



International Association
of Business Communicators

THE MIDAS TOUCH 2016

How to Prepare a Gold Quill Award Entry for:
Communication Skills Division





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INTRODUCTION

The Communication Skills Division includes marketing and communication elements 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.

To receive a Communication Skills Division Gold Quill Award, entrants must demonstrate strategic alignment, the creative process and measurable results. We understand that the entrant may not have been part of the strategic planning or the follow-up measurement to business results.

The entry will require you provide 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 your target for success of the piece. If the entry is part of a larger campaign, evaluators will want to know how the submitted sample contributed to the campaign's success or delivered on its purpose.

With this guide, you'll be able to match your work against the criteria used by evaluators. We invite you to use this guide to help you prepare an award-winning Communication Skills Division entry.

The Basics

You may enter work in multiple divisions and categories; however, each entry must be customized to the category description. Please read the category descriptions carefully to determine which categories best fit your entries. Tailor your responses to the entry form questions to the category.

You must use the entry form provided and comply with the character limit counts for each of your responses. The entry must include a work sample. If the work sample is missing, the entry will be disqualified.

Make sure to follow the directions and answer all questions clearly and concisely.

Eligibility

Any work done for IABC at the international level is not eligible.

All entries must align with IABC's [Code of Ethics](#).

You must have direct involvement in the work that you're submitting.

How entries are scored

Entry final scores are based one-third on the strategic alignment, one-third on professional standards of execution for the category and one-third on creativity, resourcefulness or innovation.

Evaluators compare your work sample to the information you provided on the entry form to determine how well your work sample performs within each of the three sections. Evaluators receive clear evaluation criteria from IABC through the [Communication Skills division score sheet, *Evaluating Excellence Guide, and*](#) training. In addition, each evaluator brings his or her own perspective to the evaluation process, independent of other evaluators.

Entries demonstrating creativity and innovation that truly differentiates the entrant’s work as being groundbreaking and worthy of recognition receive the highest awards.

Meet the seven-point scale

IABC sets the award scoring criteria based on the IABC Standards of Excellence. Performance dimensions within each criteria represented by a question are assigned to a point on the IABC Seven-point Scale of Excellence. The criteria and performance dimensions align to the domains, tasks and knowledge used in the Global Communication Certification program.

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 underrepresented.
2	An inadequate approach or result: A significant number of critical elements are missing.
1	Poor: Work that is wrong or inappropriate.

The Awards score sheet provides information about how scores are weighted for each section. Go to gq.iabc.com to check it out.



DON'T FORGET!

Start with the background information

Complete the required information including your name and organization, the division and category that you're entering, and the title and time period of the entry. A short description of the project must also appear. These elements are not scored, but evaluators keep them in mind when considering the context of the project.

A preview of the Communication Skills Division entry form is available on the [Gold Quill Awards website](#). Complete this form on our [online awards entry site](#) using the information contained in this guide.

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION GUIDE

Question 1: Describe the Organization

While this question doesn't have a score on the score sheet, this is valuable information that provides evaluators the context to assess the entry.

We understand 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; and smaller companies do things differently than larger ones. In evaluating your entry, consideration is given to the geography and industry. Here's your chance to tell your evaluators what they should know about your organization, geography and industry that relates to the work you are entering.

Question 2: Why was this project undertaken?

This question is scored within Section 1 of the score sheet, Alignment.

How well does the work sample align to the purpose as described on the entry form?

Evaluators will be looking to see how appropriate the work sample is for the purpose described here and how likely the work sample is to deliver on the purpose as described. Include only the most important information directly relating to your entry.

Consider:

- What is the purpose of this project? Your purpose should solve a problem, fill a need, or help to leverage an opportunity.
- How will it help your organization?
- Is there something in your business environment causing you to take this action?
- If research drove the purpose, briefly mention the research.
- If the work sample is a part of a larger campaign, how does the piece support the overall campaign?

How this section is scored

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4.

- The purpose is explained in enough detail specific to the work sample to enable the evaluator to understand why you feel the entry deserves an award.
- The work sample is an appropriate choice for a communication tool to meet the purpose described in the entry.
- The work sample aligns to the purpose described.
- The work sample provides the information needed for the recipient to take the desired action to meet the purpose.

