



Evaluating Excellence
A Guide for IABC Evaluators
Division 4 Communication Skills

Division 4: Communication Skills

The communication skills division includes marketing and communication projects or deliverables that showcase technical skills such as editing, writing, design and multimedia production. Entries in this division are generally tactical in nature and are often part of a larger campaign. The entrant may be in the foundation career level where they are not involved in strategic communications planning.

Work worthy of an IABC award should contribute to the success of the organization. Thus, it must be strategic. Yet the Skills Division does not evaluate strategic planning ability. This division does not use a Work Plan. The simple entry form for this division allows the entrant to provide information on the purpose of the work along with the audience, measurable objectives, key messages and resources. The entrant is limited by word count as to the length of the information provided.

The entry form for the Skills Division entry consists of six questions.

1. Describe the organization and project?
2. Why was this project undertaken?
3. Who was the audience for this project? What do you know about the audience?
4. List up to three key measurable objectives for the project. How well did the project meet the objectives?
5. List up to three key messages for the project?
6. Describe the resources (budget, time, others) available for the project and how effectively they were managed?

Scoring Scale

The scoring of the Skills Division entry uses a rubric. Rubrics are widely used in education to provide an objective and consistent means to score complex tasks. Rubric, in the education field, means “a standard of performance for a defined population.” IABC believes the use of rubrics will improve the consistency of evaluations across all evaluators and reduce the amount of time it takes to evaluate an entry.

The three equally-weighted key performance criteria for Skills Division entries are:

1. Alignment to purpose, audience, measurable objectives and key messages
2. Creativity, resourcefulness or level of innovation
3. Professional execution within the category

Performance dimensions within these criteria are assigned to a point on the IABC Seven-point Scale of Excellence.

Meet the IABC seven-point Scale of Excellence

IABC Award entries are scored using a seven-point global scale of excellence as a guide. All entries start with a mark of four, which represents a fully competent approach to communication planning and execution. Work is graded up or down, depending on the content. Marks of seven or one are very rare. Scores of six or seven should be given to truly innovative or resourceful work.

7	Outstanding: an extraordinary or insightful approach or result
6	Significantly better than average: Demonstrates an innovative, strategic approach, takes all elements into account and delivers significant results
5	Better than average: Demonstrates a strategic approach and aligns the communication solution with the business need to deliver meaningful results
4	Average: Competent approach or results, professionally sound and appropriate
3	Somewhat less than satisfactory: Several key elements that are critical to the strategy or execution are missing, incorrect or under-represented
2	An inadequate approach or result: A significant number of critical elements are missing
1	Poor: Work that is wrong or inappropriate

How to Evaluate a Division 4 Communication Skills Entry

While work worthy of an IABC Award must be strategic, the evaluation of a Skills Division entry should include only the work or project being submitted, not the entire communications program nor the strategic planning capability.

The Skills Division entry has severe limitations on the amount of information that can be provided. As an evaluator, consider the information provided. Try to be objective in scoring the work sample against the information on the entry form. Do not make assumptions.

The entrant should have provided enough information for an evaluator to determine that the work is aligned to a purpose, audience(s) and key messages. The entry must also have measurable objectives enabling the evaluator to understand the target set for success of the piece. Ideally, objectives should be outcome-based. Yet, output-based objectives may score well since the entry may be part of a larger campaign. Evaluators should understand how the piece contributed to the campaign success or delivered on its purpose. It is not necessary that the evaluator understand how the entry contributed to the overall business need.

When giving a score, select the box on the rubric that best represents the entry. Start at the “4” level which is professionally competent work. The dimensions of each score level build on each other: to score a “5” an entry must demonstrate the dimensions from the “4” score and to score a “6” the entry must demonstrate the dimensions from both the “4” and “5” scores. Some entries may not score equally on each dimension. As an evaluator determine the best fit. Half points are allowed.

