Ethics in Action: Instructor Guide

Developed for use with *Business Communication Today,* 16th Edition

This expanded edition provides ten 10-minute ethics spotlight activities, arranged by textbook chapter order. Each scenario connects to *Business Communication Today,* 16th Edition and includes suggested instructor answers to help guide class discussions. Use these as quick warm-ups, small-group debates, or reflection prompts to strengthen students' ethical reasoning in real-world communication contexts.

1⬜ AI and Attribution: Who Really Wrote It? (Connects with Chapter 1: Understanding Business Communication)

Scenario: An intern uses ChatGPT to write most of a client report without disclosing it. Should AI contributions be acknowledged?

Learning Objectives:
• Reinforce transparency and accountability in digital collaboration.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: What constitutes authorship when AI assists? How can disclosure maintain credibility?

Instructor Debrief:
Discuss ethical citation and the importance of AI transparency in the workplace.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- AI use must be acknowledged when it contributes significant content or structure to a message. Students should recognize that omitting disclosure can misrepresent authorship and harm credibility.

- Best practice: treat AI as a supporting tool—similar to a research assistant—while maintaining human accountability for accuracy and tone.

- Encourage noting AI collaboration briefly, such as: 'Draft prepared with assistance from a generative AI tool and reviewed for accuracy by [author].'

2️⃣ Confidentiality in Collaboration: The Leaked Draft (Connects with Chapter 2: Collaboration, Interpersonal Communication, and Business Etiquette)

Scenario: A teammate shares a confidential draft with an outsider for feedback. Helpful or harmful?

Learning Objectives:
• Examine trust and discretion in teamwork.
• Balance collaboration with security.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: How can open collaboration coexist with confidentiality?

Instructor Debrief:
Emphasize boundaries and responsible information-sharing practices.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should conclude that confidentiality agreements and workplace trust outweigh casual sharing of internal documents.

- Encourage ethical collaboration within approved channels or using internal peer reviews instead of external input.

- Point out that even good intentions (e.g., seeking advice) do not justify breaches of confidentiality or intellectual property.

3️⃣ AI Bias and Representation: The Unseen Consequences (Connects with Chapter 3: Communicating Across Cultures)

Scenario: A firm's AI hiring tool filters out diverse candidates unintentionally. Who's accountable?

Learning Objectives:
• Discuss responsibility for algorithmic outcomes.
• Foster inclusivity and fairness.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: How can communicators detect and correct AI bias?

Instructor Debrief:
Guide discussion toward proactive auditing and inclusive oversight.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should understand that accountability lies with both developers and communicators using AI outputs.

- Ethical organizations conduct audits and validate data sets to detect bias before deployment.

- Communicators play a key role in questioning AI results, ensuring language and decisions reflect inclusion and fairness.

4⃣ Cross-Cultural Missteps: The Lost in Translation Message (Connects with Chapter 3: Communicating Across Cultures)

Scenario: A campaign's humor offends international audiences. How should the team respond?

Learning Objectives:
• Explore intercultural sensitivity.
• Develop corrective communication strategies.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: How can global communicators ensure messages respect diverse audiences?

Instructor Debrief:
Encourage cultural intelligence and pre-launch review with diverse focus groups.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should identify apology and corrective communication as ethical first responses to cultural missteps.

- Effective global communicators seek pre-testing with diverse focus groups to anticipate misunderstandings.

- Stress the value of humility and swift acknowledgment in restoring trust across cultural lines.

5⃣ Tone Under Pressure: The Heated Email Response (Connects with Chapter 5: Writing Business Messages)

Scenario: A project manager replies harshly to a colleague's mistake in a company-wide thread. How can professionalism and empathy coexist under stress?

Learning Objectives:
• Identify emotional triggers in written communication.
• Practice replacing reactive language with constructive tone.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: What principles from Chapter 5 could guide tone adjustments? How can timing and empathy prevent escalation?

