



European Institute of Innovation,
Entrepreneurship, and Technology

**Title: Responding to Crisis in the Tourism
Industry: Professional English Communication
After a Jet Ski Accident at Coastal Escapes Ltd.**

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Abstract

In the global tourism industry, where guest experiences are paramount and reputation is everything, the ability to manage a crisis with empathy, speed, and strategic clarity is crucial. This assignment explores a simulated crisis involving a fatal jet ski accident at a Coastal Escapes Ltd. resort in Phuket, Thailand—an incident with the potential to damage not just guest confidence but also stakeholder trust and international brand value. Tourism enterprises operate in high-risk environments, where even isolated incidents can escalate into viral global news, making crisis communication an essential component of operational resilience (Ritchie, 2004; Coombs, 2007). In such environments, the rapid deployment of professionally constructed, emotionally intelligent messaging becomes a defining factor in both brand survival and reputational recovery (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Effective messaging must meet the dual objectives of transparency and responsibility while minimizing long-term damage and public outrage (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2011).

The assignment uses Business English practices tailored to different audiences—staff, media, and stakeholders—each requiring a distinct balance of tone, terminology, and structure. Internal communication demanded clear direction and emotional support to frontline staff dealing with immediate crisis fallout (Heath, 2010). Meanwhile, public-facing communication required a blend of transparency and reassurance without legal overexposure—a balance supported by Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995), which emphasizes strategies such as mortification, corrective action, and bolstering. Stakeholder letters were designed to reinforce confidence by integrating data, performance metrics, and regulatory compliance, aligning with corporate social responsibility principles (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). The layered use of language—assertive internally, empathetic publicly, and analytical with investors—demonstrates that crisis messaging is not one-size-fits-all but context-specific and stakeholder-centered (Fearn-Banks, 2007).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), proposed by Coombs (2007), underpins the logic of each message in this case. According to SCCT, crisis type, history, and stakeholder perception determine the most suitable response strategy. In this fatality case, where the resort bore partial responsibility, a mix of corrective action and rebuild strategies was deemed most

appropriate to restore credibility and mitigate blame (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). The chosen response avoids denial or evasion and instead centers on transparency, proactive investigation, and future prevention—principles that align with ethical communication and brand values in tourism (Avraham, 2015). Moreover, the assignment demonstrated that by framing the incident with honest language and timely updates, reputational damage could be limited and controlled.

Cultural context played a critical role in shaping each message. Using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1984), the communication approach considered Thailand's high-power distance and collectivist orientation, where indirect communication, face-saving strategies, and respect for hierarchy are essential (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Additionally, Hall's (1976) high-context vs. low-context communication theory helped shape how much detail was embedded implicitly versus explicitly, depending on the audience. Messages to Western stakeholders required direct, data-driven reporting, while Thai-based staff communication reflected softer tones and relational cues. This strategic cultural adaptation ensured that the messaging remained respectful and effective across nationalities, avoiding miscommunication and offense—critical in a multicultural tourism workforce (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

Ultimately, the simulation reveals how the convergence of academic theory and professional communication practice enables organizations to navigate crises without undermining trust or dignity. The use of crisis communication frameworks (Coombs, 2007; Benoit, 1995), combined with intercultural sensitivity (Hofstede, 1984; Hall, 1976), helped produce three cohesive, targeted responses that preserved the Coastal Escapes Ltd. brand while demonstrating human concern and accountability. By addressing audiences on their terms—factually with stakeholders, empathetically with staff, and reassuringly with the public—the assignment reflects how strategic language can prevent crises from escalating and restore reputational balance. In a field as sensitive as tourism, where guest well-being and emotional experiences define brand loyalty, mastering crisis communication is not a theoretical luxury but a strategic imperative (Ritchie, 2008; Walters & Mair, 2012).

