letters is more extreme language and more emotional content, sometimes escalating into conflict that has to be resolved through other communication channels (e.g. face to face or

over the telephone). Such conflicts probably arise in part from the rapidity and lack of mediation just mentioned. If a message irritates its receiver, that person may hit the reply key, compose an angry response, and hit the send key, all before having a chance to calm down and consider the implication of the response. This tendency towards extreme and uninhibited language — sometimes known as *flaming* (e.g. emotional outbursts, obscene language, and name-calling)—is widespread in electronic communication. E-mail and other forms of computer-mediated communication encourage this phenomenon by removing social context cues present in other modes of communication (e.g. the communicator neither sees nor hears the message recipient, and there is no paper letterhead to remind the communicator of the organizational context).

E-mail has not just displaced some written documents and telephone calls; it is also used for certain types of communication that would probably not have occurred at all without this medium. E-mail provides a way to exchange information that would not have been worth a disruptive or lengthy telephone call, a formal written document, or even a walk down a hall. Users have found it particularly valuable in maintaining frequent contact between individuals over great geographical distances, especially when time differences and costs deter the use of telephone. While e-mail does not displace face-to-face communication, it may enrich face-to-face interactions by providing a channel through which minor details can be handled, thereby leaving more substantive issues for direct discussion.

Thus, e-mail, like many new communication media before it, is probably more additive than substitutive. E-mail is not likely to replace the telephone or paper-based written correspondence, but it

provides an additional channel that can enrich overall communication for individuals and groups.

(ii) The Great Equalizer, and Individual, Task, and Organizational Factors

Because a person's gender, education, age, ethnic origins, appearance, handicaps, wealth, and social situation are not readily apparent in many e-mail exchanges, the Internet has become something of a leveler. It provides access to the world of information and ideas that often ignores the social restrictions put on each of these categories. E-mail acts as the great equalizer. Most of the time, you know someone's name and e-mail address when you send e-mail to him, nothing more. For example, TomSmith@com could be a janitor, a summer student intern, or the president of what is actually a Fortune 500 firm. Similarly, any address ending in edu can link to a student, some member of the staff, a world-renowned professor, or the president of the university.[4] You have no way of knowing unless that fact somehow comes up in conversation.

Factors other than the capabilities of the medium itself affect how e-mail is used and how it affects organizations. Individual, task, and organizational factors all play a role in shaping e-mail use. Individuals may have abilities, experiences, or self-images that shape their preferences for sending or receiving e-mail messages. Those who are already proficient with computers, for example, may find e-mail more desirable than those who lack experience and ability at using them. Similarly, ability to type (or willingness to type, given traditional images of who does and does not type) may shape

individual reactions to e-mail. Further, individuals who feel they are better writers than speakers may find e-mail an attractive alternative to face-to-face or telephone interactions. Anecdotal evidence points to many individuals who are quite reserved in these other modes of communication but who blossom in electronic communication because they can create a better image of themselves in the informal writing often characteristic of e-mail than they can in oral communication. Alternatively, people who are effective speakers but less proficient writers may use electronic mail less extensively.

The preference of a message receiver may also shape a communicator's choice and use of e-mail. Some people dislike being interrupted by telephone calls and visits and prefer to receive e-mail messages. Other people do not like e-mail and may not use it at all. In still other cases, individuals use e-mail occasionally but do not log onto the system often enough to guarantee timely receipt of a message. A communicator must take these factors into consideration in choosing and using e-mail for particular purposes and with particular individuals.

Task demands also shape media choices. E-mail, like other types of written communication, is best suited to tasks involving routine, non-equivocal information, whereas telephone and face-to-face communication are better suited to complex and equivocal tasks. Other task factors do and should play a role in media choices as well. For example, geographical distance separating those involved in a task, along with associated time zone differences, may make e-mail a very desirable medium for carrying out many tasks. Similarly, e-mail may be particularly appropriate for communicating about a complex task that needs to be comprehensively documented for later reference. Thus,

communicators need to look at a variety of task factors as well as other factors.

Organizational factors also shape (and are shaped by) the use of e-mail. E-mail, like telephone, is useless to a single individual and becomes increasingly useful as more people are accessible on the system. Thus, a critical mass or sufficient number of users is necessary to get a system going and to keep it growing. Moreover, an organization that provides the equipment required for convenient access to e-mail to all or most employees will certainly have different use patterns than one that provides such access only to professionals or only to support staff. By determining what resources are available to whom, an organization influences the success and patterns of e-mail in organizations.

