

NOTES FOR COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH

Definitions of Communication:

The word 'communicate' is derived from the Latin word 'communicare' and the French word 'communis', and both the words mean 'to give to another'.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'communication' as "The activity process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information".

Communication is a dynamic exchange between a sender and a receiver. It is a complex process and not as simple as it appears to be. Mere transmission of message is not sufficient. Along with this, receiver's understanding, feeling and response are to be taken into consideration.

The Process of Communication:

1. Sender and Idea: The process of communication begins with an idea that is generated in the mind of the sender and the selection of a message to be communicated. The scope of the idea depends on the knowledge and abilities of the sender as well as the purpose and the context of communication.

2. Encoding: Encoding is the next step in communication. Here, the sender converts the idea into a message which can be non-verbal, verbal or written. This is called encoding. It involves language selection in addition to the selection of the medium of communication. An appropriate choice of language is necessary for effective encoding.

3. Transmission: The next step is transmission of the message. Transmission is the flow of message through a chosen channel—verbal, nonverbal, written, visual and audio-visual. A channel of communication uses a medium such as telephone, e-mail, SMS, video conferencing, Internet, letter and face-to-face conversation. The choice of the channel and the medium depends upon the time and place of communication.

4. Decoding: Decoding is the next step in the process of communication. It is the stage when the transmitted message is converted into thoughts so that the receiver may understand its meaning. It is to be noted that the receiver interprets the message by analysing it according to his/her understanding.

5. Receiver's Response or Feedback: Response or feedback is the last stage in the process of communication. It incorporates the reaction of the receiver to the message and assists the receiver in knowing whether the message has been correctly interpreted, misunderstood or rejected. If encoding and decoding match each other, that is, the sender and the receiver of the message are on a common wavelength, transmission of the message is effective and efficient.

Communication Channels

A communication channel is the medium, mean, manner or method through which a message is sent to its intended receiver. The basic channels are written (hard copy print or digital formats), oral or spoken, and electronic and multimedia.

Oral Communication

Oral channels depend on the spoken word. They are the richest mediums and include face-to-face, in-person presentations, mobile phone conferences, group presentations, telephone, video meetings, conferences, speeches, and lectures. These channels deliver low-distortion messages because body language and voice intonation also provide meaning for the receiver. They allow for immediate feedback of the communication to the sender.

Written Communication

Written communications include emails, texts, memos, letters, documents, reports, newsletters, spreadsheets, etc. (Even though e-mails are electronic, they are basically digital versions of written memos.) They are among the leaner business communications. With written communications, the writer must provide enough context so the words can be interpreted easily. The receiver should inquire about ambiguity and ask for clarification if needed.

Written messages are effective when transmitting large messages. Humans are limited in the amount of data they can absorb at one time. Written information can also be studied over time if necessary. Reports can include supporting data and detailed explanations when it is important to persuade the receiver about a course of action. Written communications can be carefully crafted to say exactly what the sender means. Formal business communications, such as job offer letters, contracts and budgets, proposals and quotes, should always be written.

Electronic (Multimedia) Communication

Television broadcasts, web-based communications such as social media, interactive blogs, public and intranet company web pages, Facebook, and Twitter belong in this growing category of communication channels. Electronic communications allow messages to be sent instantaneously and globally. People can talk face-to-face across enormous distances. Marketing and advertising can be targeted at many different types of customers, and business units can easily communicate in real time.

Tailoring a Message to an Audience

Have you ever had a serious conversation with a young child? You probably knelt down so that you were at eye level. You may have even put your hand gently on her arm to focus her attention on you. Speaking clearly and slowly in words that you knew she understood, you made exaggerated facial gestures of fear or surprise or happiness to emphasise your points. In brief, you tailored your message to your audience so that it would be effective.

Although the channel of communication you select to transmit your message is important, so is knowing the intended audience. Effective communicators seem to instinctively adjust their styles to their audience, but it is a skill that can also be learned. The way the information is conveyed should complement the audience, whether it is one person or a roomful of people. Three factors are involved in tailoring a message: the sender, the message itself, and the audience.

The Sender

The sender is an individual, group, or organisation who initiates the communication. This source is initially responsible for the success of the message. The sender's experiences,

attitudes, knowledge, skill, perceptions, and culture influence the message. "The written words, spoken words, and nonverbal language selected are paramount in ensuring the receiver interprets the message as intended by the sender" (Burnett & Dollar, 1989). All communication begins with the sender.

The Message

The process of communication begins when the sender or person with whom the communication originates has a message. The message is the information that is being passed on during the communication process. The message connects the sender to the receiver.

By definition, a message is a compilation of information—whether visual, verbal, or numerical—that can be written (and read), created as images (and seen or felt), spoken (and heard), video recorded (and seen, heard, and/or read), digitally analysed (and interpreted), and so forth.

Generally transmitted verbally or in writing, a message can also be sent via a look or a gesture. In today's world, people tend to use email to send a short message. But in yesteryears, pre-internet and when the post was faster, people relied on the art of letter writing to send a message.

