

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

## Accreditation Demystified and Keys to Success

IABC Accreditation Webinar  
October 4, 2011

Presenter: Cathleen Wolf, ABC, Director of Portfolio Evaluators  
IABC Accreditation Committee

Be Heard® IABC INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

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### What We'll Cover

- Value of Accreditation
- Accreditation steps and keys to success
- Portfolio process with examples
- Exam process with examples
- Tools, tips and resources

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### Value of Accreditation Study Jan 2008 – 51% of ABCs Responded

- Completed by L.C. Williams Research Group  
Chicago, Illinois USA in 2008
- International study: **77** chapters from seven countries
- Enhanced resume – **80%**
- Increased confidence – **75%**
- Raised credibility – **68%**
- Gained peer recognition from my department – **60%**

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**Accreditation Steps**

- Application (online or through group)
- Ethics assessment (self-test)
- Qualification (portfolio work plans and samples)
- Examination (written and oral)

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**Application Requirements:  
Experience + Education**

- At least nine years of combined communication experience and higher education
- Can include up to four years of higher education
- Ideally, have more than five years of work experience
- Some IABC accreditation paths have additional requirements:
  - Executive Accreditation Seminar (EAS)  
<http://www.iabc.com/abc/eas.htm>
  - Corporate Accreditation Seminar (CAP)

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**Are You Ready?**

- Enough experience and skill as communication professional?
  - Career Resources: <http://www.iabc.com/cw/private/career/>
  - Self-Assessment Worksheet:  
<http://www.iabc.com/education/pdf/IABCSelf-AssessmentTool.pdf>
- Body of work that demonstrates ability to think strategically and achieve measurable results?
- Apply the principals of the IABC Code of Ethics (accuracy, truthfulness, sensitivity)?
- Commit adequate time to complete the process?

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### Accreditation Resources: Local Support

- Accreditation Completion Program (ACP)
  - Some chapters have, some are doing by distance
- Contact accredited members in your IABC chapter – they've been through the process
- Request a mentor through <http://www.iabc.com/abc/mentor/request.htm>
- Search for accredited members online or contact [recognition@iabc.com](mailto:recognition@iabc.com)

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### Accreditation Portfolio Process

- Two projects for which you were the principal communicator and decision-maker
- Recent projects (ideally within five years)
- Each project contains
  - Work Plan
  - Work Sample
  - Details found at <http://www.iabc.com/abc/>
- Your proprietary work is protected
- Evaluators are IABC-accredited communicators

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### Portfolio Deadlines

- **5 April** - If accepted July - January
- **15 September** - If accepted February - June
- **Gold Quill winner** - Special deadline (must be lead entrant)

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**Your Project**

- Highlights your work experience
- Portrays a range of skills
- Demonstrates your strategic thinking and implementation skills
- Shows you achieve measurable results

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**Project Selection Criteria**

- Portfolio projects should be
  - **Strategic:** Address organizational needs (vs. creating "product")
  - **Finite:** Have beginning and end dates
  - **Recent:** Ideally, within the last five years
  - Have **S**pecific, **M**easurable and **T**ime-related objectives

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**Project Work Plan**

- Work Plan is most important part
- Provides strategy and context
- Rules of thumb
  - Use assigned headings
  - Provide the requested details
  - Long enough to fully explain your approach
  - Explain what you learned or might do differently

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**Example: Employee Benefits**

- *Goal* describes overall desired result
  - Example: Ensure that as many employees as possible are adequately preparing for retirement
- *Objectives* describe defined and measurable supporting results
  - Example: Encourage 80% of employees to enroll in retirement plan by 15 October
- *Tactics* are those actions taken to achieve objectives
  - Example: Create information kit explaining retirement plan benefits to employees

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**3. Selling the solution/plan to management**

- Checklist
  - Were you persuasive in presenting ideas? You may not have actually sold the project. If this is the case, explain your role in directing the project.
  - Approach was thorough and professional?
  - Were you successful in directing management's thoughts?
  - Did you explain changes you may have implemented based on management input or other factors?

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**4. Implementing the solution/plan**

- Checklist
  - Work was executed logically and professionally?
  - If the original plan wasn't followed, are changes (media, budget, timeline) explained?
  - Cross refer to Work Samples by number
  - Work Samples should be uploaded separately (not embedded in the Work Plan sections)

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### 5. Evaluating the Plan

- Did your solution/plan accomplish what you wanted?
  - Link evaluation to original objectives?
  - State whether the project was successful?
  - If appropriate, explain what you might have done differently?