Instructor Debrief:
Remind students that even justified frustration must be filtered through audience awareness and organizational culture.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should recall the 'You-Attitude' and empathy principles from Chapter 5: focus on solutions, not blame.

- Encourage delaying response until emotions cool to prevent tone errors and preserve professionalism.

- An ethical communicator considers timing, phrasing, and the emotional impact of messages before sending.

6⃣ Privacy vs. Transparency: Monitoring the Workforce (Connects with Chapter 6: Designing Digital and Print Messages)

Scenario: An employer installs AI tools to track staff messages for productivity. Necessary oversight or overreach?

Learning Objectives:
• Evaluate privacy vs. efficiency trade-offs.
• Discuss communication transparency.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: How should leaders balance trust and accountability?

Instructor Debrief:
Guide debate on establishing ethical digital monitoring policies.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Instructors can highlight that transparency and consent are essential ethical standards for digital monitoring.

- Leaders should inform employees in advance about monitoring practices and explain purposes clearly.

- Balanced ethical policy: data collection only for legitimate business improvement, not intrusive surveillance.

7⃞ Social Media and Transparency: The Hidden Sponsorship (Connects with Chapter 8: Social Media)

Scenario: A marketing associate posts a product review without revealing employment ties. It's true—but is it ethical?

Learning Objectives:
• Examine honesty in public digital communication.
• Understand FTC and company disclosure norms.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: Is factual accuracy enough without full context? How might this affect stakeholder trust?

Instructor Debrief:
Highlight that transparency sustains brand reputation and audience confidence.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should note that ethical communication requires full transparency—honesty includes context, not just content.

- Regulatory bodies like the FTC require disclosure of relationships influencing endorsements.

- Conclude that failing to disclose can damage both credibility and corporate integrity.

8⃞ Visual Manipulation: The Chart That Misleads (Connects with Chapter 9: Visual Media)

Scenario: A team changes a graph's scale to exaggerate progress. Persuasive or deceptive?

Learning Objectives:
• Promote ethical data visualization.
• Evaluate impact of visual framing on decision-making.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: How do visuals influence perception? Where is the line between persuasion and deception?

Instructor Debrief:
Encourage integrity: visuals must clarify, not distort.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should recognize that manipulating visuals violates honesty in representation, even if data is technically accurate.

- Encourage adherence to proportional scales and labeling clarity.

- Ethical communicators ensure visuals illuminate truth rather than manipulate interpretation.

9 Persuasion and Pressure: The Overpromised Proposal (Connects with Chapter 12: Writing Persuasive Messages)

Scenario: A salesperson shortens delivery times to win a bid. When do optimism and dishonesty diverge?

Learning Objectives:
• Reinforce truthfulness in persuasive communication.
• Address short-term gains vs. long-term trust.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: Can persuasion remain ethical if accuracy is sacrificed?

Instructor Debrief:
Stress the ethical obligation to ensure promises match capabilities.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should distinguish persuasion from deception: exaggeration undermines credibility and damages long-term relationships.

- Encourage realistic framing—ethical persuasion highlights genuine strengths while acknowledging limitations.

- Instructors can connect this to ethical audience analysis: respect the decision-maker's right to accurate information.

▢ The Ghostwriter Dilemma: Writing for the Boss (Connects with Chapter 14: Planning Reports and Proposals)

Scenario: You're asked to draft an article expressing opinions you disagree with under your manager's name.

Learning Objectives:
• Debate authenticity vs. loyalty.
• Reflect on professional integrity.

Discussion Prompts:
Ask: When does ghostwriting cross an ethical line?

Instructor Debrief:
Note that ethical writing respects truth while aligning with organizational representation.

Suggested Instructor Answers:

- Students should understand that ghostwriting is acceptable only when it accurately represents the credited author's views.

- An ethical communicator clarifies discrepancies privately rather than misrepresenting opinions publicly.

- Instructors can emphasize balancing professional duty with personal conscience— transparency and internal dialogue preserve integrity.