The Audience

The communications landscape changes rapidly over time, but one criterion for successful communication remains the same: the importance of knowing who your audience is and understanding their needs. Imagine you want to give a presentation to people in your department at work. You likely know your colleagues' personalities and what they expect of you. You might know their education levels and you are sure they understand all of your company-specific jargon. You think delivering your message should be easy, except many of them are so comfortable with you, they decide to skip your presentation because you took for granted that they would be interested. On the other hand, if you had to present to the board of directors, you might need to do more homework on who they are and what they expect from you. In other words, it is always important to get to know your audience as much as possible to give yourself the best chance at communicating successfully.

Types of Communication

Verbal – It is a method that uses speech in the form of speaking to convey a message or information. It is the most popular and effective mode of communication, usually practised during video conferences, phone calls, presentations, one-on-one conversations, and meetings. It supports both nonverbal and written communication.

Nonverbal – It is basically a practice of gestures, facial expressions, and body language to send information. It can be implemented intentionally and unintentionally when communicating. For instance, a person can smile unintentionally when they hear an interesting piece of information or a pleasant idea.

Written – It is all about typing, printing symbols, numbers, letters, and writing to send a piece of information. Sometimes used to record information for evidence or reference

purpose. In general, the written style of communication is used in books, blogs, pamphlets, memos, and letters to share and spread information. In the workplace, e-mail is a common example of written communication.

Visual – It uses art, photographs, sketches, graphs, charts, and drawings, to pass on the information. It is used especially during presentations to give a visual effect and support written or verbal communication.

Barriers of Communication

Communication is a process through which you convey your idea to someone or a group of people. It is said to be effective if the idea is conveyed clearly and unambiguously. In such a case, the message should reach the receiver with little deformation. Communication becomes successful only if the receiver understands what the sender is trying to convey. If your message is not clearly interpreted or the receiver does not give the desired feedback, you should understand that you are facing a communication barrier.

One of the major barriers to communication is the physical barrier. Physical barriers include large working areas that are physically separated from others. Distracting body movements can also create physical barriers. Another distraction that could cause physical barriers is the negative environment which is not conducive to healthy talks. Background noise may also affect the whole process of communication. One should try to minimise the elements that cause physical barriers.

2. Psychological Barriers: Your emotions could be a barrier to communication. If you are preoccupied with some emotions, you will have trouble listening to others or understanding the message conveyed to you. It can be due to many other reasons too—hostility, anger, inhibitions, ego-hang-ups, personal prejudices, tiredness, preconceived notions, stress, lack of confidence and introvert nature.

3. Linguistic Barriers: Incapability or failure to communicate in a language that is known to both the sender and the receiver is the most crucial barrier to effective communication. Wrong or out of place words, mispronounced sounds, incorrect grammar and syntax as well as difference in accent, lack of clarity, could lead to misunderstanding between the sender and the receiver while conversing or writing.

4. Perceptual Barriers: The problem in communicating with others occurs because we all perceive things differently. This is because we are made and groomed differently due to our varied social, cultural and family backgrounds. If we weren't, we would have no need to communicate. We all see the world from different angles and if we lack the perspective to see other's point of view, we become the victim of the perceptual barrier.

5. Cultural Barriers: Intercultural communication has become more common in the present scenario than ever before. The differences in cultural values cause socio-cultural barriers. When we interact with a cross-cultural group and wish to associate with it, we need to adopt the behaviour patterns of the group. The group reverts back by showing recognition and approval. When you are not able to adjust to the new setting, cultural barriers crop in.

These are some of the major barriers which obstruct the process of communication. In addition to them, goal mismatching i.e., communication with conflicting intentions, ineffective listening and impoliteness create barriers that you may encounter during oral and written communication.

Communication in Contexts

Each type and instance of communication will have a specific context. Communication context will, for example, be different for a television broadcaster than for a door-to-door salesperson. A communications context can be thought of as the environment or human ecosystem, in which communication takes place. Determining the context of a particular instance of communication involves considering the cultural, historical, psychological, social and physical factors at play.

Types of Contexts

Historical Context

The historical context involves the expectation of the speaker and the audience in situations that happen regularly or have happened in the past. If, for example, an individual does an annual sales presentation for a particular client there will, over time, evolve certain expectations about what will happen and how things will go. That does not mean that the same thing must happen every time, but the speaker should be aware of both their own historical expectations and that of the audience.

Psychological Context

The psychological context refers to the mood and emotions of the audience, as well as the speaker to a lesser extent. How the audience is feeling will have an impact on how the speaker's messages will be received, and how they should be delivered. For example, if a speaker is making a presentation at a conference with several days of various speakers doing presentations, the psychology of the audience will be different in the morning of the first day than it will be in the evening of the last day. The mood following dinner will be different than the mood right before dinner.

Cultural Context

Cultural context is one of the most obvious factors of communication, but it is also one of the most important. Culture relates to the beliefs and values of a group. The way material is effectively presented to a group of teenage boys will be different from the way it is effectively presented to a group of elderly women. The best way to present information to a group of Wall Street stock brokers will be different than the best way to present that same information to a group of California surfers. It is always critically important that a speaker understand the cultural expectations of the audience.

