

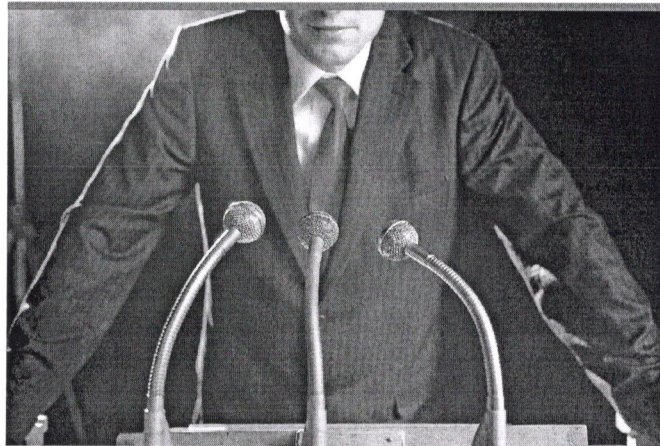
Communication Apprehension

Effective communication skills are essential if you want to excel in leadership. Put simply, to move up the ladder of success, you must develop your communication skills. Unfortunately, communication apprehension is a very real problem that stops many talented individuals from achieving professional excellence. What is communication apprehension?

Types of Communication Apprehension

According to James C. McCroskey (1982), one of the leading researchers in the communication discipline, **communication apprehension** is “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 137). You can understand your own communication apprehension by thinking about your communication in particular situations. What types of communication situations increase your apprehension? According to McCroskey (1984), there are at least four types of communication apprehension:

1. **Trait communication apprehension** means that one possesses a “shy trait.” In general, shy people tend not to raise their hands in class a lot, avoid certain social situations, and feel extremely anxious about giving a professional presentation.
2. **Context-based communication apprehension** describes a fear of communicating in certain contexts. A fear of public speaking is a great example of context communication apprehension. For example, a student may not be nervous about meeting new people or participating in small groups, but presenting a speech in front of the class promotes a high degree of apprehension.
3. **Audience-based communication apprehension** explains a person’s fear of speaking to certain people or groups. For example, a person may feel comfortable speaking in front of friends in his or her social circle, but speaking in front of colleagues at work makes him or her extremely nervous.
4. **Situational communication apprehension** refers to apprehension to communicate in specific sets of circumstances; everyone at some point in their lives is going to feel apprehensive about communicating something. Think of a person you might want to impress, such as a boss or an interviewer. In general, you are an outgoing person and don’t mind presenting in front of people, but someone you want to impress may promote an uneasy or anxious feeling.



What experiences have you had speaking into a microphone? Did using a microphone increase your communication apprehension?

Causes of Communication Apprehension

Now that we've reviewed the different types of communication apprehension, let's take a look at some of the causes. Communication scholar Michael Beatty (1988) lists eight causes for communication apprehension. Review the list that follows to see if any of the causes resonate with you personally.

1. *Novelty*: If the type of communication situation, such as giving a speech or running a meeting, is not something you do every day, it can create apprehension until you become familiar with this task or situation.
2. *Formality*: Preparing and organizing something to be in the spotlight can promote the feeling of formality that makes you nervous or apprehensive.
3. *Subordinate status*: If someone in charge of you, such as a manager at work, is evaluating your presentation, his or her higher status and evaluation can cause anxiety.
4. *Peer evaluation*: How are my coworkers going to respond to me? These questions hit some concerns you may have about your peers evaluating you. These concerns can in turn cause apprehension.
5. *Dissimilarity*: Sometimes you may feel different from the audience. Having nothing in common with the audience causes anxiety.
6. *Conspicuousness*: Feeling as though you are in the spotlight and all eyes are on you can certainly cause anxiety.
7. *Lack of attention*: When you feel as though a listener or the audience is bored and uninterested in your message or presentation, you may begin to feel apprehension.
8. *Prior history*: Many people have had a bad experience during a communication interaction, such as an interview, presentation, or meeting. This negative experience can create anxiety the next time you find yourself in a similar situation.

As you can see, there are many different types and causes of communication apprehension. Identifying the types and causes of your communication apprehension is important but not nearly as important as learning the skills that will reduce those fears.

Communication Ethics

With professional excellence as our goal, we believe that ethical behavior must serve as a foundation for people to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Central to professional excellence is communication ethics. **Ethics** is the general term for the discussion, determination, and deliberation processes that attempt to decide what is right or wrong, what others should or should not do, and what is considered appropriate in our individual, communal, and professional lives (By, Burnes, & Oswick, 2012; Japp, Meister, & Japp, 2005; Johannesen, Valde, & Whedbee, 2008). What considerations or factors help shape our ethical decisions as professionals? **Ethical considerations** are the variety of factors



Know Yourself Personal Report of Communication Apprehension

The following personal report will help you gain a better understanding of your own communication apprehension. Answer each question thoughtfully and then reflect on the results. How can this knowledge help you be a better communicator?

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)

The PRCA-24 is the instrument most widely used to measure communication apprehension. The measure permits one to obtain subscores on the contexts of public speaking, dyadic interaction, small groups, and large groups.

This instrument is composed of 24 statements concerning feelings about communicating with others. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you *strongly disagree* = 1; *disagree* = 2; are *neutral* = 3; *agree* = 4; or *strongly agree* = 5.

- _____ 1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
- _____ 2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
- _____ 5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
- _____ 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____ 8. Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____ 9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called on to express an opinion at a meeting.
- _____ 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
- _____ 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
- _____ 12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
- _____ 13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
- _____ 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
- _____ 15. Ordinarily, I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
- _____ 16. Ordinarily, I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
- _____ 17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
- _____ 18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
- _____ 19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- _____ 20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
- _____ 21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- _____ 22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- _____ 23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
- _____ 24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

SCORING:

Group discussion: 18 – (scores for Items 2, 4, and 6) + (scores for Items 1, 3, and 5)

Meetings: 18 – (scores for Items 8, 9, and 12) + (scores for Items 7, 10, and 11)

Interpersonal: 18 – (scores for Items 14, 16, and 17) + (scores for Items 13, 15, and 18)

Public speaking: 18 – (scores for Items 19, 21, and 23) + (scores for Items 20, 22, and 24)

Group discussion score: _____

Interpersonal score: _____

Meetings score: _____

Public speaking score: _____

To obtain your total score for the PRCA, simply add your subscores together. _____

Scores can range from 24 to 120. Scores below 51 represent people who have very low communication apprehension. Scores between 51 and 80 represent people with average communication apprehension. Scores above 80 represent people who have high levels of trait communication apprehension.