

# communication skills

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



## Aims

This resource has been compiled to give a general introduction to effective communication for practice educators. The key components of the communication process will be discussed. The basic skills required for effective communication will be explored in the next few sections, and some specific contexts for communication, including giving presentations and feedback meetings, will be examined.

## Learning Objectives

On completion of this resource, you should be able to:

- Identify the key components of the communication process.
- Identify some typical problems that can arise in the communication process and demonstrate knowledge of skills to overcome these.
- Demonstrate increased awareness of forms of communication and social behaviour.
- Identify and use strategies for managing specific contexts for communication, including giving presentations.

## Introduction

As we progress through our careers in the health or social care environment, the sorts of skills that are critical to our success can change and evolve. Many of us are first responsible for performing specific practical tasks, linked to our developing knowledge base. Our effectiveness centres upon our actions and our growing expertise at performing these. Proficiency at such tasks is often the initial focus.

However, as we continue to progress, it is likely that success will depend more and more upon our interpersonal skills and our ability to develop effective working relationships with key others. Jobs that include a managerial, supervisory or a mentoring role can involve complex relationships with people. Demands can be made that are sometimes conflicting and ambiguous. A practice educator's job can involve reconciling and managing these demands. Not surprisingly, interpersonal and communication skills often rank among the most critical for work related success.

In its most straightforward sense, effective communication may be understood as occurring when the intended meaning of the sender and perceived meaning of the receiver are the same. Yet the level of skill required for effective communication to occur, belies the simplicity of this definition. After examining studies involving hundreds of large organisations, Goleman (1997) concluded that a high level of individual success at work was characterised by 'emotional intelligence', or skills of social awareness and communication. Typically, these included the ability to motivate and influence others, to give honest feedback sensitively, to empathise and develop relationships, to monitor one's own behaviour, to handle emotions both of self and others and to read interpersonal situations and organisational politics.

However it is important to note that emotional intelligence, or the skills of social awareness and communication, can be developed and honed. This resource aims to give a basic introduction to the area of effective communication and will seek to increase your awareness of forms of

communication, communication skills and social or interpersonal behaviour therein. Communication (from Latin *commūnicāre*, meaning "to share") is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior. It is the meaningful exchange of information between two or more living creatures.

One definition of communication is “any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or non-linguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes.”

Communication requires a sender, a message, and a recipient, although the receiver doesn't have to be present or aware of the sender's intent to communicate at the time of communication; thus communication can occur across vast distances in time and space. Communication requires that the communicating parties share an area of communicative commonality. The communication process is complete once the receiver understands the sender's message. Communicating with others involves three primary steps:

Thought: First, information exists in the mind of the sender. This can be a concept, idea, information, or feelings. Encoding: Next, a message is sent to a receiver in words or other symbols. Decoding: Lastly, the receiver translates the words or symbols into a concept or information that a person can understand. There are a variety of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. These include body language, eye contact, sign language,

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haptic communication, and chronemics. Other examples are media content such as pictures, graphics, sound, and writing.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also defines the communication to include the display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia, as well as written and plain language, human-reader, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology. Feedback is a critical component of effective communication.

## Communication

## Process

The A first step in unravelling the complexity of interpersonal communication is to understand the basic process by which communication occurs. Only then can we identify where possible problems can arise and explore skills for enhancing communication and managing such breakdowns. Human beings are not passive, predictable objects who always interpret meanings and react as they are 'supposed to'. Neither is communication a passive, predictable, one way event.

Rather, communication can be viewed as an active process, influenced by all the complexities and ambiguities of human behaviour. It is also fraught with potential points of breakdown. As Clapitt notes, 'We actively construct meanings within a unique vortex that includes the words used, the context of the utterances, and the people involved.' (2005, p. 8)

A more accurate way of looking at the process of communication is probably as a dynamic, circuitous process in which elements such as non-verbal

behaviour and individual styles of interpreting and ascribing meaning to events have significant influence. Strategies such as constructing a clear, unambiguous message can encourage effective communication, but so too can seeking to understand meanings imposed by the listener via processes such as actively listening to feedback. 1. Sending The Message:

Person 1 constructs and sends a message. Messages are the signals and symbols that we use to convey what we want to transmit. They can occur in various ways, including visual (non-verbal, written), auditory (verbal and sub-vocal speech), tactile (touch, bodily contact) and olfactory (perfumes, aftershaves) formats. In order to send the message, it must be encoded into words, as well as tone, inflection, facial expression, and other non-verbal language.