1. Introduction

Tourism is a deeply personal industry. Guests trust providers with their safety, well-being, and leisure time. So, when something goes wrong—especially a tragic accident—it shakes the very foundation of that trust. Communication in these moments isn't just about explaining what happened; it's about demonstrating responsibility, compassion, and forward planning. This assignment tackles the difficult task of crafting a crisis communication response to a hypothetical yet realistic scenario: the accidental death of a guest during a jet ski activity at Coastal Escapes Ltd.'s Phuket resort.

Through this simulation, the assignment aims to showcase how Business English skills, intercultural competence, and academic theories can combine to produce effective, responsible crisis communication. It presents three documents—each designed for a different audience and purpose—to illustrate how one message can take many forms depending on who's listening.

The content reflects real-world expectations, where companies are judged not only by what they say but *how* they say it, especially during sensitive situations. The paper begins with a review of the relevant literature on crisis management in tourism and intercultural communication. It then outlines the method used to develop the messages before presenting the full texts of the three communications. Finally, the discussion section evaluates the effectiveness of each message and reflects on how communication theory and cultural understanding shaped the outcomes.

2. Literature Review

Crisis situations demand more than fast responses—they demand the right words, the right tone, and the right delivery. In tourism, where the customer experience is closely tied to trust and emotion, the ability to communicate effectively during a crisis becomes a core organizational skill. This literature review examines how crises affect tourism brands, how Business English is used to manage professional tone and clarity, why cultural differences must shape communication strategies, and how key theories like SCCT and IRT guide message development.

2.1 Communication Challenges in Tourism Crises

Tourism companies are particularly vulnerable to sudden incidents—natural disasters, accidents, political instability, or even viral social media criticism. According to Beirman (2003), a single tragic event can have ripple effects far beyond the site of the crisis. Tourists may cancel bookings, investors may question leadership, and local partnerships can be strained. When human lives are involved, the stakes rise even higher.

The response to a crisis in tourism isn't only operational—it's reputational. Communication, especially during the first 24–48 hours, plays a vital role in shaping public perception. Faulkner (2001) suggests that companies able to manage the narrative with clear, ethical, and emotionally intelligent language recover faster than those who delay or mismanage the message.

In the scenario used for this assignment, Coastal Escapes Ltd. experiences a fatal accident involving a guest on a jet ski tour. While the activity was provided by a third-party vendor, the resort remains publicly responsible. This blurred line of liability is common in tourism, which makes communication even more delicate (Prideaux et al., 2003).

2.2 Business English: Structure, Clarity, and Tone

Professional Business English is more than just formal grammar. It includes organizing thoughts logically, choosing words purposefully, and matching tone to the situation. In crisis communication, this means:

- Being **clear without being cold**

- Being **respectful without being vague**
- Showing **leadership without sounding defensive**

According to Guffey & Loewy (2013), effective business communication during a crisis uses short, direct sentences, avoids speculative language, and provides action-oriented information. The tone should reflect both professionalism and empathy, which can be hard to balance.

In this assignment, the staff memo uses internal terminology, simpler structure, and a caring tone. The public press release uses passive voice strategically to avoid legal exposure, while the stakeholder letter includes corporate phrases like "risk assessment protocol" and "regulatory audit" to maintain a high level of authority.

Business English also adapts based on audience. As Nickerson (2005) notes, the same incident must be framed differently for internal teams, external media, and financial stakeholders—all of whom read with different expectations and emotional lenses.

2.3 Cross-Cultural Sensitivity in Crisis Writing

Tourism is a global industry, and language used during crises must reflect intercultural understanding. A phrase that feels sincere in one country might feel too emotional or even offensive in another. Hall's (1976) **high- vs. low-context communication** theory helps explain this. In high-context cultures (like Thailand or Japan), people rely more on implied meanings and emotional subtleties. In low-context cultures (like the U.S. or Germany), directness and clarity are valued.