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### Common Pitfalls

- Objectives not specific, measurable and time-bound
- Objectives not tied to business goals or needs
- Don't provide appropriate context for the organization or the project
- Lack of detail in audience description
- Focus on implementation – tactical vs. strategic
- Trying to impress (awards focus) vs. demonstrating competence and strategic thinking (accreditation focus)

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### Review Process

- Results communicated within 10 – 12 weeks
- You need to pass portfolio step to schedule the exam
- Up to one year to take the exam
- Director of portfolio evaluators reviews non-passes
  - Non-pass feedback letter
  - You have one year to revise and resubmit
  - Usually the work plan
  - Don't be discouraged

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**Exam Format**

- Written exam - 4 hours
  - Section 1: General essays
  - Section 2: Case study
  - Section 3: Philosophy and ethics
- Oral exam - 30 minutes
- More details in exam teleseminar and slides:
  - <http://www.iabc.com/abc/prospective/resources/#teleseminars>
  - <http://www.iabc.com/abc/pdf/IABCAccredExamTeleseminarOct2010.pdf>
  - Presented October 2010 by Jennifer Wah, ABC

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**Exam Content  
Part 1**

- General knowledge & tools of the trade
  - Communication fundamentals
  - Essay questions and short answer topics
- You need background in:
  - Employee communication
  - Marketing communication
  - Media relations
  - Communication channels and tools
  - Non-profit communication
  - Planning and budgeting

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IABC Accreditation Program      Candidate Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Written Exam SAMPLE

**SAMPLE EXAM RESPONSE FORM**  
**PART 1: GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND TOOLS OF THE TRADE**  
 This section represents 40 percent of your written examination grade.  
 Allow about 1 hour and 45 minutes.

**[PRESENTER'S NOTE: This section will contain 6 - 8 questions that represent 40% of your written exam score. So you would allow about 10 - 12 minutes per response depending upon how many questions.]**

**Part 1a. ESSAY QUESTIONS (Use as much space as needed for each question.)**

Part 1a.

1. Your organization's profits have been sharply declining this year. Personnel memos stress the need for efficiency and productivity improvements. Rumors are rampant about possible layoffs and declining morale. Outline the steps you might take to help the organization improve profitability and morale during this challenging period. Explain what you and others might do to control the spread of rumors.

Sample: Here's where you type your response to Question 1 of Part 1a.

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**Exam Content Part 2**

- Case study
- Practical problem solving:
  - Analyze/identify challenges
  - How to develop a solution (process)
  - Outline approach
  - How to assess success (outcomes)
  - Communication plan

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**Exam Content Part 2**

- Case study – Reminders
  - The questions guide you through the response as if you're developing a communications plan. Tackle with that in mind.
  - Your plan must be comprehensive, within the time allowed, and demonstrate an effective approach to manage the issues presented in your chosen scenario.
  - Remember to create metrics that mirror your stated objectives.
  - Be sure to evaluate your plan based on those objectives.
  - Good to include basic **SWOT** analysis to trigger thoughts (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**bstacles, **T**hreats).

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**Exam Content Part 3**

- Philosophy and ethics
  - 45 minutes (20% of exam grade)
  - Two or three essay questions
  - Three or four short-answer questions.
- IABC Code of Ethics
  - Legal
  - Ethical
  - Good Taste

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### Written Exam – Keys to Success

- Use your own practical experience and knowledge when approaching a communication challenge.
- If you have an on-the-job example that applies to the question being asked, use it.
- Think strategically – include “Why” as well as “What”
- You are writing to your peers. Accredited graders can’t assume that you know something. Don’t be worried about providing too much detail. Try to find a good balance.

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### Oral Exam

- Package of materials with information provided
  - E-mails
  - Letters
  - Memos
  - Phone messages
- Usually a crisis or emergency scenario
- Multi-audience solutions needed, including news media

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### Oral Exam Tips

- Consider using the following outline
  - Opportunity/challenge
  - Facts
  - Audiences
  - Priorities and Plan
  - Evaluate

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**Oral Exam Tips**

- Remember “CAP” in a crisis:
  - Concern/compassion
  - Action steps
  - Perspective

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**Exam Results**

- Written exam graded by at least two ABCs
- Oral exam evaluated by two ABC proctors
- Both exams scored using 7-point scale
  - Baseline is “4”
  - The “4” represents a competent communicator
- Director of Examiners reviews non-passes
- Results communicated within 10 – 12 weeks
- You only retake the non-passing sections

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**Common Pitfalls**

- Skipping one or more questions
- Missing key information (e.g., budget) in case study
- Rushing to tactics and missing key details in the oral exam
- Reading too much into a scenario
- Failing to state your assumptions

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### Review Process

- Two ABCs grade each exam
- Passing score = "4" on 7-point scale
- Director of Examiners reviews all results
- If you pass, congratulations!
- If not, you retake specific sections as needed (details provided in your results letter)

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### Keys to Success

- Talk to others who have been there
- Subscribe in *Discovery* – IABC's powerful online library
- Access the *IABC Handbook of Organizational Communication – Second Edition*
- Read *Communication World* – practical articles
- Apply IABC Code of Ethics to real-world situations
- Use practice exam questions and time yourself  
<http://www.iabc.com/development/accrediti/exams.htm#written>  
<http://www.iabc.com/development/accrediti/exams.htm#oral>

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### Questions or comments?

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