

Consistent Messaging with Court Tools

Amy Tucker

Civil Division Coordinator, Travis Count Pct. 2

Jessica Foreman

Education Manager, TJCTC

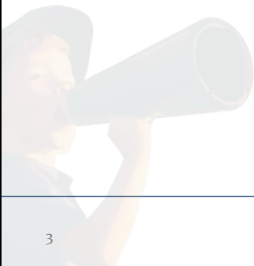
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**How many people do you talk to a day
at our job?**

**How about if you include virtual and
written communication?**

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Roadmap



Why is consistent communication important?

How do you get info out?

Best Practices

Developing a communication plan

Putting it into action....and revisiting

Special topic: Communication in a crisis

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Why is consistent communication important for your court?

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Example of Inconsistency

- Confusion: “What’s the correct fee to file this form?”
- Frustration: “Why did I get told one thing over the phone and another online?”
- Loss of trust: “Can I rely on the court for accurate info?”

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How do you get information out?

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How do you currently communicate in your court?

- Phone – Phone tree?
- Mail
- Email – Auto generated?
- Website (Do you have access to update it?)
- Social media
- In-person communication
- Communication from your database
- Court signage
- Physical handouts at court
- Text message?

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Communication Best Practices

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Templates and Scripts

- In the next section, we will show some examples of templates and scripts you can use for different types of communication.
- You can download and access all of those templates and scripts here:
<https://www.tjctc.org/handouts/consistent-communication.html>
- Or use the QR code:



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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Easy to Understand

- Clarity: Use simple, straightforward language to ensure comprehension, avoiding legal jargon unless absolutely necessary.
- Average reading level for Americans is 6th grade
- Examples of common legalese we see clerks use:
 - ex parte
 - Citation
 - Writ

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Professional Tone

Professional Tone: Maintain a respectful, formal tone that reflects the court’s authority and neutrality.

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication

Consistent: Ensure that messaging across all modes is aligned in tone, language, and information provided.

Accessible: Comply with ADA requirements and offer translations or resources in languages commonly spoken in your community

Neutral: Remember to remain neutral in your communication

Accuracy: Double-check all content for errors, ensuring information is factual and up-to-date.

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What are some issues with this? (On the front page of a JP website)

- Tickets that were issued to juveniles cannot be paid online.
- Any offense under the Alcohol and Beverage Code that involve minors under the age of 21 must contact the court for instructions.
- Only tickets that have been filed with the Courts by the issuing officer and that have not yet been disposed may be accessed by this service.
- I hereby understand that in accordance with Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Art. 27.14 (c), case payment will result in a waiver of a jury trial and a finding of guilty, which may be reported to the Texas Department of Public Safety.

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Written Best Practices

- Email
- Attachments
- Mailings

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Written Best Practices: Design

- **Email signature:**
 - Photos – Hard to load
 - Quotes – Make sure they are neutral!
- **Color/Font:**
 - Colors: Black is best! Font size: Between 12 and 16
 - Sans – serif fonts like Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Tahoma
 - Minimize capital letters

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Tips On Typography

Oh dear

When you use **too many fonts**
see how they **all fight** for attention

CAPITALIZING FULL PARAGRAPHS IS BAD.
**THIS IS EVEN HARDER TO READ WHEN
IT'S BOLDEN. ARE YOU HAVING FUN
READING THIS?**

9. Avoid Coloring Text In Red or Green

Color blindness is a common condition, especially amongst men (8% of men are colour blind), it's recommended to use other cues in addition to

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Written Best Practices: Content

- **Subject Lines:** Use clear and specific subject lines to indicate the email's purpose (e.g., "Court Appearance Reminder for Case #12345").
- **Professional Structure:** Include a greeting, body, and closing, with the court's contact details in the signature.
- **Clear Formatting:** Use professional letterhead and ensure the layout is clean, with adequate margins and spacing. Use bullet points, charts when appropriate, ways to break up the text.
- **Detailed Information:** Provide all necessary details (e.g., date, time, location, case number) to reduce follow-up inquiries.
- **Review grammar and spelling.**
- **Templates:** Develop templates for common communications (e.g., hearing notices, follow-ups) to ensure consistency.

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Examples – In-person Hearing

J2-CV-25-000498: Justin Wilson vs. Bridget Miller



JP2 <JP2@traviscountytexas.gov>

To: jmw1400@yahoo.com



EV Hearing Notice.pdf
131 KB

Please see the attached notice of your hearing setting. The hearing will be held IN PERSON.

If you have any questions, please contact the court.

