Thank you for that wonderful introduction.
As ______ said, my name is Jennifer Williams and I am Electronic Resources & Collection Development Librarian at Alabama A&M University.
I proposed this topic for the Working with Continuing Resources Webinar series for 3 major reasons.
1. All workplaces, departments, and professions have jargon.
2. Tech services staff are often introverts and may also be shy.
3. Everywhere suffers from some form of communication problem.
Tailoring Communications to Different Audiences

What are we going to learn?

Outcomes:
1. Participants will feel more confident in their communication skills.
2. Participants will be better able to determine the appropriateness of various communication styles in different settings.

Created with Haiku Deck, presentation software that's simple, beautiful and fun.

Photo by Chuckumentary
So... in an attempt to focus, I’ve built today’s presentation around an imaginary new database subscription. We’ll begin with a successful trial, and we’ll end with a tech support issue after the database subscription has been purchased and patrons are using it. Along the way, I’ll show examples of a variety of communication styles, audiences, and media.

This scenario will provide a framework by which we can examine our communication.
Before we start our scenario, though, I want to cover just a few communications basics so that we know what we are talking about.
Your audience is anyone who is receiving your communication. It could be one person or millions of people. You audience will dictate the medium and formality of your message, which are some of the next terms we’ll look at.
The medium is the format of the message. It could be speech, email, memo, poster, text message, or any other method you can think of to get a message from one person to another.
One-way communication does not allow for audience response. Two-way communication does. In some cases this is obvious - an email or a face-to-face conversation is two-way, a poster advertisement is one-way. But where does that leave a blog post or a tweet? The real difference between one-way and two-way communication isn’t whether the audience can respond, it is whether the communicator bothers to pay attention to the audience’s response. If one blogger engages commenters on his posts, then his blog is an example of two-way communication. If another blogger ignores commenters, then his blog is an example of one-way communication.
There are two things that influence the formality of your communication: audience and medium. A text message is, by necessity, less formal than an email. An advertisement aimed at a young patron will be less formal than one aimed at an administrator or stakeholder.
So without further ado, our scenario is that our library has just run a successful trial of Credo Reference and we are interested in purchasing a subscription.

*Disclaimer - no particular reason for using Credo*
librarydirector@mylibrary.edu

Credo Reference

Dear Dr. Jones,

We just ran a trial of Credo Reference that got more use and more positive feedback than any other trial we've ever run. It was really successful! 👍

Mr. Smith said he would use it in all his classes (he's a local high school teacher) and one of our regulars, Ms. Johnson said her kids would use it for their homework assignments. I think it would really get a lot of use.

The company that makes it wants $xxxx for it, but we can probably get a better deal than that if you want me to try to negotiate with them.

The usage was really high, too. Like 45 uses in a month, which is unheard of for a trial - they usually don't get any use at all.

Should I contact the vendor and try to negotiate, or not?

Jennifer

Jennifer C. Williams

Email to director: longwinded, buries the lead.
"The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do." - Thomas Jefferson
So Rule #1 is "Be concise." Let's look at that email again and pick out the important bits.
Dear Dr. Jones,

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Jennifer

The three highlighted areas are the only important pieces of information in the email.

So we need to shorten due to rule #1, be concise. But there is another rule that applies here too, and that is...
Rule #2, Know Your Audience.

In this case our audience is our library director. Directors are usually very busy and don't have time to read long-winded emails.

We are asking the director to do something for us (and for our patrons) that is going to cost money. We want to get across a sense of urgency without making her work too hard.

Here is a better, more concise version....
Dear Dr. Jones,

Due to the overwhelmingly positive response to our recent trial of Credo Reference, I recommend that we pursue a subscription at $xxxx/year as quoted by the vendor.

Would you like me to contact them for a license agreement?

Jennifer

Jennifer C. Williams
Electronic Resources & Collection Development Librarian

Notice that all the pertinent information is in the first sentence. It is concise and definitive. The question at the end is a simple yes or no question that demands an answer, but does not demand more than that one word.

Now let's look at her response...
Cryptic, isn't it?

Easy to be annoyed by this kind of thing.

Assume hurried and busy rather than careless. Be thankful for the quick response.

Try to cipher it out but ask for clarification if needed.

But supervisors, be cognizant of how this sort of thing comes across to your employees. Better to send a proper response a little later unless a deadline is looming. Because...
"...everything that can be said can be said clearly." - Ludwig Wittgenstein
Rule #3 is “Be Clear.” We've all gotten cryptic messages from people, sometimes orally and sometimes in writing. If you take a minute to collect your thoughts before speaking you will get your message across more clearly. A clear message is an effective message.

Moving on with our scenario, let's take our boss's question to the vendor.
For many people, especially people new to this role, vendors can be intimidating.

Don't be intimidated....
Vendors are people too. In fact, they are in a similar situation to us. Most of the time the librarian or staff member talking to the vendor is not the decider. The vendor representative is not the decider either. We are both middle-men working together to get both parties the best deal. We want a good price, the vendor rep wants a sale.

Make friends with your vendor reps. They can be a great help to you.
Hi Mike,

You were right, the trial has gone really well. I can't believe we got so much feedback!