Social Context

Social context is a personal matter. It involves the relationship of the speaker and the audience and the expectations involved in that relationship. The way an individual communicates with his employer will be different from the way he communicates with a drinking buddy. The way a teacher makes a request to her students will be different from the way she communicates the request to her spouse.

Physical Context

There is a time and place for everything, and that is where physical context comes in. The physical context involves the actual location, the time of day, the lighting, noise level and

related factors. A speaker at a political rally might shout, pound the podium and use inflammatory language to get an audience excited. At many political rallies, this type of behaviour is expected. Doing the same thing with a small group of friends around a fireplace late at night would produce a very different reaction.

Intrapersonal communication

Intrapersonal communication involves one person; it is often called “self-talk.” (Wood, 1997) Donna Vocate’s book on intrapersonal communication explains how, as we use language to reflect on our own experiences, we talk ourselves through situations. For example, the voice within you that tells you, “Keep on Going! I can DO IT!” when you are putting your all into completing a five-mile race; or that says, “This report I’ve written is pretty good.” Your intrapersonal communication can be positive or negative, and directly influences how you perceive and react to situations and communication with others.

Interpersonal Communication

The second major context within the field of communication is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication normally involves two people, and can range from intimate and very personal to formal and impersonal. You may carry on a conversation with a loved one, sharing a serious concern. Later, at work, you may have a brief conversation about plans for the weekend with the security guard on your way home. What’s the difference? Both scenarios involve interpersonal communication, but are different in levels of intimacy. The first example implies a trusting relationship established over time between two caring individuals. The second example level implies some previous familiarity, and is really more about acknowledging each other than any actual exchange of information, much like saying hello or goodbye.

Group Communication

Have you ever noticed how a small group of people in class sit near each other? Perhaps they are members of the same sports program, or just friends, but no doubt they often engage in group communication.

“Group communication is a dynamic process where a small number of people engage in a conversation.” (McLean, 2005) Group communication is generally defined as involving three to eight people. The larger the group, the more likely it is to break down into smaller groups.

Public Communication

In public communication, one person speaks to a group of people; the same is true of public written communication, where one person writes a message to be read by a small or large group. The speaker or writer may ask questions, and engage the audience in a discussion.

Mass Communication

Mass media is a powerful force in modern society and our daily lives, and is adapting rapidly to new technologies. Mass communication involves sending a single message to a group. It allows us to communicate our message to a large number of people, but we are limited in our ability to tailor our message to specific audiences, groups, or individuals.

Listening Skills

A good communicator has to be a good listener first. Nature has given us an auditory system in our body for the purpose of listening. Although the early humans used sounds and wordless voices to communicate, listening must have been used to listen to the sounds of the surrounding areas. Along with the growth of communication, listening has become more and more vital to make communication productive. No oral communication is complete without listening. In a communication process, the decoder has to be a good listener. As a student, you require active and efficient listening to understand your lectures, seminars and speeches. Listening is not only a necessary first step in language learning but is also a manifestation of certain virtues in your personality such as patience, tolerance, involvement, understanding and many more. Once you are in a profession, you are required to listen to instructions, telephonic conversations, meetings, presentations, etc. carefully and respond to them in a graceful way.

Listening and Hearing: Listening is a conscious process. It requires complete involvement of all your faculties—auditory, mental and visual—and the whole of your body has to support you. Hearing is more or less an unconscious process. For example, when you are sitting in a class, you are supposed to listen to the lecture. Meanwhile, you may hear sounds of fans, air conditioners, students' voices from outside, etc., but your concentration is on the lecture as you are listening to it.

Body Language

Charles Darwin, in his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, wrote, "The power of communication between the members of the same tribe by means of language has been of paramount importance in the development of man; and the course of language is much aided by the expressive movements of the face and the body". On paper, words are static but in face-to-face conversation message is conveyed at two levels simultaneously—verbal and nonverbal. Body language is a non-verbal communication and is an integral part of oral interaction. Nature has gifted human beings with the body that has a surprising versatility of expression. It keeps on communicating endlessly, round the clock, with an infinite variety of abstract signals, that too without getting tired. Although the most part of non-verbal communication is involuntary, it accounts for a larger part of the total message than the words. A research done by Albert Mehrabin, Professor Emeritus in psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), reports that words are only 7 per cent, voice tonality 38 per cent and body language 55 percent in a message. Body language gives listeners important clues about thoughts and feelings of a speaker, confirming or contradicting the words he/she speaks. We achieve complete communication when our body works with our ideas. Body language should not be considered in isolation; rather, it should be taken in a broader perspective of personal appearance and grooming, posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, paralinguistic aspects of speech and space (proxemics) and touch. A study of the following aspects of body language can help you acquire a deeper understanding of body language and motivate you to develop the right ones.