Organizational culture as well as norms for existing communication media are also likely to influence the ways in which a new medium such as e-mail is used. For example, very formal organizations are likely to use this new medium in more formal ways similar to the ways they use existing paper-based communication. For example, correct spelling and grammar may be considered necessary in such organizations. Looser, more informal organizations that depend less on written communication and more on informal telephone communication may carry the conversational norms of telephone into e-mail. In such contexts, correctness may seem unnecessary. Another organizational factor is the way e-mail is introduced to an organization. For example, in attempting to persuade people to use e-mail systems, many vendors and internal champions have encouraged informality, saying that messages in this medium do not have to conform to the norms of more formal, paper-based written

communication.

As discussed earlier in the great equalizer of e-mail, the equalizing effect carries over to some extent to communication within an organization. Observers of the organizational influence of e-mail often note that it changes interaction patterns by giving those lower in a hierarchy readier access to those above the level of their own supervisors. The hierarchical paths traditionally followed for written communication may be perceived as optional for the often-less-formal electronic communication. Moreover, since e-mail is less intrusive to the recipient than visits or telephone calls, lower level individuals may feel more comfortable using it to communicate with managers more than one level above them. Therefore, the medium may erode strict hierarchical relationships and increase participation within an organization. This influence is itself shaped by the cultural norms of the organization. Where hierarchical norms are strongest, e-mail may be used more hierarchically.

In all, e-mail has at least two contradictory effects on social relations in organizations. To the extent that it displaces face-to-face and telephone communication, it may reduce accompanying social interaction in an organization. On the other hand, to the extent that e-mail adds a new type of communication that would not otherwise have occurred, it may augment social relations. For example, there is anecdotal evidence of relationships (even romantic ones) that are created, that develop, or that are maintained primarily over e-mail or electronic conferences. Under some circumstances e-mail may enhance social relations in organizations and, under others, it may reduce them.

2. E-MAIL INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

The nature of e-mail in comparison to other available media, as well as the influence of individual preference, task, and organization on the adoption, use and effects of e-mail, are still being studied. Nevertheless, teachers of business communication should introduce their students to the guidelines and some of the issues surrounding e-mail. (See the instructional applications discussed later.) While universal norms for e-mail use have not yet emerged, the following guidelines are suggested for effective use of e-mail. These should, of course, be combined with normal guidelines for all effective communication (e.g. analyze your audience).

Message Design

(1) Between paragraphs a blank line should be inserted; additional white space makes e-mail messages much easier to read. Nothing is harder to read than page after page of unbroken text.

(2) E-mail messages are sent in ASCII (7 bit), which contains upper- and lower-case letters, numbers, a few punctuation marks, and some control codes. Because the Internet involves millions of computers, messages must use this lowest common denominator to communicate. Underlining, boldface, italics, and other ways of highlighting are generally not available in e-mail. However, with some practice, you accentuate words by using capital letters, a line of hyphens below the words, stars(*) at the beginning and end of the words (asterisks

emphasis), or an underline character at the beginning and at the end of the words (pseudo_underlining_).

(3) When inserting pieces of a previous message into your message in order to reply to them, indent or otherwise set off the pieces, or use ">" symbol at the head of each sentence inserted so that formatting clearly differentiates them from your own message.

(4) Use capital letters only for emphasis. Sometimes individuals new to e-mail or unaccustomed to typing enter entire messages in capital letters. Such messages are hard to read and are often perceived as "shouting" at the reader.

(5) Provide an appropriate subject line for most messages. Many systems list all received messages with sender, receiver, and subject line. A recipient who receives a lot of e-mail may decide whether or when to read a message based on the subject line. Moreover, the subject line (of your own stored messages as well as messages you receive and store) is an important aid in retrieving messages. Replying to a received messages is easier than initiating a new one; however, it usually retains the subject line on the original message. As a result, the same subject line gets used again and again, losing any value as a scanning or retrieval device. Thus, you should initiate a new message when the subject changes significantly.

E-mail Style

(1) While norms for formality and correctness vary, make sure that carelessness in matters such as typing and grammar does not interfere with your meaning. Reread your message to make sure it is clear and appropriate.