Thank you,

Amy Tucker

Office Manager
Judge Randall Slagle
Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2
Fax: 512-854-4535
JP2@traviscountytexas.gov

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Examples – In-person Hearing Attachment

NOTICE OF EVICTION HEARING

Cause Number:
J2-CV-25-000498

JUSTIN WILSON VS. BRIDGET MILLER

In accordance with the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, you are hereby notified to appear before the Justice Court, Precinct 2 of Travis County, Texas, Judge Randall Slagle presiding, 10409 Burnet Road, Suite 180, Austin, Texas 78758, at **9:30 AM** on the **11th day of February, 2025** for your Eviction Hearing.

You should also arrange to have present any witnesses you think are necessary to support your claim. Please contact this office at 512-854-6367 if you have any questions.

YOU MUST BRING ENOUGH COPIES OF YOUR DOCUMENTS TO PROVIDE A SET FOR THE COURT AND EVERY OTHER PARTY.

****** THIS HEARING WILL BE HELD IN PERSON ******

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Letterhead



JUDGE RANDALL SLAGLE

*JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, PRECINCT TWO
TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS*

10409 Burnet Road, Suite 180, Austin, Texas 78758

*Criminal Division
512-854-4545*

*Fax: 512-854-4535
Email: jp2@traviscountytx.gov*

*Civil Division
512-854-6367*

January 24, 2025

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Subject line: 24-1567 Ext. Order:

Body:

From Jessica

Court Staff for Judge Randall Slagle

Justice of the Peace Precinct 2

Phone: 512-854-6367

Fax: 512-854-4535

Email: JP2@traviscountytx.gov

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CUASE NO: _____ DEFENDANTS NAME: _____

YOU MAY ENTER A PLEA OF NO CONTEST, GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY.

NO CONTEST

A PLEA OF NO CONTEST STATES YOU ARE NOT CONTESTING THE CHARGES FILED. IF YOU PLEAD NO CONTEST, A FINDING OF GUILTY WILL BE ENTERED BY THE COURT.

GUILTY

A GUILTY PLEA STATES YOU ARE GUILTY OF THE CHARGES AS FILED. THE FINE AND COSTS ON A PLEA OF GUILTY ARE THE SAME AS A PLEA OF NO CONTEST. A GUILTY PLEA MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT YOU IN THE EVENT A CIVIL ACTION IS BROUGHT AGAINST YOU.

NO GUILTY

A NOT GUILTY PLEA STATES YOU ARE NOT GUILTY OF THE CHARGE AS FILED. IF YOU PLEAD NOT GUILTY, A TRIAL DATE WILL BE SET. YOU ARE REQUIRED TO APPEAR FOR TRIAL. FAILING TO APPEAR MAY RESULT IN YOU BEING CHARGED WITH FAILURE TO APPEAR (SECTION 38.11 PENAL CODE) AND A WARRANT BEING ISSUED FOR YOUR ARREST. IT IS NOT REQUIRED THAT YOU BE PRESENTED BY AN ATTORNEY. HOWEVER, YOU MAY ELECT TO DO SO. SHOULD YOU BE FOUND GUILTY, YOU WOULD BE RELEASED AT THAT TIME FROM THE CHARGE AGAINST YOU. SHOULD YOU BE FOUND GUILTY, YOUR FINE WOULD BE IN THE AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$500.00 PLUS COSTS PER VIOLATION. NOTICE OF YOUR COURT DATE WILL BE MAILED TO THE ADDRESS YOU HAVE LISTED BELOW.

INITIAL ONE: A \$25.00 TIME PAYMENT FEE WILL BE ASSESSED TO EACH OFFENSE PAID ON OR AFTER THE 31ST DAY OF CONVICTION.

_____ GUILTY AND WAIVE APPEARANCE FOR TRIAL AND WAIVE MY RIGHT TO A TRIAL BY JURY.

_____ NO CONTEST AND WAIVE APPEARANCE FOR TRIAL AND WAIVE MY RIGHT TO A TRIAL BY JURY.

_____ NOT GUILTY AND REQUEST A TRIAL BY _____ JUDGE OR _____ JURY

INITIAL ONE IF YOU HAVE ENTERED A PLEA OF **GUILTY/NO CONTEST**:

_____ I REQUEST THAT I BE ALLOWED TO PAY OFF THE BALANCE IN ____ 30 DAY EXTENTION ____ PAYMENT PLAN

_____ I CAN PAY IN FULL TODAY. (MONEY ORDERS/CASHIERS CHECKS ONLY/ EXACT CASH & DEBIT/CREDIT CARDS)

_____ I REQUEST TIME TO COMPLETE A DRIVING SAFETY COURSE.

_____ I AM INDIGENT AND REQUEST TO PAY MY FINE/COSTS BY ALTERNATE MEANS.

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Another type of written communication: Social Media

- **Professional Tone:** Keep posts formal and neutral; avoid any language that could be perceived as biased. Social media posts though can be a little more informal than other types of written communication.
- **Timeliness:** Use social media for real-time updates (e.g., weather closures, emergency notifications).
- **Platform-Specific Optimization:** Tailor content to each platform's strengths (e.g., concise updates on Twitter, detailed posts on Facebook).
- Do not use your personal social media accounts.