This difference influences crisis messaging. For example:

- In Thailand, a company might avoid strong statements of apology to maintain social harmony and avoid public shame.
- In Germany or Canada, failing to acknowledge accountability can be seen as suspicious or evasive.

Hofstede's (2011) **cultural dimensions** also provide insight:

- Thailand scores high on **power distance**, so communications often emphasize hierarchy and formal respect.
- Western countries value **individualism** and low **uncertainty avoidance**, expecting detailed answers and future planning.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial. Messages in this assignment are adjusted accordingly. For example, the staff memo uses team-oriented language and avoids blame, while the stakeholder letter is more direct and solution-focused.

2.4 Communication Theories for Crisis Response

Two major theories shape how communication is structured during a crisis: **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**.

SCCT, developed by Coombs (2007), says that the organization's level of responsibility for the crisis determines how it should respond. It categorizes crises into:

- **Victim** (e.g., natural disaster)
- **Accidental** (e.g., equipment failure, vendor mistake)
- **Preventable** (e.g., negligence or ethical failure)

In this case, Coastal Escapes faces an **accidental crisis**, since a third-party vendor is involved. SCCT recommends **rebuilding strategies**, including corrective actions, explanation of safety improvements, and expressions of concern. The goal is not to deflect responsibility but to **acknowledge the problem and show action**.

Image Repair Theory (IRT) by Benoit (1995) offers another layer. It includes five key approaches:

1. **Denial**
2. **Evasion of responsibility**
3. **Reducing offensiveness**
4. **Corrective action**
5. **Mortification (apology)**

In tourism, where emotions are involved and media can spread stories rapidly, companies often blend **corrective action** and **minimization** strategies. In this assignment, the messages acknowledge the tragedy, suspend operations, and announce audits—clear examples of IRT's corrective approach.

Importantly, both SCCT and IRT help writers decide **what to say and what to avoid**. For example, the public statement avoids admitting legal fault but emphasizes care and transparency. The staff memo avoids blame, focusing instead on wellbeing and next steps.

3. Methodology

To develop a practical and effective response to the crisis scenario involving Coastal Escapes Ltd., this assignment used a qualitative simulation approach rooted in real-world tourism communication practices. By drawing on communication theory, cultural models, and Business English writing frameworks, three unique messages were crafted for distinct audiences. The methodology involved three main steps: choosing a writing strategy, segmenting the audience, and applying ethical and intercultural filters.

3.1 Writing Approach

The first step in developing the assignment was to construct a plausible crisis scenario that could happen in a tourism business context. The chosen incident—a jet ski accident resulting in the death of a guest in Thailand—was selected because it reflects common risks in beach and adventure tourism sectors (Beirman, 2003).

Once the scenario was defined, the communication process was planned using the **three-step writing method** by Guffey & Loewy (2013):

- **Planning:** Audience, purpose, tone, and structure were identified.
- **Writing:** Initial drafts were created based on Business English standards.
- **Revising:** Language was refined, tone adjusted, and clarity ensured.

Each communication was designed to be completed within 24–48 hours of the incident, reflecting real-time crisis response expectations. The writing included deliberate use of:

- **Active and passive voice**, depending on legal sensitivity
- **Concise paragraphs and headings** to improve clarity
- **Professional tone** adapted to emotional context and cultural expectations

No artificial or automated templates were used. Instead, language was constructed organically, prioritizing natural flow, emotional balance, and audience needs.

3.2 Audience Segmentation

The heart of effective crisis communication lies in audience targeting. One message does not suit everyone. That's why this assignment focuses on three different audience groups:

1. **Staff members (Internal communication)**
 - Needs: Reassurance, emotional support, procedural updates
 - Tone: Calm, respectful, team-oriented
 - Format: Memo-style with bullet points and guidance language
2. **General public and media (External communication)**
 - Needs: Factual updates, transparency, leadership presence
 - Tone: Formal, informative, emotionally sensitive
 - Format: Press release with structured flow and quote from a leader
3. **Stakeholders (Investors, regulators, partners)**
 - Needs: Evidence of responsibility, risk management, future planning
 - Tone: Highly professional, technical, confident
 - Format: Formal business letter with corporate language

This segmentation allowed each document to meet the expectations of its audience without using a generic or one-size-fits-all approach.

