

FOLLOW-UP

Writing an executive document can take a significant investment of your time. A few minutes of follow-up can do a great deal to maximize the return on that investment.

Put a note on your calendar to remind yourself to follow up in a week, a month etc. to assess whether the message achieved its objective. This will entail:

- checking to see whether your audience has received the message;
- assessing whether the message achieved its objective;
- deciding — regardless of whether the message succeeded or not — what further action needs to be taken; and
- asking yourself what lessons you have learned from the present message that you could apply for future messages.

HAS THE AUDIENCE RECEIVED THE MESSAGE?

It can be helpful to follow up to make sure your message progresses through the system to its ultimate audience. It can be vital to do so for time-sensitive messages. The urgency of your message might be obvious to you, but it might not be apparent to all of the many people — from clerks to senior executives — who handle the message as it moves through the system. Bear in mind as well, though, that a message that seems urgent to you might not be urgent to others at senior levels who have a broader perspective on things.

If you need information about how the message is progressing, your manager or your executive documents coordinator should be able to keep you up to date.

HAS THE MESSAGE SUCCEEDED?

Your most important concern will be whether your message achieves the objective you defined back when you defined a frame of reference for the task. (If you don't know how to assess whether the message has achieved its objective, this could be a sign that you need to reexamine how you [define objectives](#).)

WHAT ACTION IS NEEDED NOW?

Whether the message succeeded or not, there may well be action that you need to take to follow up on it.

If it did not succeed, you might be able to take steps to rectify the problem. Or you might need to change your plans and inform others that the message did not succeed so they can plan accordingly. Conversely, if the message did succeed, there may well be steps that you and others need to take in response.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

After all the time you put into preparing a message, it would be tragic if you didn't also take some time to ask what you have learned from the process. Even just five minutes of reflection can pay significant dividends. What went well? What did not go well? What could you do in the future to increase the chances of things going well and reduce the chances of things not going well? Input from your managers and colleagues can be helpful in answering those questions.