1. **Appearance and Dress:** Appearance and dress are part and parcel of the message that we transmit to the listeners. The first impression is a lasting impression and the first thing we communicate about ourselves is through our appearance. Right from your hairstyle to your footwear, appearance speaks a lot about you. Well-groomed people are generally regarded as people with skills, intelligence and professionalism, while a dishevelled appearance puts them at a disadvantage in the eyes of the observers.
2. **Posture:** Posture plays an important role in communication and it can be positive or negative according to the situation. Good posture is a natural alignment of the body. A

physiotherapist would advise one to keep ears, shoulders and hipbone in a straight line while sitting and on standing the same should be from hip down to the knee. A gait appears confident if a person walks straight and squared shouldered with stomach in. Not only this, holding the head awkwardly puts a lot of strain on the neck and shoulders, extending the tension throughout the body, while an unnatural posture makes the body a mass of stresses resulting in an undue strain on our vocal cords. Crossed arms and legs may indicate an unseen barrier or a negative attitude. Similarly, leaning away from the speaker most likely shows opposition, while leaning forward means that a person is open, honest and interested. A slumped posture presents a person in low spirits while an erect posture shows his/her high spirits, energy and confidence. Posture, as far as possible, should be natural to your body but it should be examined and corrected if it is not up to the mark. With sincere and determined efforts one can get rid of inappropriate traits and develop the right way of walking, sitting and standing.

Gestures: Gestures refer to the movements made by hands, arms, shoulders, head and torso. Sincere and meaningful gestures not only drive a point home but also add greater value to what is being said. Gestures clarify ideas and reinforce them; hence, they should be well suited to the audience as well as to the occasion. Too many gestures make a person look theatrical. For example, hand movements should be used to add emphasis to what is being said without waving arms around all over the place. Playing with earrings, wrist watch, fumbling with rings, twisting a key chain, clasping hands tightly, or cracking knuckles not only distracts the listener but also indicates nervousness or lack of confidence. For communicating monosyllables such as “yes” or “no” avoid using fingers or head as it may be annoying for some people. Sometimes involuntary gestures such as biting nails and scratching your head, can give a lot of hidden information about a person’s mental state. Dr. Alan Hirsch of St. Luke’s Medical center, Chicago, explained “*Pinocchio Syndrome*” as something when “blood rushes to the nose when people lie. This extra blood may make the nose itchy.” People who stretch the truth tend to either scratch their nose or touch it more often. Positive gestures can make us better communicators. Conscious effort and practice is required to develop the right gestures.

4. Facial Expressions: Face is the index of the mind; it conveys warmth and sincerity and is the most expressive part of our body. Expressions that cross our face send out signals which can be encouraging as well as discouraging. A smile stands for friendliness, a frown for discontent, raised eyebrows for disbelief, tightened jaw muscles for antagonism, etc. It puts the vocal cords at ease and helps the speaker sound interesting. Facial expressions are subtle as the face rarely sends a single message; rather it communicates a series of messages—anxiety, recognition, hesitation and pleasure—at the same time. Facial expressions should be encouraging. It has been seen that people often assume virtual masks which are rigid and incommunicable. For instance, if the mask is that of tight lips and a tense jaw with little expression, speakers may not get enough encouragement to talk. Some faces are very expressive while some are not. Let your expressions be natural and you should be careful enough not to display negative signs such as consistent frowning. At the same time, expressions should match the content of the verbal message.

5. Eye Contact: Eyes are considered to be the window of the soul; hence, eye contact is a direct and powerful form of non-verbal communication. Eyes are a rich source of feedback as a speaker looks at the listeners to find how they are reacting—are they bored, asleep or interested? The listeners too may search for truthfulness, intelligence, attitude and feelings of the speaker. If a speaker or a listener avoids eye contact, it may mean that he/she is guilty of something or is telling a lie. In a small group one should look at everyone at eye level, neither above their heads nor at the walls or at the other places. In a large group one can maintain eye contact by drawing a large imaginary ‘M’ or ‘W’ round the room. Maintaining eye contact

with only one part of the audience may instil a feeling of neglect amongst the rest. It is not enough that one should look at the listeners, how one looks at them also matters a lot. Consistent eye contact indicates that the person is thinking positively of the speaker. If a person looks at the speaker but makes the arms-crossed-chest signal, the eye contact could be indicative that something is bothering the person. Fiddling with something while looking at the speaker means that the attention is somewhere else. The attention invariably wanders if a person is not being convinced by what the speaker is saying. So, we should be able to analyse the situation, particularly in the professional world and should make pleasant eye contact with the listeners to show that we are confident, concerned and interested.

6. Touch: Touch is an important element of body language. It goes beyond and forges a bond that is more on an emotional and spiritual level than on the physical one. Touch is an inherent desire of almost all the creatures. Children instinctively seek physical contact whenever they are disturbed. As one grows older, one tends to suppress this desire possibly due to fear of social embarrassment. Touch can also convey negative feelings if it is used unwillingly. In India, one has to be careful of touch and the extent of it has its own cultural reservations.

7. The Voice of Silence: Silence can be a very effective means of communication, if used positively and in the right context. The age old saying 'speech is silver; silence is gold' undoubtedly refers to the superiority of silence over verbal communication. A well-timed silence has more eloquence than speech. In face-to-face communication, it can communicate a number of messages. However, with the help of a right posture and proper facial expressions, silence can be highly effective.