(2) While e-mail messages are, on average, less formal than paper-based business documents, adjust your formality and tone to suit your purpose and audience. Use your style to indicate to your reader how formal and serious you intend the message to be. In light of the informality of e-mail compared to postal mail (called in the Internet community, *snail mail*), the standard salutation of "Dear" sounds inappropriately formal and stilted to most e-mail users. Because e-mail more closely resembles spoken communication than written, some people opt for the less formal and more colloquial "Hi," or "Hello." Some people forego the salutation completely, relying solely on the name, more often, on the first name. However, this approach feels abrupt to some people, as if someone called them on the phone and stated the recipient's name without a "Hello" or so much as a questioning tone.

(3) A universal drawback of the written word and long distance communication without visual aides is the absence of body language. When "talking" by computer, your intended meanings may be misunderstood because the emotional clues such as body language, facial expressions and vocal inflection experienced in person or by phone are absent. E-mail is ASCII text only, and only two ways exist to convey inflections such

as humor, sarcasm, surprise, anger, irony, or bewilderment that would be obvious in spoken conversation. First, polish your writing skills. There is no substitute for clear and coherent writing. You should not think of composing e-mail as writing, but as speaking to someone who sees your words but cannot see or hear you. Second, utilize *smileys* (also referred to as *emoticons*). These are figures created with the symbols on a keyboard that can be read with your head tilted (which is usually easier than your monitor tilted) to the side. They are used to convey the spirit in which a line of text is typed. For example, :-) signifies a smile. People have come up with literally hundreds of different smileys, and you can find lists containing hundreds of them on the Internet. See a lot of smileys in *The Smiley Dictionary*.[5] A few of the more popular emoticons are as follows:[6]

:-)	Smiling humor	:-,	Smirk
:-1	Smirk/Brand smile	:-!	Bland smile
:-}	Fiedish grim/Dopey smile	:-/	Popeye smile/ Undecided
:-]	Biting sarcasm smile	:-^	After wry statement
:-(	Frowning/Unhappy	):-)	Big smile
:-|	Grim/disgusted	(:-&	Anger
):-(	Big frown	8-|	Eyes wide with surprise
:-<	Forlorm	:-#	Sealed lips /Censored /Wears braces
'-)	Wink	:/)	Not funny
|-(	Bored	|-)	Asleep
:—*	Kiss	:-@	Scream

:->	Sarcasm	8-0	"Omigod!"

The implication of some smileys: The happy face :-) implies that what you just said was meant as humor or at least should not be taken too seriously. A variant of the happy face uses the semicolon instead of the colon ;-) and (because of the wink) implies that the preceding sentence was somewhat sarcastic or ironic. The frowning face :-(implies that you are not happy about whatever you just said. However, be careful that your humor does not came across as sarcasm. Even with the *emoticons*, or stage directions "she said with a chuckle" common in some systems, humor can be misread and resented. Choose your words, as well as symbols, with your audience in mind.

(4) Another shorthand way of communicating is through a set of commonly understood abbreviations such as:

<g>	grin	AKA	Also Known As
BTW	By The Way	IMHO	In My Humble Opinion
IMO	In My Opinion	LOL	Laughing Out Loud
SYSOP	System Operator	OTOH	On The Other Hand
ROFL	Rolling On the Floor Laughing		

(5) When you are angered or annoyed by a message, don't reply immediately. The immediacy and semi-anonymity of on-line communication makes it easy for users to issue inappropriate remarks. Personal attacks, or *flames*, can often erupt into a flame war, which wastes everybody's time, bandwidth (which

is composed of transmission time, people time, and disk storage throughout the world), and can be emotionally upsetting. Mail that is sent cannot be unsent or called back. Give yourself time to consider the appropriateness of your response before you send it. You may regret a hasty and "flaming" response.

E-mail Etiquette

(1) Avoid indiscriminate copying and forwarding of messages. Such behavior contributes to electronic junk mail. In replying to a message, you may insert the relevant pieces of that message, indented, into the message before your response, to avoid having to paraphrase the sender's question or comment. Avoid, however, just appending the entire previous message, especially if it is long.

(2) Never alter, then forward, another person's message without clearly labelling the alterations as your own. While some systems allow you to do this, it misrepresents the originator of the message.

(3) Never, under any circumstances, send unsolicited e-mail to a list of internet users. The Internet cannot be used as an alternative method of sending flyers, or other advertisements.

(4) If tensions have escalated in an e-mail exchange, switch to another medium (usually telephone or face-to-face) to address the issue and reduce tensions.