Evaluators score entries based on the criteria and the information within the entry. When selecting a score, evaluators should justify why something is sub-standard, or why it is excellent, with feedback.

Six steps for Evaluating Division 4 Communication Skills Entries

1. Review the Call for Entries to understand the entry requirement and categories.
2. Review How-To Guide for IABC Awards: The Midas Touch Guide to preparing an IABC Award entry to understand the entrant guidelines.
3. Read the entry form.
4. Review the work sample.
5. Using the score sheet, evaluate the work sample against the information provided on the entry form.
6. Provide constructive feedback to help the entrant improve their work. You may provide feedback that would help the entrant with their strategic planning capability, yet do not allow that to influence the score you give.

Disqualifying Entries

IABC prefers not to disqualify entries. If you believe the entry should be disqualified for any reason, discuss your concerns with the individual coordinating the evaluation process.

Does the entry fit the category being entered?

If you believe the project does not fit the category being entered, it will score poorly. Work may be entered in multiple divisions and categories; however, each entry should be customized to the category description.

Is the work sample missing?

The entry must include a work sample. If the work sample is missing, contact the person coordinating your evaluation process. An attempt may be made to obtain the work sample. If the entrant does not promptly reply with a work sample, the coordinator will notify you that the entry is disqualified.

Providing Feedback

For each of the key performance criteria areas on the score sheet provide feedback that supports the score given using the performance dimensions on the rubric as a reference point. This is where your own perspective comes into the evaluation process. Use your experience and expertise to provide constructive advice to the entrant with the intent to help them improve their communications program or project.

Examples of constructive feedback:

- The tactic itself is solid, and seems to be executed professionally. What is lacking is the audience research and thinking that went into the decision to take this creative approach.
- Here is a missed opportunity to have some outstanding metrics for your objectives that would clearly define the success of your project.
- The plan seemed to address critical issues, but left much to inference and providing insights into your inferences would have made for a better plan.
- Entrant showed a good understanding of what was needed and how to get there. However, you could take it to the next level. For example, your objectives could be much more specific in their measurability. You focus on outputs rather than outcomes: you show how editorial directly supports the direction for the publication. You fall short on the opportunity to measure the impact of those outcomes. Did employee engagement scores increase, in part, because of better communication? Are associates better retailers, in part, because of better communication? Did the average revenue per employee rise as a result, in part, of the articles?

The Score Sheet

The first question on the entry form, “Describe the Organization and Project,” doesn’t have a spot on the score sheet. This information provides a context to assess the entry. IABC understands that communication for business-to-business is different from business-to-consumer; not-for-profit is different than for profit; industrial often times has less pizzazz than high-tech; different cultures have varying preferences; and, smaller companies do things differently than larger ones. In scoring the entry, give consideration to these factors.

SECTION ONE: Strategic Alignment

In this section of the score sheet, evaluators score the strategic alignment of the piece of work. Alignment is expected to a purpose, audience, objectives and key messages. The entry may cover only one element of a campaign. The evaluator sees and evaluates only a section of the full project. For this reason, we ask the entrant to explain the purpose of the piece of work. The purpose should solve a problem, fill a need, or help to leverage an opportunity. The more information an entrant provides on the purpose, the easier it is for the evaluator to score the alignment of the work to the purpose. As an evaluator, score the entry based on the information provided.

One-third of the weight of the evaluation is based on this section.