Entries are scored up for:

- A sample that is highly likely to cause the recipient to take an action to meet the purpose
- A clear explanation of specific changes or challenges that may have occurred.
- Research that was used to determine the purpose.
- Strategic alignment of sample is clearly explained
- Project will increase the credibility of the organization

Entries are scored down if:

- There isn't enough information for the evaluator to determine if the work sample meets the purpose.
- The work sample is part of a higher-level campaign and there isn't an explanation of how the project supports that higher-level campaign.
- The work sample is clearly not an appropriate choice for a communication tool to meet the purpose described in the entry.
- The work sample is unlikely to cause the recipient to take an action to meet the purpose.

Question 3: Who was the audience for this project? What do you know about the audience?

This question is scored within Section 1 of the score sheet, Alignment.

How appropriate is the work sample for the audience as described on the entry form?

Evaluators will determine if the choices you made in executing the project are driven by your target audience(s). Effective communication doesn't occur until the audience receives and understands the message. The entry form responses must demonstrate an understanding of the target audience(s). The entrant should explore the audience preferences, attitudes, demographics, psychographics or other characteristics.

Consider:

- Identifying target audience groups.
- Sharing relevant audience characteristics that caused you to make decisions on the project for each audience. This may include education level, geography, demographics, psychographics, preferences, attitudes, opinion, motivations, etc.
- Mentioning how any critical audience characteristics influenced the creation and production of the communication vehicle.
- Describing how you determined the characteristics.
- Briefly mentioning if audience research was conducted.

How this section is scored

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4

- List audiences (primary, secondary and tertiary if appropriate) and describe their characteristics, preferences, and needs to show how your understanding led to choices of strategy, tactics, media and channels.
- The work sample is an appropriate choice for a communication tool for the audience(s) described in the entry form.
- The elements of the work sample are appropriate for the audiences as listed in the entry form.

Entries are scored up for:

- Including especially insightful and relevant audience characteristics factors, such as prior knowledge, education, geography, psychographics, motivations, opinions, understanding, and other issues.
- A discussion that shows how the audience is linked to execution of the work sample.
- Research that defines the audience characteristics and needs (formal is best, but informal analysis can be cited).

Entries are scored down if:

- The audience isn't listed in the entry form.
- Broad audiences such as employees or the general public are listed without defining characteristics.
- Audiences are listed but no characteristics are provided.
- The wrong audience is identified based on the purpose.
- There are vague, unsupported assumptions about audience needs.
- The work sample is clearly not an appropriate choice for a communication tool for the audience(s) described in the entry form.

Question 4: List up to three key measurable objectives for the project. How well did the project meet the objectives?

This question is scored within Section 1 of the score sheet, Alignment.

How well were the stated measureable objectives met?

Evaluators will determine if you have set targets for success in the form of measurable objectives that are relevant to your stated purpose and if you met the targets or not. If the targets are not met, a brief explanation of extenuating circumstances will help your score in this section.

We understand that you may not be involved in the strategic planning within your organization. Yet, your entry should be aligned to the strategy within your organization. Having appropriate objectives ensures that you know when you achieve success and that your work is aligned to the strategy of the organization. Both of these are critical to demonstrating the impact of communication on business.

Consider:

- Including objectives that are relevant to the category entered.
- Including objectives that are able to produce an effect on the stated purpose.
- Including only the three most important objectives.
- Including output-based objectives.
- Including outcome-based objectives. These score higher since you are showing how your communication work impacts the audience and delivers on the purpose.
- Being careful not to confuse goals or tactics for objectives.

How this section is scored

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4.

- Entry states specific, measurable objectives.
- Objectives are relevant to the category entered.
- Objectives are relevant to the stated purpose.
- Output-based objectives are included.
- Objectives are met or an explanation of why they were not met is included.
- The work sample is an appropriate choice for a communication tool to meet the objectives.

Entries are scored up for:

- Includes outcome-based objectives that are relevant to the business need.
- Clearly exceeding objectives.
- A work sample that demonstrates that your choice of communication tool(s) met the objectives of the project.

Entries are scored down if:

- Measurable objectives are not included.
- Objectives are not relevant to the category entered.
- Objectives are not relevant to the stated purpose.
- Objectives are not met and an explanation of why they were not met is not included.
- The work sample is clearly not appropriate to reaching the stated objectives.
- The explanation of how well the objectives were met does not link directly to the stated objectives.

Question 5: What were the key messages for the project?