8. Cultural Variations in Body Language: These aspects of body language are an integral part of oral interaction and we should try to develop them for effective communication. However, some mannerisms are culture specific. Social status, age, occupation and ethnic background also influence non-verbal signs. People who are enthusiastic about communication should not take cultural differences of body signals lightly. We should know the variations that could cause failure in communication. In a country like India, there can be regional cultural variations too. For example, it has been observed that North Indians like to talk in a more informal tone than the people of the other parts of the country. A handshake, an embrace, a kiss on cheek and lips in public may be a traditional form of greeting in many western countries but in Asian countries such as India, Pakistan and China such gestures are frowned upon and are considered actions reserved for one's private life. In many cultures, 'thumbs up' is a positive sign while in Greece it is negative. In the west, most people sit when they wish to remain in place for some time, but in many Asian countries squatting is considered as primitive by some westerners. Bowing as a greeting is traditional in Japan but may be interpreted as a sign of subordination in other cultures. Therefore, one can see that it is not safe to assume that gestures used with all innocence in one country are accepted in the same manner throughout the world.

Combative or Competitive Listening

Combative listening is the listening style of those whose goal is to push their own view or opinion. Rather than actively listening to the message of the person initiating communication, combative listeners are formulating a counterattack, waiting for opportunities to hijack the conversation and interject their view. Combative or competitive listeners are consistently analysing discourse to identify flaws in their counterparts thought processes.

Passive Attentive Listening

While the passive attentive listener may be interested in what a co-worker is communicating; they are not to a point in the conversation where they are willing to commit to a response. It is the lack of response that causes those trying to initiate communication to feel they are not taken. A person trying to communicate with a passive listener may feel the listener is uninterested in the conversation. They may also be left wondering if the intended message was correctly understood.

Active Reflective Listening

In this type of listening, active reflective listening, the listener gives their complete attention to the person relaying the message. The active reflective listener keeps their focus on the conversation, asks questions to clarify communication; and listens without casting judgment. Active reflective listening is the type of listening that facilitates effective communication.

Barriers to Effective Listening

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process (Hargie, 2011). At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

Environmental Barrier

Environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, and furniture affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. Some seating arrangements facilitate listening, while others separate people. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. Environmental noises such as a whirring air conditioner, barking dogs, or a ringing fire alarm can obviously interfere with listening despite direct lines of sight and well-placed furniture.

Physiological Barrier

Physiological noise, like environmental noise, can interfere with our ability to process incoming information. This is considered a physical barrier to effective listening because it emanates from our physical body. Physiological noise is noise stemming from a physical illness, injury, or bodily stress. Ailments such as a cold, a broken leg, a headache, or a poison ivy outbreak can range from annoying to unbearably painful and impact our listening relative to their intensity. Another type of noise, psychological noise, bridges physical and cognitive barriers to effective listening. Psychological noise, or noise stemming from our psychological states including moods and level of arousal, can facilitate or impede listening. Any mood or state of arousal, positive or negative, that is too far above or below our regular baseline creates a barrier to message reception and processing. Stress about an upcoming event ranging from losing a job, to having surgery, to wondering about what to eat for lunch can overshadow incoming messages.

Cognitive and Personal Barriers

Whether you call it multitasking, daydreaming, glazing over, or drifting off, we all cognitively process other things while receiving messages. The fact that we have the capability to process more than one thing at a time offers some advantages and disadvantages. But unless we can better understand how our cognitive capacities and personal preferences affect our listening, we are likely to experience more barriers than benefits.

Bad Messages and/or speakers

Bad messages and/or speakers also present a barrier to effective listening. Sometimes our trouble listening originates in the sender. In terms of message construction, poorly structured messages or messages that are too vague, too jargon filled, or too simple can present listening difficulties. Listening also becomes difficult when a speaker tries to present too much information. Information overload is a common barrier to effective listening that good speakers can help mitigate by building redundancy into their speeches and providing concrete examples of new information to help audience members interpret and understand the key ideas.

Prejudice

Oscar Wilde said, “Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens one may be convinced.” Unfortunately, some of our default ways of processing information and perceiving others lead us to rigid ways of thinking. When we engage in prejudiced listening, we are usually trying to preserve our ways of thinking and avoid being convinced of something different. This type of prejudice is a barrier to effective listening, because when we prejudge a person based on his or her identity or ideas, we usually stop listening in an active and/or ethical way.

Aggressive listening

Aggressive listening is a bad listening practice in which people pay attention in order to attack something that a speaker says (McCornack, 2007). Aggressive listeners like to ambush speakers in order to critique their ideas, personality, or other characteristics. Such behaviour often results from built-up frustration within an interpersonal relationship. Unfortunately, the more two people know each other, the better they will be at aggressive listening.

Presentation Skills

Strong communication skills are highly valued by all employers. In any given job, you may be asked to share your ideas and vision, report on research or findings, or walk through project plans. Presenting material to an audience is a key skill, and by working on your presentation skills, you are also improving your verbal communication skills.

Have a clear message

Picture your audience. Jot down a few key details about them, such as what they might already know about your topic and any context or jargon you might want to explain.

Think of the main message you want to communicate and try to summarise this in 1 sentence. This will help you keep your content on track as you put together your presentation. Your audience will only remember a fraction of what you say, so you’ll want your message to be clear and focused.