While skills such as clear thinking, concise expression of plain English, logical association of ideas and organised speech are important, especially to specific contexts such as giving presentations they do not ensure that effective communication will take place. The meaning of the message is not contained solely in the words, as factors such as non-verbal cues, the context and the people involved will heavily influence meaning. It is important to note that unintended as well as intended meanings may be communicated via non-verbal leakage.

## 2. The Channel

In Clappitt's (2005) model, this refers to the means used to deliver messages and the related formats. Means used to communicate can include face to face, telephone, pager, written, radio and video communication. In face to face communication, which is most often preferred for

communication of more important matters, communication occurs through visual, auditory and olfactory formats, while the tactile medium may or may not be used. Skilled communicators will choose the channel most appropriate to the specific goal sought at that time.

### 3. Receiving the Message

For effective communication to take place, the message must be accurately decoded and reconstructed by person 2, from the signals received from person 1. However, even if the "encoding" is carried out very well; this in itself does not ensure that it will be "decoded" accurately. The meaning ascribed to the message may vary according to the person doing the interpreting, the context in which the message was given and the total information communicated.

### 4. Feedback

Person 2 responds to person 1, and this message is received by person 1 as feedback. Again, feedback comprises both the verbal and non-verbal messages of others, and allows us to evaluate how the message has been understood and the response to it. Actively listening to feedback is a key skill in effective communication. We can also get feedback from our own responses through a process known as 'self-monitoring' (Hargie et al 2004). Self-monitoring involves staying aware of what we are saying and doing in social encounters and how this is impacting on others. This type of feedback can then be used to alter or adapt our behaviour in the light of the responses from others.

People who are skilled communicators are high self-monitors, who continuously analyse and regulate their own behaviour according to the way in which the other person is responding. With feedback as with other forms of message, the information received must be interpreted by us. Therefore, the message is susceptible to the same possible misinterpretations and will be influenced by factors such as context and people involved.

Meaning is not an inherent quality of the message, but is perceived or constructed in the mind of the recipient. In the above exercise, a message that would seem to have been intended by the practice educator as being genuinely positive was misinterpreted as negative by the student in the second situation. The important part of this communication at this point, is how the practice educator listens to this feedback, the meaning that s/he ascribes to it, and how it is subsequently responded to.

## 5. Context

A significant point to note is that communication never occurs in a vacuum. Communication is inextricably linked to the particular context in which it occurs, which in turn has a major impact upon behaviour.

## 6. Noise

The term ‘noise’ describes anything that can interfere with or distort the meaning of a message. Dickson (1999) has identified a number of such barriers or common sources of noise, which can affect communication accuracy and effectiveness.

- Psychological:

These include the perceptual biases or stereotypes that can impact on how we interpret a particular person’s message. People respond to stimuli in the environment in very different ways. We each have shortcuts that we use to



organize data. Invariably, these shortcuts introduce some biases into communication. Stereotyping is an example of such a shortcut.

- Semantic:

This is used to describe situations where language or cultural differences distort or interfere with the meaning of the message. Effective communication requires deciphering and understanding the basic values, motives, and assumptions of the other person. Given that dramatic differences exist across cultures in terms of approaches to time, space, and privacy; the opportunities for misinterpretation when we are in cross-cultural situations are plentiful.

- Environmental:

This refers to a range of factors such as size of room, layout of furniture, intrusive noise, heating and lighting etc. Each of these can either encourage or inhibit interaction.