List up to three key messages. This question is scored within Section 1 of the score sheet, Alignment.

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

Evaluators will be looking to see that you used key messages or themes to produce the work represented in the work sample. You may not use the term “key messages,” yet you likely have a document or instruction guiding you in the production of your work.

Key messages provide a context to structure your message logically focusing on essential elements, removing ambiguity and creating resonance with the target audience. These messages can guide both visuals and stories. Key messages help your audience understand the information you are trying to convey.

Consider:

- Including key messages that are appropriate to deliver on the purpose.
- Including key messages that are relevant and appropriate to the audience.
- Providing evidence in your work sample that the key messages were used to produce the piece.

How this section is scored

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4.

- Key messages are appropriate to deliver on the purpose.
- Key messages are appropriate for the audience.
- Key messages are evident in the work sample.

Entries are scored up for:

- A work sample where key messages are integral to the approach taken.
- Key messages are delivered in novel or innovative ways.
- A work sample that demonstrates your choice of communication tool(s) met the objectives of the project.
- Key messages within the work sample that engage the intellect/emotions of the audience, and influence their thoughts and behaviors.

Entries are scored down if:

- Key messages are not included in the entry form.
- Key messages are not appropriate for the purpose.
- Key messages are not appropriate for the audience.
- It is not evident within the work sample that key messages were used.

Question 6: How effectively were the resources managed?

Describe the resources (budget, time, etc.) available for the project. How effectively were they managed? This information is taken into account when scoring within Section 2 of the score sheet. Given the resources and information described in the entry, how creative, resourceful or innovative was the work sample?

The IABC Awards program looks for excellence in communication execution; work that stands out from the norm. Evaluators will be looking at your work sample to determine its level of creativity or innovation as compared to work within the category, geography and industry. Your resourcefulness will be included in this scoring. Our evaluators are experienced senior communicators who are very aware of the state of communication and work that represents excellence.

We would like to see an actual budget figure, yet we understand that this isn't always possible given confidentiality. If the budget figures cannot be given, we accept a description of resources. Consider using a percentage of your annual budget or describe a comparison to another piece of work. **Unless you give permission to share information in your entry, entries are only seen by evaluators evaluating the entry.**

Since this section of the score sheet accounts for one-third of the total entry score, it is well worth your time to explain how resource factors impacted the resulting work sample. Did a resource limitation require you to reduce page count in a publication? Did a tight deadline impact your production schedule? Did you have an unlimited budget because of the importance of the project to business results?

We understand that limited resources cannot produce the same level of work that could be accomplished with a large amount of resources. Your response to this question on the entry form helps evaluators take this into account.

Consider:

- Describing your resource abundance or shortage as it directly relates to what can be seen in the work sample.
- Providing actual budget figures.

How this section is scored

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4.

- Includes a standard approach within the category, geography and industry.
- Demonstrates an appropriate use of resources.
- Presents solid design, writing or imagery targeted to the audience.



Entries are scored up for:

- An excellent use of resources to deliver a project that achieves its purpose.
- A clever, new way of using the communication tool selected.
- Exceptional design, writing or imagery considering the category, geography and industry.

Entries are scored down for:

- Excess spending not likely to achieve

the purpose.

- A dated approach to the purpose and audience given the category, geography and industry.
- Applying a technique that enhances the professional standards of execution within the geography or industry.
- Clearly demonstrating a novel approach that should be shared with others in the profession.

SCORING PROFESSIONAL EXECUTION

How well does the work SAMPLE meet the standards of professional execution for the category?

Evaluators will look at your work sample and compare it to their knowledge of the state of communication and the body of work within that category. They will look for work that is likely to generate interest or attract attention within the given geography or industry. They will want to see high-quality writing, design and production within the budget and resource considerations.

Consider:

- Providing well-designed work sample elements.
- Using file names that easily identify the work sample element.
- Clearly labeling each work sample.
- Including relevant information needed to understand the work sample element with use a short note on the sample itself.
- Educating the evaluator with relevant information by the way you answer the questions on the entry form

How this section is scored

Evaluators ask these three questions to determine professional execution:

1. Overall, how likely is the work sample to engage the audience, connect emotionally or elicit a desired response?
2. How well does the work sample demonstrate effectiveness, functionality, organization, consistency, readability or appropriateness?
3. 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-and-feel, theme, use of color, design, layout, composition, imagery, graphics, production value, language, writing style, etc.