Develop your topic in a clear and organised way. With the purpose and message in mind, create a structure or roadmap. Not all presentations need to be told chronologically. You can follow the typical story structure: set up the plot, introduce the problem or challenge, share

how your team tackled the issues, identify potential solutions, and finish with a resolution which can be a list of recommendations or next steps.

Prepare an agenda

Introduce your topic by giving the audience an overview of your presentation.

By listing the topics you will be covering, your audience can better focus on what is at hand, rather than wondering what is to come.

Be convincing

You can further develop your points by providing real-life examples, such as quotes or testimonials, data or statistics, and even images of your work process. By giving examples, your content will be easier for your audience to understand.

Do your research

If you share facts or details, make sure to cite all your sources accurately. Nothing weakens your credibility more than misstating information for your audience.

Make a conclusion

Much like a written paper, your conclusion should connect back to your introduction. Highlight your key points and consider your message or a takeaway that you want your audience to leave with.

If your presentation has moved slowly, condense this section but don't eliminate the conclusion. Your presentation may appear to lack direction if you don't offer closure for your audience. Finally, be prepared for questions. A friend or colleague may help you anticipate and practice answering possible questions.

Presenting your material

Refer to the following tips for presenting the material you have prepared.

- You can engage your audience by starting with a hook. A statistic, anecdote, controversial question or quotation that relates to the topic and message can capture your audience's attention immediately.
- Consider how your audience can engage and interact with the concepts in your presentation. Discussion questions, brainstorming, small group topics, simulations, case studies, or demonstrations are just a few ways to involve your audience.
- Visuals help tell the story, but make sure they're simple and creative. Visuals should be relevant to the content, since they help to tie the words together and create a lasting impression on viewers.
- Use text sparingly on slides, they are not your speaking notes. It's difficult to both read and listen at the same time, so don't make your audience multitask. For any text you include, font size should be large enough to be read at the back of the room. Consider high-contrast colours that will look good on the screen.

Tips for professionalism

- Dress neatly. Wear something you feel good and comfortable in.
- Remember to breathe.
- Make eye contact with people in the room.
- Pay attention to your body language.
- Watch for unconscious mannerisms, such as fiddling with a pen or swaying.
- Take a breath or pause instead of saying filler words like "um" or "like".

- Pause before and after important ideas so that your audience has a chance to think about what you have said.
- Be aware of your audience and choose language that they will understand.
- If something unexpected happens, try to go with it. Only you know the plans for how it was supposed to go.

Tips for Practicing

Everyone experiences some nervousness when presenting, but practising gives you confidence.

- Practise your presentation out loud a few times until you're comfortable with the content.
- Prepare a few notes to help you stay on track, but avoid directly reading your notes during your presentation.
- Consider recording and watching your practice session. Note 3 strengths and focus on 1 area to improve.
- Time yourself.
- Speak clearly and loud enough to be heard in the back of the room.
- Study and critique other speakers. You will learn a lot by observing your own reaction to their presentations.

If you're still nervous

Remember that everyone experiences nervousness when presenting. Audiences want presenters to succeed. Before your presentation, practice relaxing breathing, recite an empowering mantra or phrase, or strike a confidence pose that makes you feel powerful.

What Are Presentation Skills?

Presentation skills refer to all the qualities you need to create and deliver a clear and effective presentation. While what you say during a presentation matters, employers also value the ability to create supporting materials, such as slides.

Your prospective employer may want you to deliver briefings and reports to colleagues, conduct training sessions, present information to clients, or perform any number of other tasks that involve speaking before an audience.

Giving engaging and easy-to-understand talks is a major component of the strong oral communication skills that are a job requirement for many positions. Not all presentations take place in a formal meeting. Many presentation skills are relevant to one-on-one consults or sales calls.

Steps To Create a Presentation

Any presentation has three phases: preparation, delivery, and follow-up. All presentation skills fit into one of these three phases.

Preparation

Preparation involves research and building the presentation. Consider the audience you'll be presenting to and what most interests them.¹ This may mean crafting the entire text (or at least writing notes) and creating any slides and other supporting audio/visual materials.

You will also have to make sure that the appropriate venue is available, properly set up beforehand, and ensure the projector (if you'll need one) works and connects with your laptop.

You'll also want to practice your presentation as many times as you need to to feel comfortable delivering it with ease and confidence within the time allotted for the presentation.²

Skills related to preparation include conducting research related to your presentation topic, devising charts and graphs depicting your research findings, and learning about your audience to better tailor your presentation to their needs. You'll also need to create digital slides, using statistics, examples, and stories to illustrate your points and effectively to persuade the audience.

Preparing handouts or digital references is an added courtesy that will help the audience pay attention because they won't be preoccupied with note-taking.

Delivery

Your delivery is the part of the presentation that the audience sees. A good delivery depends on careful preparation and confident presentation and requires its own distinctive skill set.

Skills related to delivery include giving an attention-grabbing opening for a talk, providing a summary of what will be covered to introduce the presentation and provide context, and using body language and eye contact to convey energy and confidence.

Note

Make sure you pause to emphasize key points, modulate your vocal tone for emphasis, and articulate your speech clearly and smoothly.