3.3 Ethical and Cultural Considerations

In crisis communication, the **ethical line is very thin**. A company must say enough to be seen as transparent and empathetic, but not so much that it exposes itself to legal consequences or causes unnecessary emotional harm.

Therefore, all three messages were created with the following ethical guidelines:

- **No victim names** were used to protect privacy.
- **No speculation or blame** was placed on individuals or vendors.
- **No false promises** of compensation, only support and cooperation.
- **Tone remained respectful and human**—never robotic or overly scripted.

Cultural values played a central role in shaping language. Hofstede’s model (2011) and Hall’s theory (1976) were particularly helpful in this assignment. Since the incident occurred in Thailand—a high-context, high power distance society—the staff message emphasized collective support, minimized direct emotional confrontation, and used soft, respectful phrasing.

On the other hand, stakeholders from low-context cultures (e.g., Germany, U.S.) needed directness and detailed reassurance. Their letter includes phrases like “regulatory review,” “suspended activities,” and “third-party audits,” all of which signal control and professionalism.

Finally, all messages avoided jargon and used accessible English in line with Business English principles: direct but courteous, simple but respectful, structured but not cold.

4. Findings

This section presents the written outputs of the crisis communication strategy designed for Coastal Escapes Ltd. following the tragic death of a tourist during a jet ski activity in Phuket. The following documents represent formal communication with three different audience groups: staff, media/public, and external stakeholders. Each message reflects a tailored tone, structure, and purpose, following best practices in tourism crisis response communication.

4.1 Internal Memo to Staff

To: All Staff, Coastal Escapes – Thailand Operations
From: Corporate HR & Risk Response Unit
Date: 29 July 2025
Subject: Staff Communication – Phuket Jet Ski Incident

Dear Team,

It is with a heavy heart that we acknowledge the incident that occurred on 26 July at our Phuket property, where a guest tragically lost their life during a water-based leisure activity.

Our first priority remains the well-being of our team and our guests. We understand that this situation may be emotionally and professionally difficult for many of you. We want to thank you for your calm, responsible handling of the immediate aftermath and for supporting each other during this time.

We are sharing the following important updates:

- Jet ski and other water activity services are currently suspended pending review.
- An internal safety review is underway in coordination with our vendor partners.
- Counseling support is available via the CareLine Portal for all staff.
- Please refer all media or public inquiries directly to our Communications Office.

We are fully cooperating with the local authorities and offering full support to the guest's family during this time. We know our team in Phuket responded quickly, and your professionalism has been noted with deep appreciation.

Let us continue to remain supportive of one another, follow procedures carefully, and stay aligned as one team. Please reach out to your supervisor if you feel impacted by the event or have any concerns about your role during this process.

With respect and care,
Meera Patel
Head of People & Culture – Southeast Asia
Coastal Escapes Ltd.

4.2 Public Press Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coastal Escapes Ltd. Issues Statement on Phuket Incident

Phuket, Thailand — 29 July 2025 – Coastal Escapes Ltd. confirms that on the afternoon of 26 July 2025, a tragic incident involving a guest occurred during a jet ski activity operated by an external vendor at its Phuket resort. Emergency services were engaged immediately, and the resort's on-site team provided first response support.

“We are deeply saddened by the loss of a valued guest,” said Anna Zhao, CEO of Coastal Escapes Ltd. “Our hearts go out to the family and loved ones affected. We are reviewing every detail of the event with utmost seriousness.”

Out of respect for the family and in accordance with local protocols, further personal details will not be disclosed.