We are definitely interested in pursuing a subscription to Credo Reference. You quoted us $xxxx for a year. We would like to get a 2-year subscription at $xxxx/year, for a total of $xxxx.

Thank you,

Jennifer

To: Jennifer.Williams@aamu.edu
From: Michael.Stipe@credo.com
Subject: Credo trial

Hi Jennifer,

I see that your trial is getting a lot of usage. Have you received any feedback from your users? I would be happy to send you any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,

Mike

So here is an email to my pretend Credo rep. (Those of you of a certain age will recognize the name I gave him.)

Again, the email is concise, consisting of 5 sentences.

Note the greeting and closing are informal, matching the rep's informal email to which I am replying.

Note also that, although my email is friendly and informal, I do not mince words about what we need in order to make a deal.

Concise. Clear. Informal. Why informal?...
Rule #4: Mirroring creates rapport.

Increasing the level of formality is a good way to put someone in their place, but that is generally not your goal when communicating in the workplace.

Mirroring other people’s formality and language makes them comfortable.
Now let’s assume that we succeeded in getting our subscription and we have set it up on the website and added MARC records to the catalog.

Now what?
New Database: Credo Reference

Colleagues,

I’m happy to announce the acquisition of a new database for our library. Our recent trial of Credo Reference was very successful, so we have added a subscription. You will see the link on our database page and the reference titles have been added to our OPAC.

Attached you will find a copy of the poster that we will be placing around the library to advertise and a printable brochure that provides a good basic overview. In addition, Credo’s marketing website contains instructions for creating search boxes, customizing LibGuides, and fun ways to improve usage.

Please contact me with any questions.

Thank you,
Jennifer

Now we need to notify the public services staff of our new resource.

I’ve seen countless emails from tech services and IT that simply forward highly technical information without parsing it first.

In this case, Credo is not high tech, but we still want to provide a summary for our public services staff.

Always recognize that your colleagues are busy too and that the easier you can make things for them, the better received your messages will be.

Because...
Rule #5 is “People won’t read.”

True of long emails, long blog posts (tl;dr), signs.

Signage, especially, should be highly graphic/visual, with as few words as possible. The adage "a picture is worth a thousand words” is true.

Credo provides some excellent examples of signage that follows this rule, but not all vendors do.
If your vendor doesn't do a good job with visually-appealing signage, you can create your own. Just be sure to use copyright-free images from sites like these.

- Pixabay
- Morguefile
- Wikimedia Commons
- Creative Commons
Signs are, of course, not the only way we communicate with students. If your library has a Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account, or a text messaging service, use them. These different media all call for very specific levels of formality, are all light on text, and are mostly heavy on images.
Now I want to turn to our role as translators. We are in a unique position in tech services. We get to act as mediators and translators between a variety of internal and external groups, using a variety of different terminology and jargon.

*story about first job out of library school*

So let's imagine, going back to our scenario, that a patron has come onto our chat reference service to complain that they cannot get into Credo from home. They are chatting with a reference (public service) librarian who has then called us for back up. What do we do?
Prioritize. We can speculate that there is a link somewhere that is missing the proxy prefix that allows our users to get access. But that requires some serious surgery. First we need to put a bandaid on the immediate problem and get the patron into Credo ASAP.

But what will happen if we tell the reference librarian to tell the patron that they need to add a proxy prefix to their URL?! Rule#6...
Tailoring Communications to Different Audiences

RULE #6

AVOID JARGON.

Avoid jargon.

Send the reference librarian a link that includes the proxy prefix (or infix) and tell them to tell the patron that a librarian is working on the problem, but that they can use this link in the meantime.

Then figure out what the bigger problem is - where is there a link with no proxy information?
This is where you get to really let your techie side out (for those of you who have one). Is the bad link in the catalog? Do you need the help of a cataloger or a systems librarian? Is the problem with Credo itself, and you need their tech support? Maybe it's something you can fix yourself. If not, when dealing with a technical issue like this, be as detailed as you can possibly be. This is one case where jargon is allowed, as long as it is used with the right people. Remember, we are translators - we speak patron, but we also speak IT. Just don't confuse the two.
RULE #1

BE CONCISE.
RULE #2

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.
RULE #3

BE CLEAR.
RULE #4

MIRRORING CREATES RAPPORT.

Photo by sean dreilinger

Created with Haiku Deck, presentation software that's simple, beautiful and fun.
RULE #5

PEOPLE WON'T READ.
RULE #6

AVOID JARGON.
I threw in an extra rule here. I know, not fair, right?

Rule #7 - Know thyself. Not just as an individual, but as a department. There are likely going to be skills that you are good at and some that you need to work on. Play to your strengths and work on your problem areas.

If you are really good at creating graphically appealing posters, let that be your thing. If someone else in your department is really good at explaining things clearly, maybe they can read over some of your emails and help you with clarity.
• What Georgia city does Delta Airlines fly to from London?

• Who portrayed the doomed Melanie in Gone with the Wind?

• What affectionate nickname does Princess Diana have for Prince Charles?

• What book is the follow-up to Future Shock?

• What's a gila monster?

• What do wet Formula 1 tyres have that dry ones don't?

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?
Contact me:

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