Don't be afraid of injecting humor or speaking with enthusiasm and animation—these techniques can help you in projecting confidence to your audience.

Summarize key points at the conclusion of the presentation, and be sure to have a plan for how you'll field any audience questions.³

Follow-up

Presentation follow-up includes properly breaking down and storing any equipment, contacting any audience members with whom you agreed to communicate further, and soliciting, collecting, and analyzing feedback.

In some presentations, you may collect information from audience members—such as names and contact information or completed surveys—that you also must organize and store.

Skills related to follow-up include creating an evaluation form to solicit feedback from attendees, interpreting feedback from evaluations, and modifying the content and/or delivery for future presentations. Other follow-up skills include organizing a database of attendees for future presentations, interviewing key attendees to gain additional feedback, and emailing presentation slides to attendees.

Skills That Help Make an Effective Presentation

To create and deliver the most effective presentation takes a variety of skills, which you can always work to improve.

Analytical

You must be able to look honestly at your performance, assess the feedback you get, and figure out what you need to do to get better. That takes analytical thinking.

More importantly, you need to have a firm grasp of the information you are about to communicate to others. You need to analyze your audience and be prepared to think quickly

if asked questions that force you to demonstrate that you are fully aware of the material and its implications.

The kind of analytical skills you need to be an effective presenter include problem sensitivity, problem-solving, reporting and surveying, optimization, and predictive modeling. It also helps to be adept at strategic planning, integration, process management, and diagnostics. With these skills, you'll be better able to objectively analyze, evaluate, and act on your findings.

Organization

You do not want to be the person who spends half of their presentation time trying to find a cable to connect their laptop to the projector. Many things can and do go wrong just before a presentation unless you are organized.

Presentation preparation also means keeping track of notes, information, and start/stop times. You will want to proofread and fine-tune all the materials you plan to use for the presentation to catch any mistakes. Make sure you time yourself when you rehearse so you know how long it will take to deliver the presentation.

Note

A presentation that's finished in half the time allotted is as problematic as one that's too long-winded.

Some key organizational skills to work on include event planning, auditing, benchmarking, prioritization, and recordkeeping. Make sure your scheduling is on point and pay close attention to detail. Quick thinking is an important skill to have for when things inevitably go wrong.

Nonverbal Communication

When speaking to an audience, the way you present yourself can be just as important as how you present your information. You want to appear confident and engaging. You can do this through good posture, the use of hand gestures, and making eye contact with the audience.

Practice your nonverbal communication by filming yourself doing a practice presentation and observing your body language carefully. Your physical bearing and poise should convey a degree of comfort and confidence in front of an audience, while active listening, respect, and emotional intelligence will help you in facilitating group discussions.

Presentation Software

Microsoft PowerPoint is the dominant software used to create visual aids for presentations. Learn to use it well, including the special features outside of basic templates that can really bring a presentation to life. Even if someone else is preparing your slideshow for you, it will help to know how to use the software in case of last-minute changes.

Other software that is good to learn includes Microsoft Office, Apple Keynote, Google Slides, and Adobe Presenter.

Public Speaking

You need to appear comfortable and engaging when speaking before a live audience, even if you're not. This can take years of practice, and sometimes public speaking just isn't for certain people. An uncomfortable presenter is a challenge for everyone. Fortunately, public speaking skills can improve with practice. Some skills to work on include articulation, engagement, and memorization. You should be able to assess the needs of the audience and

handle difficult questions. Controlling your performance anxiety will help you communicate more effectively.

Research

Research is the first step in preparing most presentations and could range from a multi-year process to spending 20 minutes online, depending on context and subject matter. At the very least, you must be able to clearly frame research questions, identify appropriate information sources, and organise your results. Other useful skills include brainstorming, collaboration, comparative analysis, data interpretation, and deductive and inductive reasoning. Business intelligence is a skill that will help you evaluate what information you need to support the bottom line, while case analysis and causal relationships will help you parse and evaluate meaning.

Verbal Communication

Public speaking is one form of verbal communication, but you will need other forms to give a good presentation. Specifically, you must know how to answer questions. You should be able to understand questions asked by your audience (even if they're strange or poorly worded) and provide respectful, honest, and accurate answers without getting off-topic. Use active listening, focus, and empathy to understand your audience. Skills such as assertiveness, affirmation, and enunciation will help you restate and clarify your key points as it relates to their questions or concerns.

Writing

You may or may not need a written script, but you do need to pre-plan what you are going to say, in what order you will say it, and at what level of detail. If you can write a cohesive essay, you can plan a presentation.

Typical writing skills apply to your presentation just as they do to other forms of writing, including grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and proofreading. The ability to build outlines, take notes, and mark up documents will also be useful.