Section 1: How well does the work sample itself demonstrate alignment?						
A. How well does the work sample align to the purpose as described on the entry form?						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How appropriate is the selected communication tool for the purpose?</i> • <i>How well do the elements of the sample align to the purpose?</i> • <i>How likely is the sample to deliver on the stated purpose?</i> 						
7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
A unique method to meet purpose Clear and intriguing alignment to purpose Compelling, urgent call to action	An excellent method to meet purpose All major elements align to purpose Clearly persuasive information or call to action	An effective method to meet purpose Multiple elements of the sample align to purpose Sample likely to cause recipient to take action to meet the purpose Sample aligns to research	An appropriate method to meet purpose Key elements align to stated purpose Information included for recipient to take desired action, increase understanding or awareness It is clear how entry supports higher level campaign, if appropriate	Somewhat inappropriate method to meet purpose Key elements not aligned to purpose Information inappropriate for recipient to take an action that could deliver on purpose	Clearly in- appropriate method to meet purpose Significant number of elements do not align to purpose Information not included so recipient can take action, increase understanding or awareness Sample is part of a campaign yet how the piece supports campaign is not clear	Description of purpose not included in entry form None of the elements align to purpose

B. How appropriate is the work sample for the audience as described on the entry form?						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Were the choices made driven by the audience(s) characteristics?</i> • <i>Was the channel and work appropriate for the audience(s) to receive the message?</i> • <i>Was the audience able to understand the message?</i> 						
7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
Clear and compelling to the audience	<p>Intriguing to audience based on characteristics</p> <p>Insightful approach to targeting relevant characteristics</p>	<p>Well targeted to audience</p> <p>Highly likely to capture audience attention</p> <p>Choices made driven by audience characteristics</p> <p>Sample aligns to audience research</p>	<p>Appropriate for the audience</p> <p>Likely to capture audience attention</p> <p>Meets audience needs</p>	<p>Not clearly aligned to audience</p> <p>Elements very inappropriate to audience</p> <p>Choices made inappropriate to audience</p>	<p>Audience(s) listed with no characteristics provided</p> <p>Approach or tone is insulting to audience</p>	<p>Audience(s) not included on entry form</p>

C. How well were the stated measurable objectives met? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How well did the entry meet up to three key measurable output- or outcome-based objectives?</i> • <i>Were the objectives relevant to the purpose?</i> • <i>How well was the project measured and evaluated?</i> 						
7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
Evaluation includes quantifiable and anecdotal support Evaluation leads to future improvement Outcome-based objectives exceeded	Results significantly exceeded Quantifiable data supports results Outcome-based met	Results exceed stated measurable objectives Objectives relevant to business need Outcome-based objectives explained	At least three output-based objectives met or reasonable explanation why not met Objectives relevant to purpose Appropriate measurement methodology Includes preset targets with objectives	Objectives not measurable Objectives not met without explanation Only anecdotal results provided Results provided are not related to stated objectives Targets set too low without explanation	No information provided on results Stated objectives are not aligned with the purpose or category entered	Objectives not provided on entry form

D. How well does the work sample incorporate the key messages stated on the entry form?

- *How appropriate are the key messages to the audience?*
- *How were the key messages integrated into the sample(s)?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
Key messages delivered in novel or innovative ways Key messages delivered in way that influences thoughts and behaviors	Key messages delivered in interesting way that will engage the intellect and/or emotion of audience	Key messages integral to the sample	Key messages appropriate to purpose and audience Key messages are evident in sample	Key messages not aligned to purpose or audience	Key messages inappropriate for audience, purpose and communication medium	Key messages not included in entry form

AN IABC PRIMER ON GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND TACTICS

Goals

Goals generally describe what is to be accomplished in a broad sense.

Tactics

Tactics describe the tools and channels used to achieve the objectives. Tactics which are task-based versus objectives which are result-based. Examples of tactics include:

- Stage a town hall meeting
- Create a new social media campaign
- Stage a special event
- Distribute the brochure to 15,000 customers
- Redesign a newsletter

Objectives

Objectives clearly define the desired outcome, or what success will look like. They describe what you want to have happen after the audience receives the message/communication tool. They are:

- Measurable in quantity, time, cost, percentages, quality or some other criteria
- Realistic, meaningful and believable
- Aligned with the needs of the business
- Stated from a communication perspective
- Can be a combination of output-based statements (volume, increases), and outcome-based measures (results)

The **SMART** formula is one way to determine whether the objectives are sound, and while this process is not the only way to evaluate the strength of objectives, it is a good guideline.