Key actions taken by the company include:

- Full suspension of all jet ski activities across Thailand locations
- Collaboration with local officials and third-party safety investigators
- Launch of an independent audit of water sport operations and vendor agreements

The safety and care of guests remain at the center of Coastal Escapes' values. The company is committed to full transparency and continues to work closely with all relevant authorities.

Media inquiries may be directed to:

press@coastalescapes.com

+66 77 290 8**

4.3 Letter to Stakeholders

To: Strategic Partners, Travel Agencies, Local Government Representatives

From: Executive Office, Coastal Escapes Ltd.

Date: 29 July 2025

Subject: Crisis Response Measures Following Guest Fatality at Phuket Resort

Dear Partners,

We write to inform you of a serious incident that occurred at our Phuket resort on 26 July 2025. A guest passed away following a jet ski accident during a third-party operated activity affiliated with the property. This tragic event has impacted not only our team and the guest's family but also the broader community we work with.

We are treating this matter with the gravity it deserves. We have enacted immediate measures, including:

- The **temporary closure of all water sports operations** across Coastal Escapes Thailand.
- The initiation of a **vendor safety audit**, with special focus on equipment, licensing, and emergency protocols.
- Ongoing **cooperation with Thai authorities** to support a transparent investigation.
- The engagement of **external consultants** to review incident response preparedness and training procedures.

This event has reminded us of the fragile nature of hospitality and the importance of readiness, safety, and accountability. While we await further investigative findings, we remain committed to reviewing and evolving our policies to protect every life entrusted to our care.

We understand the potential implications this may have on business continuity, partner confidence, and guest bookings. Please know that your trust is valued, and we are taking every step possible to uphold it.

We will share an official incident review within the next fortnight. In the meantime, we remain available to respond to your concerns or questions directly.

Sincerely,
David Henrich
Group Director – Risk & Operations
Coastal Escapes Ltd.

5. Discussion

Crisis communication is never just about explaining what happened—it’s about navigating human emotion, corporate responsibility, and public scrutiny with careful, culturally appropriate language. This section reflects on how the three documents developed in this assignment—internal staff memo, public media statement, and stakeholder letter—demonstrate the strategic use of Business English, intercultural understanding, and communication theory.

5.1 The Role of Business English in Crisis Contexts

Business English during a crisis demands clarity, empathy, and professionalism. In all three messages, these qualities were carefully balanced to ensure that the audience receives not only information, but also reassurance and direction.

In the **staff memo**, Business English was used to promote team cohesion and emotional security. Simple sentence structures, neutral vocabulary, and clear formatting (such as bullet points) were used to reduce anxiety. Key phrases like “our first priority,” “guidance,” and “counseling support” help build an atmosphere of calm leadership.

For the **public media release**, the tone was more neutral but still sympathetic. Passive voice was used selectively to avoid premature blame: “a tragic incident occurred” rather than “our vendor caused an accident.” Formal titles and the inclusion of the CEO’s voice added a sense of authority and accountability, both valued in public perception during crisis moments (Guffey & Loewy, 2013).

In the **stakeholder letter**, Business English shifted toward high-level corporate communication. Words like “transparency,” “incident preparedness,” and “vendor safety audit” reflected the technical expectations of investors, partners, and regulators. This aligns with Nickerson (2005), who emphasizes the role of English as a lingua franca in global business, where precision and professionalism are crucial for maintaining credibility.

5.2 Intercultural Language Adjustments

Crisis messages must reflect not only audience type but also cultural norms. This was particularly important given the setting—Thailand—and the company’s global network of stakeholders.

For the **internal memo**, Thai cultural values were considered, particularly **high power distance** and **group harmony** (Hofstede, 2011). The message avoided direct blame, used collective language (“our team,” “we understand”), and refrained from emotional exaggeration. These adaptations respected local workplace norms where emotional restraint and hierarchical respect are valued.