Evaluators 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, evaluators will look for clear writing, an easy to follow structure, charts, graphs, illustrations and appropriate research methodology. Evaluators consider if this entry would survive the competition given the kind of communication normally directed to the audiences described.

IABC allows for cultural differences when evaluating work from different parts of the world.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4.

- Contains good production values appropriate to the media and the budget.
- Reflects professional standards of ethics and good taste.
- Includes work samples that match the description in the entry form.
- Demonstrates clear, consistent use of language, visuals and other elements that support the brand, communicates the purpose, and supports the achievement of communication objectives.
- Demonstrates a fairly standard approach that is well executed.
- Demonstrates well-organized entry using appropriate headers.

Entries are scored up for:

- High-quality writing and superior production values.
- Strong images that convey key messages.
- Clever, strategic work appropriate for the audience and likely to leave a lasting impression.
- Clear, consistent and clever work communicating the key messages in a powerful, emotional way.
- Work that is unique or novel for the medium and channels selected, based on available budget.

Entries are scored down for:

- Amateur work or dated approaches considering the geography and industry.
- Inconsistent use of images and language.
- Poor technical production.
- Images, writing tone or style that don't align to the purpose or audience needs.
- An overused approach or one likely to bore the audience.
- An approach that clearly would not work.
- Work that insults the audience or is inappropriate.

HOW TO PREPARE A WORK SAMPLE

Preparing a work sample is like preparing a portfolio. Work sample elements demonstrate skill in execution. Material should be organized and presented in a logical order.

In Communication Skills categories, samples should include a copy of the product entered in the program, and any supporting information such as research, media plans, DVDs, scripts, creative rationale, focus tests, and post-campaign tracking information or other elements.

For information about which file formats are accepted and how to convert large files, please reference the IABC Gold Quill Awards website at gq.iabc.com.

- The maximum number of work sample files is five (5). If you have more, combine them into files no more than 2GB (2,000MB) in size.
- Include the words, “Work Sample” in the file names along with a descriptive title.
- The file should contain a representative overview of your project.
- Provide an explanation of your work sample files so evaluators have context for the sample.
- The following file formats are accepted for work samples: .pdf, .png, .jpg, .gif, .mp4, .wmv, .m4v.
- For websites, please provide the URL or IP address of the site in your entry.
- For intranets or internal, secured access sites, provide instructions on how to register for the site, along with an account name or password. If access may be a barrier to evaluation, or if there’s a chance the site may change after submission, consider submitting a “Tour of Work Sample” video (of five minutes or fewer).
- Electronic files will be disqualified if they contain viruses, if they disable or require disabling of any part of the computer system used during evaluation, or if evaluators cannot view work samples using the instructions provided.
- Large files are difficult to upload and download. Please condense the file size as much as possible. The maximum file size is 2 GB. If you have a single file larger than 2 GB, contact support@award Sentry.org for other upload options.
- The work sample can include video and audio files, Word documents, files created in iWork, PDFs, magazines, brochures and website links. Your work sample should present the full scope of your work.
- Organize and condense your work to showcase a representative overview of your project. Pick examples (clips, photos, etc.) that best support your work plan and represent your strategy. Be creative in demonstrating how the elements of your work sample are aligned with the business needs and audience preferences.

IMAGINE...

Imagine where a Gold Quill Award can take you, your organization, your team. Even the process of entering has many significant benefits.

- International peer recognition for excellence
- Profile industry innovation and best practice
- Open up speaking and publication opportunities
- Raise the bar. Take your work to the next level. Set your sights on something higher
- Build your personal reputation as a thought leader
- Enhance the reputation of your team both internally and externally in terms of employer brand.
- Build a business case to fund a key initiative
- Inspire your team. Bring them together to produce show-stopping work. Share the glory when it's complete
- Challenge yourself to new heights in terms of innovation, creativity and strategic thinking
- Build your portfolio of case studies and work ...open doors to job opportunities, new clients, and a stronger resume

Questions? Please email recognition@iabc.com for answers.



2016 IABC WORLD CONFERENCE

Join the 2016 IABC World Conference in New Orleans, 5-8 June...

The IABC World Conference heads to fabulous New Orleans next year, hosting its annual assembly with over a thousand top communication professionals from around the World. The event will take place on 5-8 June 2016 at the Hilton Riverside hotel.



[Find out more!](#)