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Social Media – Lindke v. Freed

In [*Lindke v. Freed*](#), the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously held that a public servant who:

- had actual authority to speak on behalf of the State on a particular matter, and
- purported to exercise that authority

could open themselves to potential liability if they block people from seeing their posts from their private accounts on social media.

It is a best practice to keep your personal social media accounts and official social media accounts separate and not ask any other employees to post or maintain your personal accounts.

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Verbal Communication

- In-person
- Phone

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Do you need a script?



Many people will not!

But if you are having issues with inconsistent phone etiquette, or are training a new employee, it can be helpful!

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Helpful Scripts

- Legal Advice vs. Legal Information
- FAQs
 - If caller needs info you can't immediately provide
- General information for new employees or folks that have been given feedback that they are rude on the phone
 - Greeting
 - Transferring
 - Voicemail
- Scripts in general are a great training tool for new employees.

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In-Person Communication Best Practices

- **Polite Interaction:** Greet visitors promptly and politely, acknowledging them even if they must wait.
- **Preparedness:** Staff should have quick access to common resources and answers for frequently asked questions.
- **Nonverbal Communication:** Maintain a professional appearance and use positive body language.

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Messaging Without Speaking

- Websites
- Court signage

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Website Best Practices

- **Ease of Navigation:** Use a user-friendly design with intuitive menus and clear categories.
- **Regular Updates:** Keep court schedules, contact information, and announcements current.
- **Resources:** Provide FAQs, forms, and guides for common tasks, such as filing cases or attending hearings.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure compatibility with screen readers and other assistive technologies.

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Signage – Best Practices

- **Visibility:** Place signs in prominent, well-lit areas with clear fonts and high contrast for readability.
- **Brevity:** Use short, straightforward messages to convey essential information quickly.
- **Multilingual:** Include translations to accommodate non-English speakers.
- **Consistency:** Use a unified design for all signage to establish a cohesive look and feel.

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What message is being sent?

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What message is being sent?



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New Tools to Save Time and Mental Energy

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LLM – Large Language Models

A **Large Language Model (LLM)** is a type of artificial intelligence that has been trained on massive amounts of text to understand and generate human-like language. It doesn't "think" like a person but predicts the most likely words based on patterns it has learned.

Think of ChatGPT like **a really advanced autocomplete**—kind of like when your phone suggests the next word in a text, but way smarter! It can answer questions, help write emails, draft speeches, or even come up with creative ideas.

But! It's not perfect. It doesn't actually 'think' or 'know' things in real-time. It just predicts the most likely answer based on what it has learned from text. So, always double-check important info!

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LLMs – 3 Important Things to Remember!!!!

1. **WARNING! Do not use for legal advice!!!!** And it's not good for asking factual questions like math problems or history questions.
2. **Always check with your IT department** to make sure a piece of software is allowed. You can get a personal version on your phone if you cannot use it at work.
3. **Never use personal information.** LLMs use your responses to "teach" themselves. (i.e. they memorize it.)
4. Using these chatbots **never replaces learning something yourself.** It's simply a shortcut.

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Types of LLMs

What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is an AI chatbot powered by an LLM. It can answer questions, help with writing, summarize information, and even brainstorm ideas. Think of it like a really advanced autocomplete that can have conversations, explain concepts, and assist with a wide range of tasks.

Other Examples:

Claud, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot

Best case use: You can use it to make language more concise, readable, and simplified.

<https://chatgpt.com/>

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Let's Check It Out!

Written communication:

- Can it tell us what's wrong with this document and help with the formatting? (Remember, it can't check the legal details, just grammar and ease of reading.)