Specific:	describes a desired outcome
Measurable:	quantified as an output, outtake or outcome
Achievable:	challenging but within the range of influence
Relevant:	contributes to business goals in a meaningful way
Time-framed:	includes a completion date, if appropriate

Output-based objectives

Output-based objectives measure volume or increases against media vehicles and communication channels like website visits, articles distributed, ads produced, meetings held, content analysis, blog posts, tweets, downloads of publications and so forth. This type of objective does not show that your communication has impacted the audience. Examples of output-based objectives that DO NOT have an impact on your audience:

- News media will carry 100 stories (media clips)
- The publication will be downloaded 10,000 times per year
- The number of visits to the website will increase by 15,000

Outcome-based objectives measure audience actions or what the audience will gain by way of awareness, understanding, recall, different perceptions, and quantifiable change in attitudes, opinions and behaviors. Was the message heard? Is the audience engaged? Did they read the information? How many phone calls or requests for information were received? Did the communication influence the audience to buy something—either a product or an idea? This type of objective clearly shows that your communication impacts the audience and therefore helps to achieve your purpose. Examples:

- Audience awareness of the product will increase from 10 percent to 50 percent
- Employee understanding of the business goals will increase from 25 percent to 65 percent
- Positive perception of the organization will improve from 30 percent to 50 percent
- 65 percent of employees will actively practice the customer experience standards daily
- Product sales will increase by 10 percent and market share by 2 percent
- 60 percent of employees enroll in new plan

SECTION TWO: Creativity, Resourcefulness, Innovation

In this section, you are looking at the work sample to determine its level of creativity or innovation as compared to work within the category, geography and industry. Comparisons to other work within an industry is important since work can be considered extremely creative in one industry where in another industry it would be only of average creativity. In addition, limited resources cannot produce the same level of work that could be accomplished with a large amount of resources. These factors should be taken into consideration when scoring.

The entry may show strength in one of these areas or in all of them. As an evaluator, seek to reward the entry in any or all of these areas. For an entry with a low budget, the resourcefulness may be the strongest element. An entry might show incredible creativity directly related to the audience or issue. An entry could apply a technique not common to the type of project.

While a budget number would be ideal, the entry does not require an actual budget figure. Yet, a description of the resources must be provided. Within “How-To Guide for IABC Awards: The Midas Touch,” entrants were told that we understand giving specific budget figures isn’t always possible given confidentiality. If the budget figures cannot be given, we accept a description of resources. The guide suggests using a percentage of an annual budget or a comparison to another piece of work as substitutes for an absolute monetary amount.

When scoring each question, consider the geography, industry and category.

<p>Section 2: Given the resources and information described in the entry, how creative, resourceful or innovative was the work sample?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How this work compares to other work within the category, geography or industry?</i> • <i>How creative or innovative is the work considering the category, geography or industry?</i> • <i>How effectively are resources used?</i> 						
7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
<p>An example that increases professional standards of creativity, innovation or resource</p> <p>An unheard-of effective approach to the purpose</p>	<p>Unique, effective approach to purpose</p> <p>All elements creativity or innovation with direct links to audience or issue</p> <p>Meaningful results achieved with scarce resources</p>	<p>Better than average for the category</p> <p>Elements of work show creativity or innovation</p> <p>Entrant effectively used scarce resources</p>	<p>Work comparable to other work within industry or geography</p> <p>The approach is appropriate for the resources described</p>	<p>Work is obviously less than average</p> <p>Resources were not used effectively</p>	<p>A dated approach to the purpose</p> <p>Excess spending not likely to achieve purpose</p>	<p>No resources described within entry</p>

SECTION THREE: Professional Execution

Well-designed and executed communication work helps to build professional reputation and credibility. Without carefully crafted vehicles, even the best strategy may fail to deliver messages that connect with the audience. Paying attention to industry standards and keeping up with leading edge thinking, processes and production demonstrates commitment to effective communication.