- Demographic:

Factors such as gender and age can impact on the way in which a message is interpreted. For example, a male listener may nod his head to indicate to the speaker 'I agree', whereas a female listener may nod her head to communicate 'I am listening' (but not necessarily agreeing); so sending the same visible feedback but with different actual meanings.

- Disability: Physical or neurological impairment as well as psychiatric illness can call for alternative means to the usual patterns of communication to be adopted. Some examples include sight or hearing loss, and conditions such as Parkinson's disease or severe depression.

- Organisational

Barriers to effective communication can be located within the organisation or agency itself. Difficulties with established lines and means of communication, different relative physical location of staff, lack of team or supervision meetings organisation or agency itself.

## Characteristics of Effective Communication

Even in today's electronic age, effective interpersonal communication skills are a key factor in your professional and personal success. 1. A Clear,

### Concise Message

No one likes a rambler, so have your primary purpose in mind when you begin your communication. Simplify your thoughts, so you can present your point in a precise manner. Once you have made your first important point, move on to the next.

### 2. Understanding of the Recipient

Effective communicators know who they are talking to, and they understand the style of communication will vary based on the recipient. For example, you probably talk to your co-workers very differently than you talk to your boss.

### 3. Empathy for the Recipient

Empathy involves putting yourself in the other person's shoes. Effective communicators always see the situation from the perspective of the other person, including the emotions that might be involved with the message.

### 4. Effective Listening

Communication isn't all about talking to someone. Effective listening means really hearing what the other person is saying as well. Paraphrasing the message and repeating it back to the individual will let you know you understood their point accurately. It also shows that you care enough about their message to get it right the first time. 5. Asking for Clarification, when Necessary

Effective communicators aren't afraid to ask for clarification if they don't understand the message they are receiving. When you ask for clearer understanding, it shows that you really care what the person is talking about and ensures the conversation proceeds appropriately. Clarification can come from paraphrasing what you heard the other person say or simply asking him to relay his message in a different way that is easier for you to understand.

#### 6. Adherence to the Facts

Effective communicators are much more interested in passing of facts than assumptions or gossip. Avoid the rumor mill at all costs, and unless you can verify your information through the original source, do not pass it on to others. If you are conveying a message from another person, it is also important to get that person's permission to do so before passing the information onto others.

#### 7. Awareness of Body Language

Body language makes up a large percentage of our messages, so effective communicators learn how to tune into the nonverbal message they are sending. Make eye contact with the person you are talking to as much as possible, particularly when that person is speaking to you. Avoid potentially

offensive body language like fidgeting, biting your lip or rolling your eyes that might convey boredom, cynicism or lack of honesty.

#### 8. Provision of Proper Feedback

When you offer feedback to another person, make sure it is constructive. Feedback is important to maintain a positive conversation and ensure you are both on the same page. Feedback might involve requests for clarifications, questions to expand a particular message, or constructive criticism about another's performance. Pepper potential criticism with plenty of positive feedback so the recipient is more likely to hear your message and take it to heart.

#### 9. Inclusion of Praise, when Appropriate

Effective communicators know how and when to offer praise. Positive feedback is always welcome, as long as the recipient knows it is authentic. When you praise another person, be specific in your compliment by linking it directly to a specific activity or attribute. Praise someone publically whenever you can, and make sure the praise coming out of your mouth is genuine. When you must convey negative information or criticism, try starting out with praise and ending with a positive statement. This “hamburger” approach usually helps others take criticism in stride.

#### 10. Positive Attitude

No one likes to listen to a complainer, so effective communicators work hard to keep their messages positive. Instead of using phrases like, “ I can’t” or “ We won’t” in your conversations, focus on what you can do for others. Even if you cannot grant a request the way someone hopes, keeping your

message positive will allow the other person to accept your “no” with grace. Effective communicators are typically the successful people in life that others admire. If you would like to join this elite group, practice these tips to improve your own communication skills. The improvement in your professional and personal relationships will make the work on your communication worth the effort.

