

Checklist: 12 of the Most Controversial Issues in Business Communication—and How to Handle Them in the Classroom

In the evolving world of business communication, instructors must prepare students to handle topics that are no longer just professional—but also political, cultural, emotional, and ethical. These topics often feel like walking on eggshells—demanding careful language, strategic framing, and an awareness of invisible boundaries. This checklist offers instructors a structured approach to navigating 12 of the most controversial issues in business communication and equips students with the skills, mindsets, and ethics to face them thoughtfully and effectively in the workplace.

1. Bluntness vs. Diplomacy

- ☐ Use paired-role simulations that contrast blunt vs. diplomatic approaches in emails or meetings
- ☐ Discuss cultural norms (e.g., high-context vs. low-context cultures) that shape expectations
- ☐ Debrief on how intent, tone, and delivery affect perception

2. Emoji and Emoticon Usage

- ☐ Present research and style guides from different industries on emoji usage
- ☐ Create assignments where students compare messages with and without emojis
- ☐ Facilitate a class debate: “Professional or juvenile?”

3. Personal Opinions on Sensitive Topics

- ☐ Use case studies of internal workplace conflict over political/social issues
- ☐ Encourage discussions on boundaries, freedom of speech, and professional respect
- ☐ Introduce company codes of conduct as part of policy literacy

4. Humor in Communication

- ☐ Analyze failed and successful uses of humor in business ads or internal memos
- ☐ Role-play feedback sessions with and without humor
- ☐ Explore audience sensitivity and intent vs. impact

5. Transparency in Business Communication

- ☐ Examine real cases (e.g., corporate scandals or whistleblowing) to explore transparency dilemmas

- ☐ Ask students to draft press releases or internal memos with varying degrees of openness
- ☐ Invite guest speakers from PR or crisis communication roles

6. Negative Feedback Delivery

- ☐ Compare different feedback models (e.g., SBI, DESC, Pendleton)
- ☐ Practice difficult conversations through structured peer-to-peer feedback sessions
- ☐ Reflect on emotional impact, tone, and language framing

7. Privacy Concerns

- ☐ Lead a discussion on balancing transparency with legal and ethical privacy standards
- ☐ Examine real-world cases (e.g., GDPR violations or employee monitoring policies)
- ☐ Have students draft privacy policies or internal memos on sensitive topics

8. Generational Differences

- ☐ Use generational communication preference surveys in class
- ☐ Create cross-generational messaging projects (e.g., how to appeal to Boomers vs. GenZ)
- ☐ Discuss stereotypes, inclusivity, and adaptability in tone

9. Ghosting in Business

- ☐ Analyze case examples of professional ghosting in hiring or partnerships
- ☐ Discuss the ethics and long-term brand implications of ignoring communication
- ☐ Assign students to write tactful “decline” messages or disengagement notices

10. AI-Generated Content

- ☐ Assign side-by-side comparison tasks of human vs. AI-generated emails or proposals
- ☐ Facilitate ethical discussions: “Who owns AI content?” “Is AI-generated feedback ethical?”
- ☐ Introduce policies on disclosure, editing, and transparency of AI use

11. Monitoring Employee Communication

- ☐ Present arguments for and against workplace surveillance
- ☐ Simulate a corporate policy-writing task with justification for surveillance
- ☐ Engage students in a structured debate: “Is monitoring ever justifiable?”


12. Emotional Intelligence vs. Technical Skills

- ☐ Host self-assessments and peer feedback activities on EI competencies
- ☐ Review hiring trends and HR reports on soft skill demands
- ☐ Facilitate role-plays: Resolving conflict with EQ vs. logic-driven problem solving

As business communication becomes more nuanced and high-stakes, instructors must not shy away from controversial topics—but rather, lean into them with pedagogical intention. This checklist isn't about providing the “correct” answers. It's about teaching students to ask the right questions, evaluate diverse perspectives, and communicate with integrity under pressure. Through ethical reasoning, contextual awareness, and real-world practice, students can learn to walk the eggshell-laden path of modern business communication with both confidence and compassion.

WHY AI LITERACY IS THE NEW CORE COMPETENCY IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

1 THE COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED



FROM EMAILS TO ALGORITHMS, THE NEW COMMUNICATION FRONTIER.


- Tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Hemingway Editor are commonly used.
- Professionals must know how AI affects clarity, tone, and credibility.

COMMUNICATORS WHO CAN'T USE AI WILL FALL BEHIND

- AI is used in writing proposals, summarizing meetings, and generating visual content.
- Resumes, presentations, and email are increasingly AI-assisted.
- AI-savvy communicators are faster sharper, and more effective.


2 AI TOOLS ARE THE NEW WORKPLACE NORM

COMMUNICATORS WHO CAN'T USE AI WILL FALL BEHIND



- Miss faster, smarter messaging their competitors already mastered.
- Lose relevance in AI-powered business environments.
- Fall behind in speed, scale, and strategic insight.

3 EMPLOYERS ARE DEMANDING AI FLUENCY




JOB-READY MEANS AI-READY

Job postings increasingly list “AI communication skills

- Candidates must understand prompts, feedback loops, and ethical AI use.
- Interviews are increasing AI-analyzed for nonverbal cues, behavior and personality insights, and paralinguistic features.


4 ETHICAL COMMUNICATION NOW INCLUDES AI



CAN YOU SPOT AN AI DEEPAKE? CAN YOUR STUDENTS?

- Real Faces, Fake Voices:** Deepfakes can make people appear to say things they never did—blending video and audio with AI precision.
- Emotion Over Evidence:** These fakes are designed to spark strong reactions before you think critically.
- Detecting Requires Understanding:** Spotting deepfakes takes more than sharp eyes—it takes AI awareness and digital literacy.

DON'T JUST TEACH BUSINESS COMMUNICATION. FUTURE-PROOF IT.



- Don't just teach business communication—future-proof it.
- Integrate AI Skills Early:** Prepare students to write, edit, and present with AI as a trusted co-creator, not a threat.
- Emphasize Ethical Fluency:** Teach students how to navigate misinformation, bias, and deepfakes with confidence and clarity.

In today's workplace, AI literacy isn't optional—it's foundational. As the attached infographic illustrates, business communication now demands the ability to collaborate with AI, interpret AI-generated content, and use AI tools to craft clear, persuasive messages.

Business Communication Today, 16th Edition, makes this shift seamless. With AI woven into every chapter, it helps students develop the communication skills employers want and the AI fluency they expect. This isn't just smart learning—it's future-ready education by the leading authors in the field.