People are overwhelmed by the amount of information available so a message must grab their attention. Great creative work answers the question “What’s in it for me?” or “Why should I care?” in a way that connects emotionally with the audience member. Whether a project is a multi-media advertising campaign or a government relations strategy creative thinking, imagination and innovative approaches will cut through today’s information overload to command and retain audience attention.

As an evaluator, compare the work sample to your knowledge of the state of communication and the body of work within the category, industry, geography and culture. Look for work that is likely to generate interest and attract attention within the given geography or industry. Seek out high-quality writing, design and production within the budget and resource considerations.

Watch for clear, consistent, error-free writing; high-quality photography; adherence to design principles; and well-produced video. If the entry is an audit or a proposal, look for clear writing, an easy to follow structure, charts, graphs, illustrations and appropriate research methodology. Consider if this entry would survive the competition given the kind of communication normally directed to the audiences described?

The categories within the Skills Division are quite diverse. In scoring the professional execution of an entry it is necessary that you apply the criteria to the category using your knowledge of communications.

Section 3: How well does the work sample meet the standards of professional execution for the category?

A. Overall, how likely is the work sample to engage the audience, connect emotionally or elicit a desired response?

- *How does the sample engage the audience?*
- *How does the sample connect emotionally with the audience?*
- *How does the level of execution of the sample impact its ability to deliver on the stated purpose?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
Engages audience in unique, novel way directly related to purpose	Brilliant idea to engage audience	Superior means to engage audience Likely to connect emotionally with audience	Offers means to engage audience	Speaks down to audience Offers little to entice audience to engage with the material.	Nothing to engage or connect with audience included	Insulting to audience

B. How well does the work sample demonstrate effectiveness, functionality, organization, consistency, readability or appropriateness? (Apply the appropriate criteria to category.)

- *How well organized are the elements of the work?*
- *How consistent is the work from the beginning to end? (theme, writing style, look and feel, etc.)*
- *How well does the work flow?*
- *How readable, viewable or enjoyable is the experience for the recipient?*
- *How appropriate is the format of the work?*
- *How appropriate are the choices made for the medium selected?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
Exceptionally organized. Unique or novel approach to medium.	Significant use of organization or implementation resulting in significant results.	Organized or formatted in way that urges recipients to continue Takes advantage of the medium	Effectively organized or planned Consistent throughout Appropriate flow if single piece Readability appropriate Appropriate use of medium	Seemingly unorganized Inconsistent style Disruptive flow Readability inappropriate for audience	No organization Major inconsistencies Flow interrupted in way that recipients will depart Not appropriate for medium selected	Wrong medium Multiple shifts in consistency

C. How strong are the elements of the work sample and how it comes together considering the category? Depending on the category this could include items such as look/feel, theme, use of color, design, layout, composition, imagery, graphics, production value, language, writing style...

- *How well does the sample execute for the category, given the resources available?*
- *How well written is the sample(s)?*
- *How effectively are images used in the sample(s)?*
- *Is the work produced in an ethical manner?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
Likely to leave a lasting impression Enhances the professional standards of execution	Clever, strategic work appropriate for audience Communicates key messages in powerful, emotional way Work is leading edge for medium and channels selected	High quality writing. Superior production values Strong images convey key messages If standard approach, is well executed	Production values appropriate to media and resources available Reflects standards of ethics and good taste Sample matches description in entry Clear, consistent use of language, visuals and other elements supporting brand and purpose	Production values poor given resources Amateur work Inconsistent use of images and language Overused approach Approach clearly won't deliver on purpose	Typos, spelling errors evident Work insults audience	Work is unethical or uses materials without permission

Overall Entry Feedback

The final element of the score sheet is a place for the evaluator to enter general comments about the entry. This could reference the entry's organization or highlight its strengths.