### The Types of Communication Skills

#### 1. Verbal Communication

Verbal communication skills are very important and must be honed, particularly in a job in which employees deal with the public. Clear communication requires straightforward language that is neither too flowery or too simple. It is essential to be able to use the spoken word to get your point across simply. Higher levels of communication competencies deal with persuasive speaking and these skills are necessary for management level employees and those in marketing positions within a company. All employees can benefit from public speaking courses, which help develop these key communication skills.

#### 2. Non verbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is much more difficult for many people. It consists of body language and the cues that are given off while listening to someone else speak. Those in customer service positions need to have a highly developed competency level in listening. Nodding of the head, inclining towards the speaker and showing an open body (shoulders back, arms

uncrossed) let a speaker know that you are listening and hearing what they have to say.

### 3. Oral communication

Oral communication, while primarily referring to spoken verbal communication, can also employ visual aids and non-verbal elements to support the conveyance of meaning. Oral communication includes speeches, presentations, discussions, and aspects of interpersonal communication. As a type of face-to-face communication, body language and choice tonality play a significant role, and may have a greater impact upon the listener than informational content. This type of communication also garners immediate feedback.

### 4. Written Communication

One often overlooked area of communication is the written word. Even the most basic position in a company requires employees to have good written communication skills. Proper spelling, grammar usage and a professional way of imparting information are important competencies that must be mastered. Written communication that is poorly worded, misspelled or full of errors detracts from the overall message that is being imparted. This is even more vital when dealing with the public through written communication. People judge others by the way they write and it is important to make sure that written communication is professional.

### 5. Business communication

A business can flourish only when all objectives of the organization are achieved effectively. For efficiency in an organization, all the people of the organization must be able to convey their message properly

### Barriers to Communication

#### 1. Language Barriers

Clearly, language and linguistic ability may act as a barrier to communication. However, even when communicating in the same language, the terminology used in a message may act as a barrier if it is not fully understood by the receiver(s). For example, a message that includes a lot of specialist jargon and abbreviations will not be understood by a receiver who is not familiar with the terminology used. Regional colloquialisms and expressions may be misinterpreted or even considered offensive. See our page: Effective Speaking for more information.

#### 2. Psychological Barriers

The psychological state of the receiver will influence how the message is received. For example, if someone has personal worries and is stressed, they may be preoccupied by personal concerns and not as receptive to the message as if they were not stressed. Stressmanagement is an important personal skill that affects our interpersonal relationships. See our pages Stress: Symptoms and Triggers and Avoiding Stress for more information.

Anger is another example of a psychological barrier to communication, when we are angry it is easy to say things that we may later regret and also to misinterpret what others are saying. See our pages: What is Anger?, Anger Management and Anger Management Therapy for more information. More

generally people with low self-esteem may be less assertive and therefore may not feel comfortable communicating - they may feel shy about saying how they really feel or read negative sub-texts into messages they hear. Visit our pages on Improving Self-Esteem and Assertiveness for more information.

### 3. Physiological Barriers

Physiological barriers may result from the receiver's physical state: for example, a receiver with reduced hearing may not grasp to entirety of a spoken conversation especially if there is significant background noise.

### 4. Physical Barriers

An example of a physical barrier to communication is geographic distance between the sender and receiver(s). Communication is generally easier over shorter distances as more communication channels are available and less technology is required. Although modern technology often serves to reduce the impact of physical barriers, the advantages and disadvantages of each communication channel should be understood so that an appropriate channel can be used to overcome the physical barriers.

### 5. Systematic Barriers

Systematic barriers to communication may exist in structures and organisations where there are inefficient or inappropriate information systems and communication channels, or where there is a lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities for communication. In such organisations, individuals may be unclear of their role in the communication process and therefore not know what is expected of them.



## 6. Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are behaviours or perceptions that prevent people from communicating effectively. Attitudinal barriers to communication may result from personality conflicts, poor management, resistance to change or a lack of motivation. Effective receivers of messages should attempt to overcome their own attitudinal barriers to facilitate effective communication.

