

**My Favorite Assignment: As Overheard...****Melinda Phillabaum ([mphillab@iupui.edu](mailto:mphillab@iupui.edu) or 317-278-7329)****BUSINESS COMMUNICATION PROJECT ASSIGNMENT**

Many meetings and other business activities are held outside of the workplace. Interviews, sales meetings, promotions, and dismissals are often held outside the actual business establishment. Your assignment is to observe the communication process that happens in locations such as Starbuck's, Panera, Einstein's, one of the area mall food courts, or anywhere you feel or see some type of business communication being discussed.

**The Assignment**

Write a paper that analyzes the pros and cons of this type of off-site meeting. The names of the businesses or individuals are not particularly important--do not record the conversation, just observe the event and take notes. Include dates, times, and location of the meetings in your paper.

Try not to be obvious about it and some of you might not be bold or comfortable deliberately eavesdropping on others. Do what is comfortable for you. If appropriate, you may even ask the individuals conducting the meeting if you could observe—this has worked well in the past. He/she may even give you a business card as a record of your transaction. You may do this assignment with two or more students if you choose.

If you do this as a group---you only need to submit one group paper.  
If you do this individually—you will submit your own paper.

Due is a one page paper---single space—no word requirement but it must cover the major points.  
**You will also be discussing your observations in class so be prepared to talk about the experience. Have a two minute conversation about your observation ready to go.**

**Target Learners**

- The assignment is designed for any level of student and for any major
- This Business Communication course is a 200 level course

**Learning Objectives**

- To get a feel for the ways different businesses and business people approach a meeting or a negotiation in such a setting. This includes not just the subject of the conversation, but the style of interaction among parties as well. Soft sell, hard sell, is someone really insecure or out of their depth or element in a conversation?

- Which one is driving the conversation or topic? How are they doing it? What is the nonverbal conversation?
- Do men/women meeting tend to be discussing the same element of a business relationship, or is there a wide scope of business interactions taking place?
- Think about both substance and style of a business meeting or transaction in such a setting, and when would it be least effective? Often companies fire a client or employee in a public place (restaurant) so that people will keep a sense of decorum and not make a scene. Sometimes it works, sometimes not. Do people have business arguments in a place like Starbucks?

### **Time to Complete**

- One week from when the assignment is given

### **Materials, Equipment, and Special Considerations**

- Good listening skills
- Paper and pen for note taking

### **Evaluating Outcomes/Grading**

- Understanding soft skills, nonverbal communication, audience adaptation, and cultural differences
- Demonstrating critical thinking by synthesizing and analyzing information from various sources and perspectives
- Evaluating the logic, validity and relevance of data and using knowledge in order to generate responses
- Expressing ideas and facts using oral communication skills
- Expressing ideas and facts in a written format
- Demonstrating the ability to engage in active and professional communications and dialogue in business and the community:
  - to encourage, examine, and comprehend the viewpoints of others
  - to be effective in one-on-one and in group settings
  - to operate with civility and cooperation in a complex, diverse, and global business and social world
- *Graded as both a written and oral assignment*

This has been an extremely helpful assignment to introduce the complexities of business communication. It also is a great way to show differences of opinion in observation, cultural awareness, attention to detail, ethical choices made, and a good preparation for students who are interviewing for various career opportunities.