CUASE NO. _____ DEFENDANT'S NAME: _____

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NOT GUILTY
A NOT GUILTY PLEA STATES YOU ARE NOT GUILTY OF THE CHARGE AS FILED. IF YOU PLEAD NOT GUILTY, A TRIAL DATE WILL BE SET. YOU ARE REQUIRED TO APPEAR FOR TRIAL. FAILING TO APPEAR MAY RESULT IN YOU BEING CHARGED WITH FAILURE TO APPEAR (SECTION 16.1 PENAL CODE) AND A WARRANT BEING ISSUED FOR YOUR ARREST. IT IS NOT REQUIRED THAT YOU BE REPRESENTED BY AN ATTORNEY. HOWEVER, YOU MAY ELECT TO DO SO. SHOULD YOU BE FOUND GUILTY, YOU WOULD BE RELEASED AT THAT TIME FROM THE CHARGE AGAINST YOU. SHOULD YOU BE FOUND NOT GUILTY, YOU WOULD BE IN THE ARREST NOT TO EXCEED 60.00 PLUS COSTS PER VIOLATION. NOTICE OF YOUR COURT DATES WILL BE MAILED TO THE ADDRESS YOU HAVE LISTED BELOW.

INITIAL OFFER: A \$25.00 TIME PAYMENT FEE WILL BE ASSESSED TO EACH OFFENSE PAID ON OR AFTER THE 31ST DAY OF CONVICTION.

GUILTY AND WAIVE APPEARANCE FOR TRIAL AND WAIVE MY RIGHT TO A TRIAL BY JURY.

NO CONTEST AND WAIVE APPEARANCE FOR TRIAL AND WAIVE MY RIGHT TO A TRIAL BY JURY.

NOT GUILTY AND REQUEST A TRIAL BY _____ JUDGE OR _____ JURY.

INITIAL OFFER IF YOU HAVE ENTERED A PLEA OF GUILTY OR NO CONTEST:

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I CAN PAY IN FULL TODAY. (MONEY ORDERS/CASHIERS CHECKS ONLY/ EXACT CASH & DEBIT/CREDIT CARDS)

I REQUEST TIME TO COMPLETE A DRIVING SAFETY COURSE.

I AM INDIGENT AND REQUEST TO PAY MY FINE/COSTS BY ALTERNATE MEANS.

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Let's Check It Out!

Written communication:

- Can it help me write an email explaining that the judge can't give legal advice?
- Can it help me draft a non-legal email?

Verbal:

- Can it help me write a script to deal with a rude caller who I can't get off the phone with and can't help with what they want?
- I have an employee/or I myself have been told I come off rude in phone interactions. Can it write me a script to improve this?

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Let's Check It Out!

Brainstorm

- Can it help me come up with ideas?
- Can it help me with interpersonal issues?

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Chatbots.....

What is a Chatbot?

A computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users, generally over the internet.

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Chatbots.....

Common Questions:

What are your office hours?

What are my options to pay a traffic ticket?

What is Deferred Disposition?

Can I take defensive driving?

What do I bring to trial?

Can I reschedule my court date?

Can I talk to the Judge?

How do I file a civil case?

How do I file an eviction case?

How do I file an answer?

How do I appeal?

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How do you develop a plan?

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Baby Steps

What if you don't have time to develop a plan?

- Just creating a running of list of things to change and update and working through it as you have time is perfectly valid!

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But thinking about how to update or create your communication plan in an organized and repeatable way, will make it easier in the long run.

So let's do it together!



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Scenario 1: Inconsistent Information Being Provided

JP Court in Jupiter County has 3 clerks, 2 of which are relatively new. They answer most questions via phone, email, pdfs they attach to the email, mailings, and in-person communication. The clerks have noticed that the information provided across these different communication platforms is often incorrect, with outdated info, spelling errors, and inaccuracies.

Task: Use the communication plan to create a strategy that:

- Identifies why inconsistencies occur.
- Outlines steps to standardize information.
- Includes staff involvement and training to ensure uniformity.

Things to Think about:

- Who ensures updates? How will staff be trained? How can you make sure you cover all platforms?

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Scenario 1: Let's Discuss

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Scenario 2: Natural Disaster Response

Problem: A flood has damaged the court building, and court is canceled. The public needs to know what steps to take, including how to reschedule hearings, contact court staff, and access emergency resources.

- **Task:** Create a disaster communication plan that ensures timely and accurate updates via multiple channels (e.g., social media, phone, email, website, signage).

Discussion Points:

- What information needs to be communicated immediately?
- Which channels are most effective for urgent updates?
- How can the court prepare in advance for future emergencies?

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Scenario 2: Let's Discuss

A flood has damaged the court building, and court is canceled. The public needs to know what steps to take, including how to reschedule hearings, contact court staff, and access emergency resources.

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Thank you

Jessforeman@txstate.edu

Amy.Tucker@traviscountytexas.gov

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