Communication

Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.

Key Actions

- **Organizes the communication**—Clarifies purpose and importance; stresses major points; follows a logical sequence.

- **Maintains audience attention**—Keeps the audience engaged through use of techniques such as analogies, illustrations, humor, an appealing style, body language, and voice inflection.

- **Adjusts to the audience**—Frames message in line with audience experience, background, and expectations; uses terms, examples, and analogies that are meaningful to the audience.

- **Ensures understanding**—Seeks input from audience; checks understanding; presents message in different ways to enhance understanding.

- **Adheres to accepted conventions**—Uses syntax, pace, volume, diction, and mechanics appropriate to the media being used.

- **Comprehends communication from others**—Attends to messages from others; correctly interprets messages and responds appropriately.

Quick Tips

- Use analogies and graphics to make your message more interesting.

- Use accurate grammar, punctuation, and spelling, as appropriate.

- Ask people if what you’re saying or writing is clear and succinct.

- Be as ready to listen as you are to say or write something.

- Ask questions if you’re unclear about a statement or message.
Developmental Activities

Self-Directed

• Audiotape or videotape yourself having a discussion with others (e.g., coworkers, family, friends). Listen to how you express yourself verbally, and watch how you express yourself using body language.

• When you don’t know the answer to a question or understand what the speaker is saying, say so or redirect the question to the audience (“What do you think?”).

• Practice using different types of questions (open-ended, close-ended, clarifying, rhetorical, etc.).

• Practice using gestures to emphasize a point and make your communication more interesting.

• Use analogies to make the message more interesting to the listener.

• When you feel your emotions rising in a discussion, concentrate on getting under control before proceeding to the facts. Pause, count to 10, and empathize.

• Try writing the same informational piece to three different audiences: your leader, your coworkers, and outside vendors. Adjust language and style accordingly.

• Practice outlining what you want to write before making a first draft. Look for ways to better organize the information.

• Watch and listen to newscasters, politicians, and narrators; analyze their speed, volume, tone, pitch, and enunciation.

• Observe a poor communicator and ask yourself, “What communication faults do we share?”

• When finishing a document, look for jargon, difficult technical language, etc., and try to rephrase it for simplicity and reader appeal.

• Observe someone writing a meeting, workshop, or seminar agenda on a flip chart; note how this person organizes and clarifies information so the audience knows what to expect.

• Look for repeated words; use a thesaurus or dictionary to add variety.

• Use a business grammar/style book or computer program to analyze and improve your communication style.

• Take thorough notes during your next meeting, then organize them later to provide a logical summary.

• Write a poem or short story.
• Increase your exposure to new, business-related words by reading publications such as *Business Week* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Try to incorporate new language and terminology into your communication.

• Read newspaper columns (e.g., “Words and Wisdom” by William Morris, “Grammar Hot Line” by Mary Newton Border) that deal with language usage and vocabulary.

**Partnerships**

• Ask a skilled communicator or expert to provide individual tutoring in building your communications skills.

• Ask a coworker to provide you with immediate feedback on a specific communication behavior you are trying to improve.

• Observe an effective communicator. Make notes of the skills you want to focus on before the event. Ask the expert for “tips.”

• Notice the clear, concise communications you’ve received, as well as those that were difficult to understand. Seek help in analyzing the differences in what made one communication more effective than the other.

• Ask your manager or a qualified work associate to review your written drafts and provide specific feedback, including suggestions for improvement on content, logic, and flow.

• Check for understanding by asking your audience to summarize your message, as they perceived it. If it was perceived inaccurately, ask questions to determine what words or phrases led to the misperception.

• Have someone edit your written work. Request feedback on your most common errors and suggestions on ways to improve.

**Targeted Assignments**

• Offer to write/edit an article for a community or charitable organization.

• Seek opportunities for interactions in which communication skills are important. Ask your manager, a communications expert, or member of the audience to provide feedback.

• Volunteer to work on committees, task forces, and interdepartmental projects. These provide opportunities to build communication skills.

• Join organizations that help you develop speaking skills (Dale Carnegie, Toastmasters International).

• Join a theater group.

• Enroll in a business-writing program or language course at your local community college.
Workshops
Look for a workshop that addresses the following:

- Understanding the process and problems of communication.
- Analyzing the situation and audience, then tailoring your communication appropriately.
- Using words and body language to convince and persuade.
- Being an active listener.
- Organizing information in preparation for communicating.
- Developing the type of communication you most frequently use (for meetings, one-on-one interactions, reports, proposals, memos, etc.).
- Communicating with clarity and brevity.
- Identifying common barriers to effective communication.

Readings

Books

This comprehensive book covers five major areas of communication, including foundations for management communication, correspondence, reporting and proposing, career communication, managing oral communication, and global issues in management communication. It also includes numerous case studies, a grammar/punctuation/usage handbook, and guidelines for using the latest communication technology.


This comprehensive book helps readers get their point across to anyone—supervisors, coworkers, colleagues, vendors, or lenders. The author shows how to evaluate current skills and build on them. Every aspect of communication is covered, from body language to word choice, and from organization to presentation.


Effective communication gets things done. Whether in meetings or one-to-one with employees, it is important that the message is not only understood, but that it initiates action. This collection of articles gives managers the tools they need to communicate.

This book and CD combination provides information on improving voice and speech quality. Self-tests help readers assess pronunciation, pace, tone, and accent, while exercises improve weak areas and build vocal strength.


The communication tips in this book are designed to improve the quality of workplace communications by focusing on message content. Exercises help readers construct clear, effective communications and decode the messages they receive.


This guide covers the basics of business writing, concisely addressing many techniques, tips, and methods. Pertinent to all business environments, it is a good working manual to improved written communications.


This book shows how to get and keep a reader’s attention amidst the avalanche of written material that inundates the workplace. Whether the medium is a business report or a web site, the author demonstrates a “light, layered, and linked” approach to written communication.


This classic volume lays out clearly defined guidelines for effective written communication. In this updated edition, readers will find the elements of English style presented in the authors’ usual succinct, economical style. Very readable, this reference is one that will be used often as a guide to more efficient, effective writing.

**Articles**


The authors suggest developing one’s own speaking style and offer tips on adjusting to various audiences as well as honing listening skills. They also advocate aligning body language, vocabulary, and expressions to ensure that the content of the message is clearly understood.


This article offers tips on using new communication technologies in a global business environment and discusses when to use the various forms of communication for best results. The author provides real-life examples that illustrate the problems caused by making the wrong choices.

This article outlines nine steps for fast, easy, business writing. The author shows readers how to achieve clarity and precision in business communications without spending a lot of time or energy. The article includes a helpful checklist.


A good listener will listen carefully and attentively to show interest and understanding. This article details five suggestions for becoming an active listener.


Well-known management expert Peter Drucker discusses five rules for bridging the ever-widening communication gaps in organizations.


This article lists the basics of forceful business writing and stresses simplicity of language. The author offers tips on writing memos and reports and suggests ways to evaluate one’s own writing.