Security

(1) The confidentiality of the postal and telephone systems is established in law, but that of e-mail is still in flux. E-mail is not a fully secure medium. Keep in mind that no matter what you say, it may not be private. Always assume that a lot of people can and do read every message you send. These people include your coworkers, your system administrator, system administrators on other machines through which your e-mail travels, fools who like poking around in other people's e-mail, and last, but certainly not least, the government. In reality, e-mail carries significant privacy, but because you have no guarantee of that privacy, you should stay aware of what your are saying, and exercise caution in sending certain financial, personal, or proprietary information.

(2) There are also the dangers of on-line pseudonyms provided by "FakeMail" service. *Time* magazine reported on a controversial "FakeMail" service on the Internet underscoring the dangers of on-line pseudonyms.—the latest hot prank on the Internet: "FakeMail," a free service that lets fun-loving correspondents send e-mail that looks as if it is from anyone they choose—Bill Clinton, Bill Gates or even God.[7]

(3) Another security matter is that while in most cases e-mail will reach its intended destination, accidents such as improper addresses or an unintended action by an unknowledgeable recipient, such as printing the message on a public printer, can occur.

Therefore, encryption is a hot topic on the Internet, and new protocols and algorithms are available which will make e-mail more secure and useful. One of the encryption programs is Pretty Good Privacy, or PGP, written by Phil Zimmermann, which provides individuals with the kind of strong cryptography that has, in the past, been available only to the military, intelligence agencies, and large corporations. You can use PGP to encrypt your files and e-mail. You can also use PGP to "sign" documents with a tamper-proof digital signature, proving that you wrote these documents and that they were not modified during transmission.[8]

3. SURVEY OF TEXTBOOK COVERAGE

An interesting survey of 15 current business communication textbooks (1992 or more recent copyright) regarding e-mail coverage was made and presented by Bialac and Morse.[9] (See the list of textbooks.)

All but one had been published in 1993 or later. All of these textbooks had the phrase "business communication" in the title. Managerial communication textbooks were excluded from the survey; a quick survey of five managerial communication textbooks revealed very little, if any, content coverage of e-mail. Only business communication textbooks were surveyed.

Many textbooks talk about e-mail, facsimile mail, or databases in general theoretical terms, but few discuss the content or provide examples of e-mail messages. The surveyors expected that the more recent textbooks would have more e-mail coverage; however, a recent copyright did not necessarily mean greater e-mail content. Although

"e-mail" or "electronic mail" may have been covered on different pages, frequently the reference to e-mail was minimal. The examples tended to focus on the software or system arrangement and format rather than the message being communicated via e-mail. Some textbooks, however, gave many special suggestions for e-mail messages and also provided ways in which e-mail messages were different from more traditional mail messages.

As shown in Table 1 below, all of the textbooks did cover at least one or more pages for the terms e-mail, electronic mail, or e-mail messages. Care should be taken in comparing the number of pages for each textbook. The amount of coverage per page (number of sentences or paragraphs) varied considerably. One textbook might have a full page of coverage, and another textbook which did index e-mail might have less than a paragraph describing the topic. A more precise analysis would be needed to tabulate the number of words devoted to e-mail topics. However, imprecise as the results are, approximately 40 percent of the textbooks devoted three or fewer pages to e-mail topics. Sixty percent of the textbooks had at least four or more pages covering e-mail.

TABLE 1

E-MAIL COVERAGE
IN BUSINESS COMMUNICASION TEXTBOOKS
BY NUMBER OF PAGES

No. of Pages	No. of Textbooks	% of Textbooks
0	0	0.0
1	1	6.7
2-3	5	33.3
4-5	5	33.3
6 or more	4	26.7
Total	15	100.0

Table 2 presents the type of e-mail coverage in the textbooks. The majority (80%) of the textbooks which indexed e-mail covered the topic primarily by describing the technology. Approximately 67 percent of the textbooks described the content, organization, and special suggestions of e-mail messages. Several textbooks indicated that the format, appearance, organization, and content of e-mail messages are different from traditional memos.

Privacy or ethical issues in e-mail were covered by one-third of the textbooks. Only about one third of the textbooks provided actual examples of e-mail messages. Business communication textbooks offer many examples of letters and memos, but the textbooks are slow to show actual examples of e-mail messages. This is mostly because e-mail is so new that widespread norms for its use have not solidified and local norms and individual practices may vary widely. Of those providing examples, some focused more on the software format and appearance rather than the e-mail message itself.

TABLE 2

TYPE OF E-MAIL COVERAGE
IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TEXTBOOKS

Type of Coverage	No. of Textbooks	% of Textbooks
Technology	12	80.0
Content & organization of e-mail messages	10	66.7
Privacy or ethics	5	33.3
Examples of e-mail messages	5	33.3
Total	--*	--*

*No totals are given because textbooks could contain more than one type of coverage. Most textbooks covered at least two of the topics.