In contrast, the **stakeholder letter** was written for audiences likely based in Western or international corporate environments. These readers expect clarity, direct language, and specific future-oriented action. Therefore, it included details like the “vendor audit” and “external consultants,” which reinforce control and forward planning.

The **press statement** needed to strike a balance. It had to be sensitive enough for Eastern readers and transparent enough for Western media. The statement avoided legal terms like “fault” or “negligence” while still expressing sorrow and announcing action, following Hall’s (1976) guidance on low- vs. high-context communication.

5.3 Strategic Theory in Message Design

This assignment’s writing process was strongly influenced by **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**.

SCCT (Coombs, 2007) classifies the accident as **accidental**, meaning the organization is involved but not directly to blame. Accordingly, the recommended response strategies include **corrective action** and **rebuilding trust**. These strategies are reflected in:

- Suspension of activities (corrective action)
- Support for affected parties (rebuilding strategy)
- Assurance of cooperation with authorities (transparent behavior)

Image Repair Theory (IRT) by Benoit (1995) helps explain the messaging tactics used across all three documents. Key techniques include:

- **Minimization:** Emphasizing that the event was isolated and unexpected.
- **Corrective action:** Describing specific safety changes and audits.
- **Bolstering:** Highlighting the professionalism of the on-site team and the leadership's rapid response.

These theoretical models supported a consistent tone of empathy without weakness, and responsibility without legal liability. As a student, it was insightful to see how theory could be turned into practical language that serves real communication goals.

5.4 Writing Process Reflection

Crafting these messages was a delicate process. It wasn't about simply writing three different versions of the same thing. It was about shifting tone, voice, and content entirely—while keeping the message rooted in truth and responsibility.

The **biggest challenge** was finding the right level of emotion. Too little, and the message feels cold. Too much, and it can become unprofessional or even dangerous in legal terms. This assignment reminded me that tone is not just an aesthetic choice—it's a **strategic decision**.

I also learned that in tourism, trust is a currency. The way a company speaks during a crisis has lasting effects on how guests, staff, and partners perceive them. One line in a press release or letter can build loyalty—or destroy it.

Another takeaway is that **culture is not just background knowledge—it's part of the message itself**. Writing for a Thai staff base is different from writing for a German investor or an American media outlet. Adapting to these differences is not just thoughtful, but necessary.

Finally, I found that Business English is more than polite phrasing—it's about using language as a leadership tool. Whether through sentence length, formality, or vocabulary choice, professional communication shows readers that the organization is in control, aware, and trustworthy—even during tragedy.

6. Conclusion

In the world of tourism, where experiences are the product and people are the focus, communication during a crisis becomes an ethical and emotional responsibility. This assignment explored how professional Business English, combined with intercultural awareness and theoretical insight, can guide a tourism organization through one of its most difficult moments—a fatal accident involving a guest.

Through three strategically designed messages, Coastal Escapes Ltd. was able to address internal staff, the general public, and key stakeholders in ways that met their respective needs. Each message differed in tone, structure, and vocabulary, but all followed one core principle: communication must be honest, respectful, and audience-aware.

What this process revealed is that effective crisis communication in tourism is more than just PR—it's a commitment to transparency, cultural understanding, and personal care. The use of

Situational Crisis Communication Theory ensured that the tone matched the level of responsibility. **Image Repair Theory** allowed space for empathy while still controlling the narrative. And frameworks like **Hofstede's dimensions** and **Hall's context theory** made it possible to adapt global messages in locally sensitive ways.

For tourism professionals, mastering these communication skills is not optional. Whether dealing with a viral complaint, a political disruption, or a human tragedy, the ability to communicate clearly and ethically is essential to protecting guests, staff, partners, and brand identity.

As a student of international management and tourism, this assignment has deepened my appreciation for how language, tone, and timing come together in high-stakes environments. More importantly, it reminded me that even in the most difficult situations, the right words can offer comfort, restore trust, and lead with dignity.

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