### Barriers to Effective Communication

1. The use of jargon. Over-complicated, unfamiliar and/or technical terms.
2. Emotional barriers and taboos. Some people may find it difficult to express their emotions and some topics may be completely 'off-limits' or taboo.
3. Lack of attention, interest, distractions, or irrelevance to the receiver.
4. Differences in perception and viewpoint.
5. Physical disabilities such as hearing problems or speech difficulties.
6. Physical barriers to non-verbal communication. Not being able to see the non-verbal cues, gestures, posture and general body language can make communication less effective.
7. Language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents.
8. Expectations and prejudices which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping. People often hear what they expect to hear rather than what is actually said and jump to incorrect conclusions.
9. Cultural differences. The norms of social interaction vary greatly in different cultures, as do the way in which emotions are expressed. For example, the concept of personal space varies between cultures and between different social settings.

### The Main Skills for Effective Communication

Following are the main skills one should have to master to become an effective communicator. Although acquiring all these skills and mastering them to the same level seems to be challenging, knowing all these skills and slowly working on them will take you to the level you want to be in communication.

### 1. Staying Focused

When you deal with a current crisis or an argument, relating something from the past is quite natural. When this happens, most of the times, the discussion goes out of topic and the situation can become quite complicated. Staying focused is one of the best skills not only for communicating under pressure, but for all types of communications ranging from lunch chitchats to board discussions. If you go out of focus, there is a high chance that the end result of the communication may not be effective.

### 2. Listening Carefully

Although people think that they are listening when another person talks, actually they are spending time planning what to say next. This is what we actually do! Therefore, you need to make an extra effort in order to listen to what the other person says and then come up with what you want to say. If you are not sure what you've heard, repeat it and ask for their confirmation.

### 3. Understanding Others' Point of Views

In most of the communications, we want ourselves heard and understood. We talk a lot on our point of view and try to get the buying of who are listening. Remember, others also do the same! If you want them to hear you, you need to hear them and understand their point of view too. If you can

really see through their point of view, you can actually explain yours in a clear and applicable way.

#### 4. Empathy When Criticizing

Sometimes, we become really defensive when someone criticizes us. Since criticism has close ties with emotions, we can be easily erupted. But, in communication, it is really important to listen to the other person's pain and difficulties and respond with empathy. At the same time, try to extract the facts and the truth in what they say, it can be useful for you.

#### 5. Taking Ownership

Taking personal responsibility is strength. When it comes to effective communication, admitting what you did wrong is respected and required. Most of the times, there are many people, who share responsibility in a conflict. In such cases, admit what is yours. This behaviour shows maturity and sets an example. Your behaviour most probably will inspire others to take responsibility for their share.

#### 6. Compromise if Necessary

We love to win arguments all the time, but how often have you felt empty inside after winning an argument? Sometimes, winning an argument does not make sense. You may win the argument but might lose the corporation of other people. Communication is not about winning, it's about getting things done. For the objective of getting things done, you may have to compromise in the process. If it is necessary, please do!

#### 7. Take a Time-Out if Necessary

Sometimes, you need to take a break in the middle of the discussion. If the communication is intensive, there can be ineffective communication pattern surfaced. Once you notice such patterns, you need to take a break and then continue. When you continue after the break, all the parties involved in the discussion will be able to constructively contribute for the discussion.

#### 8. Compete for Your Objective

Although there can be a lot of obstacles on your way, do not give up what you are fighting for. Surely you may have to compromise, but clearly stand for what you believe in. When it comes to communication, all the parties involved should satisfy with the outcome of it. Ask for Help Sometimes, you might have difficulties to communicate certain things to certain parties. This could be due to an issue related to respect or something else. In such cases, seek help from others. Your manager will be one of the best persons to help you with.

#### Conclusion

Thus, effective communication helps us better understand a person or situation and enables us to resolve differences, build trust and respect, and create environments where creative ideas, problem solving, affection, and caring can flourish. As simple as communication seems, much of what we try to communicate to others—and what others try to communicate to us—gets misunderstood, which can cause conflict and frustration in personal and professional relationships. By learning these effective communication skills, you can better connect with your spouse, kids, friends, and coworkers.