4. INSTRUCTIONAL APPLICATIONS

As indicated earlier, at least 8.3 percent of the program titles at the ABC (the Association for Business Communication) National Convention concerned "E-mail," "Internet," "Information Superhighway," etc. As the survey shows, 60 percent of business communication textbooks had at least four or more pages covering e-mail, and approximately 67 percent of the textbooks described the content, organization, and special suggestions of e-mail messages. This would indicate that US business communication teachers are using e-mail technology in their classes.

Where feasible, e-mail can be used as the medium for actual assignments or for communication between teachers and students between classes. Similarly, students need to acquaint themselves with the capabilities and use of e-mail in preparation for its use in future jobs. Teachers and students need to recognize the e-mail characteristics, the differences and the similarities between computer-based and paper-based communication.

One of the more comprehensive articles on using e-mail was authored by Bayless & Irvine.[10] The following is the suggested instructional applications and student applications:[11]

Teacher Applications

1. Syllabus (sending the syllabus to students rather than the traditional handout.

2. Messages to individuals and classes:

(1) schedule or changes in schedule

(2) class assignments

(3) information for class

(4) report of test scores, evaluation of written assignments and reports

(5) idea discussions/forums

(6) feedback (respond, react) to student e-mail assignments

3. Research source information (Internet, Gophers, LISTSERVE, bulletin boards, etc.)

4. Research or report assignments on e-mail topics (usage in the work place, format/organization of e-mail messages, privacy / confidentiality concerns, ethical issues, equipment, and telecommuting).

Student Applications

Business communication instructors may use many of the same assignments, exercises, and classroom activities they presently use in existing classes. E-mail technology offers another tool for communication. Below are some suggestions for student applications:

1. Submitting written assignments to instructor via e-mail.

2. Sending progress reports or special requests to instructor

3. Sending messages to other students (personal messages, collaborative work, mentors, etc.)

4. Communicating with students or individuals in other universities, organizations, or even countries. Pen pals (E-pals) at other locations. (It will be interesting in intercultural communication class to link students with their counterparts at other universities in different countries and to work together for certain projects.)
5. Obtaining research information through library or Internet sources.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to make choices as to which communication medium to use, communicators must understand how e-mail compares to other communication media. The nature of e-mail in comparison with other media, as well as the influence of individual preference, task, and organization on the adoption, use, and effects of e-mail, is still being studied. Nevertheless, business communication teachers should introduce their students to this medium and some of the issues surrounding it, including message design, style, etiquette, and security.

As for instructional consideration of e-mail, teachers and students need to recognize the e-mail characteristics, guidelines, the differences and the similarities among other communication media, and adopt instructional applications and student applications in their classes.

In the United States:

(1) Business communication teachers are rapidly introducing e-mail into their classes.
(2) Business communication teachers can use a number of

different teacher and student applications of e-mail.

(3) A majority of business communication textbooks discuss technology or e-mail content; however, only one-third show any type of e-mail examples in their textbook coverage.

In Japan:

No textbooks of business communication in English or business English, published in Japan, cover e-mail or the Internet. The Japanese business English teachers I interviewed give instruction in their classes, using only paper-based media, not e-mail so far. Of course, we have to take into consideration the pervasion of e-mail or Internet capability not only at universities and colleges but also for business in Japan. Nevertheless, this would indicate that the instruction of business communication is some years ahead of that of business English in Japan in use of e-mail and the Internet in class. I hope this paper will be conducive to introducing e-mail to business English instruction in Japan. We have seen e-mail (U.S. born) characteristics and guidelines in the U.S.A., but it will also be interesting to see how different they will be in Japan, affected by the culture, even though it is the same technology.

This decade will certainly see further penetration of e-mail within organizations. Current and potential users, as well as teachers, need to pay close attention to future developments in e-mail, perhaps even helping to shape those developments. E-mail is a communication technology in widespread and ever-increasing use today.

Special thanks to Professor JoAnne Yates, my adviser at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management, who gave me information, especially on e-mail characteristics and guidelines in the U.S.A. And thanks to my senior professors and colleagues of Osaka University of Foreign Studies. I was given an opportunity to study and research on "New Technologies and Business Communication" and "International Management" at the MIT Sloan School of Management from September, 1994 to September, 1995, and at Thunderbird, The American Graduate School of International Management from November, 1995 to March, 1996.

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