3. The CCC model for text evaluation

On the basis of comments made by experts and lay people in discussions on text quality, a model has been developed in which fifteen evaluation points are presented within a coherent, hierarchical whole.

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Figure 1. The CCC model for evaluation of text quality

This model can be used, among other things, to evaluate text quality. It is based on three criteria: correspondence, consistency, and correctness. The model is therefore known as the CCC model. The first criterion, correspondence, is the most important criterion. By correspondence is meant that the quality of a text is only good if the sender achieves his goal and if the text fills a need on the part of the receiver. Therefore, the quality of a text is based to a great extent on the interplay — the correspondence — between sender goals and receiver needs.

When searching for the balance between sender and receiver, we have various choices. This explains the second criterion: consistency. The quality of a text is greatly affected by the sender’s ability to maintain the choices made (a principle of structure, a manner of wording, layout, etc.). The third criterion, correctness, requires the text to contain no mistakes, whether in content or in form; for example, the text should not contain any false information or an incorrect choice of words.

The three criteria are applied to the five levels that can be distinguished in text analysis: text type, content, structure, wording, and presentation. The CCC model thus contains fifteen evaluation points that can be used with any text type. For the purpose of illustration, we give a short explanation based on the type of text which is central to this paper: the “response letter”. The evaluation points have to be worked through from top to bottom and from left to right. This means, for example, that if a response letter turns out not to be the appropriate means of communication, evaluation after the first point of evaluation under text type is hardly useful. And if the letter is lacking in quality as far as content is concerned, then evaluation of the wording will have to be postponed until
the content has been improved. Below a short explanation is per point of evaluation given on the basis of a text of the type “response letter”.

A. **Text type**

1. **Appropriateness**
   
   A response letter is only appropriate if a letter is really needed. If the question is not clear or if further consultation is necessary, a response by telephone is to be preferred.

2. **Purity of genre**
   
   If a letter contains a lot of background information that is of only secondary importance to the question, a short response letter with reference to enclosures or other texts would be a better solution.

3. **Genre rules**
   
   A letter has to contain a salutation and a signature, and, if necessary a phone number for further contact.

B. **Content**

4. **Sufficient information**
   
   The letter should adequately answer the questions that were asked.

5. **Agreement between facts**
   
   The author should not contradict himself.

6. **Correctness of facts**
   
   The answers should be correct.

C. **Structure**

7. **Sufficient coherence**
   
   If the ordering of paragraphs is not logical, or if the connection between sentences is unclear, the letter scores low on coherence.

8. **Consistent structure**
   
   A letter should not change its structure halfway through (e.g., consistent use of one paragraph per question).

9. **Correct use of linking words**
   
   For example, if “therefore” is used, the link with the previous sentence should be clear.

D. **Wording**

10. **Appropriate wording**
Sentence structure and choice of words must be neither too difficult nor too easy. Also, the middle course has to be steered between too much terseness and long-windedness, between “too boring” and “too familiar.” The quality of a text is also negatively influenced if the author fails to strike the proper tone. If the reader is addressed too patronizingly or too arrogantly, it has repercussions on the transmission of information.

11. Unity of style

Once the author has decided on a certain style (e.g., formal wording), he or she should not suddenly use a word that is inconsistent with that style (e.g., a very informal word).

12. Correct syntax and choice of words

The text should not contain sentence fragments or run-on sentences, incorrectly used prepositions, etc.

E. Presentation

13. Appropriate structure

Because receivers are exposed to an abundance of information these days, the way a message is presented is becoming increasingly important. The quality of a text is negatively influenced if the layout of the text does not support the goal of the sender, or if the receiver’s attention is too much distracted from the content.

14. Adaptation of layout to text

The layout is maladapted to the text if, for instance, extra blank lines or tables do not support the content.

15. Correct spelling and punctuation

The text should be spelled and punctuated correctly

The CCC model and the fixed order of five times three evaluation points make a systematic and well-reasoned analysis possible. This is the most important gain over more subjective and unsystematic analyses, in which it is very often unclear according to which criteria a text is being judged.

3.1 The function of the model

In the CCC model, the quality of a text is based mainly on the correspondence between sender and receiver. Not only the goals of the sender are important, but also the needs or expectations of the reader. In the case of a response letter, the sender’s goal is, of course, that the questions are answered adequately. However, if it takes a month before the answers arrive, this will affect the quality of the interaction. In other words, effectiveness is more than just “sufficient information” or “clear wording." Effectiveness also means that the text is worded in such a way that the institution
sending the text is earmarked as a reliable institution that provides room for negotiation, or that the text makes clear that in the future the client will have other opportunities to contact the sender.

Thus when one uses the term “effectiveness,” many different aspects of what is vaguely referred to as “communicative quality” come into play. What aspects can be distinguished? The CCC model provides a framework for a reasoned overview of aspects that might affect effectiveness. In the model, the evaluation points are organized from top to bottom and from left to right, according to the relative weight they have in a “default” communication situation.

The most important factor in effective communication is “text type” or “means of communication”. For instance, if a brochure is considered sufficient to achieve a change in attitude, or if management thinks a short information film will suffice when a merger lies ahead, it hardly makes any sense to consider any other means of communication. If in those instances one were to consider other means of communication after all, the norms for effective communication would be sinned against “on the highest level”.

The model also makes it clear that content is in fact much more important for effective communication than structure or layout. If research into effective communication is limited to comprehensible or attractive wording or good presentation, then only the exterior of the message is considered. It goes without saying that communication will become less effective if the layout is deficient or if the wording is less than ideal, but such imperfections are much more superficial and therefore easier to correct than, for example, faulty content.

The CCC model makes it possible to check which factors can influence effectiveness per text type or means of communication. For a response letter, for instance, evaluation point 3 not only means that the letter has to meet the general demands of the genre, but it should also indicate how quickly an inquirer should receive an answer. Similarly, evaluation point 7, which requires sufficient information, should include which information the receiver should get, etc. The CCC model in fact serves as a checklist in which all the different aspects of effectiveness are related to one another.

However, the CCC model does not solve the problem of quality assessment. In the most important column, the column of correspondence, the evaluation points contain such words as “sufficient” or “appropriate,” without mentioning a criterion to determine when something is sufficient or appropriate. An external measure to determine effectiveness is therefore still needed. For evaluation point 4 concerning content, such an external measure could be formed by the judgment of the readers (i.e., their judgment on whether the questions that were asked have indeed been answered) and, with respect to the question of whether all necessary information has indeed been given, by the judgment of experts.