More Presentation Skills

In addition to the skills previously mentioned, there are other important skills that can apply to your presentation. The other skills you need will depend on what your presentation is about, your audience, and your intended results. Some of these additional skills include:

- Summarising
- Sales
- Persuasion
- Providing anecdotes to illustrate a point
- Humor
- Training
- Rehearsing
- Designing handouts
- Recognizing and countering objections
- Posing probing questions to elicit more detail about specific issues
- Awareness of ethnic, political, and religious diversity
- Receiving criticism without defensiveness
- Refraining from speaking too often or interrupting others
- Anticipating the concerns of others
- Product knowledge
- SWOT analysis format
- Supporting statements with evidence

- Multilingual
- Contracts
- Working with reviewers
- Consistency
- Developing and maintaining standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Developing a proposition statement
- Creativity
- Logic
- Creating and managing expectations
- Motivation
- Coaching

Methods of Speech Delivery

There are four basic methods of speech delivery: manuscript, memorised, impromptu, and extemporaneous.

Manuscript

A manuscript speech is when the speaker writes down every word they will speak during the speech. When they deliver the speech, they have each word planned and in front of them on the page, much like a newscaster who reads from a teleprompter. The advantage of using a manuscript is that the speaker has access to every word they've prepared in advance. There is no guesswork or memorization needed. This method comforts some speakers' nerves as they don't have to worry about that moment where they might freeze and forget what they've planned to say. They also are able to make exact quotes from their source material.

When the exact wording of an idea is crucial, speakers often read from a manuscript, for instance in communicating public statements from a company. However, the disadvantage with a manuscript is that the speakers have MANY words in front of them on the page. This prohibits one of the most important aspects of delivery, eye contact. When many words are on the page, the speakers will find themselves looking down at those words more frequently because they will need the help. If they do look up at the audience, they often cannot find their place when the eye returns to the page. Also, when nerves come into play, speakers with manuscripts often default to reading from the page and forget that they are not making eye contact or engaging their audience. Therefore, manuscript is a very difficult delivery method and not ideal. Above all, the speakers should remember to rehearse with the script so that they practise looking up often.

Memorized

A memorized speech is also fully prepared in advance and one in which the speaker does not use any notes. In the case of an occasion speech like a quick toast, a brief dedication, or a short eulogy, word-for-word memorization might make sense. Usually, though, it doesn't involve committing each and every word to memory. Memorizing a speech isn't like memorizing a poem where you need to remember every word exactly as written. Don't memorize a manuscript! Work with your outline instead. Practice with the outline until you can recall the content and order of your main points without effort. Then it's just a matter of practicing until you're able to elaborate on your key points in a natural and seamless manner. Ideally, a memorised speech will sound like an off-the-cuff statement by someone who is a really eloquent speaker and an exceptionally organised thinker!

The advantage of a memorised speech is that the speaker can fully face their audience and make lots of eye contact. The problem with a memorised speech is that speakers may get nervous and forget the parts they've memorised. Without any notes to lean on, the speaker may hesitate and leave lots of dead air in the room while trying to recall what was planned. Sometimes, the speaker can't remember or find his or her place in the speech and are forced to go get the notes or go back to the PowerPoint in some capacity to try to trigger his or her memory. This can be an embarrassing and uncomfortable moment for the speaker and the audience, and is a moment which could be easily avoided by using a different speaking method.

Impromptu

An impromptu speech is one for which there is little to no preparation. There is often not a warning even that the person may be asked to speak. For example, your speech teacher may ask you to deliver a speech on your worst pet peeve. You may or may not be given a few minutes to organise your thoughts. What should you do? DO NOT PANIC. Even under pressure, you can create a basic speech that follows the formula of an introduction, body, and conclusion. If you have a few minutes, jot down some notes that fit into each part of the speech. (In fact, the phrase "speaking off the cuff," which means speaking without preparation, probably refers to the idea that one would jot a few notes on one's shirt cuff before speaking impromptu.)^[1] An introduction should include an attention getter, introduction of the topic, speaker credibility, and forecasting of main points. The body should have two or three main points. The conclusion should have a summary, call to action, and final thought. If you can organise your thoughts into those three parts, you will sound like a polished speaker. Even if you only hit two of them, it will still help you to think about the speech in those parts. For example, if a speech is being given on a pet peeve of chewed gum being left under desks in classrooms, it might be organised like this.

- **Introduction:** Speaker chews gum loudly and then puts it under a desk (attention getter, demonstration). Speaker introduces themselves and the topic and why they're qualified to speak on it (topic introduction and credibility). "I'm Katie Smith and I've been a student at this school for three years and witnessed this gum problem the entire time."
- **Body:** Speaker states three main points of why we shouldn't leave gum on desks: it's rude, it makes custodians have to work harder, it affects the next student who gets nastiness on their seat (forecast of order). Speaker then discusses those three points
- **Conclusion:** Speaker summarises those three points (summary, part 1 of conclusion), calls on the audience to pledge to never do this again (call to action), and gives a quote from Michael Jordan about respecting property (final thought).

While an impromptu speech can be challenging, the advantage is that it can also be thrilling as the speaker thinks off the cuff and says what they're most passionate about in the moment. A speaker should not be afraid to use notes during an impromptu speech if they were given any time to organise their thoughts.

The disadvantage is that there is no time for preparation, so finding research to support claims such as quotes or facts cannot be included. The lack of preparation makes some speakers more nervous and they may struggle to engage the audience due to their nerves.

Extemporaneous

The last method of delivery we'll look at is extemporaneous. When speaking extemporaneously, speakers prepare some notes in advance that help trigger their memory of what they planned to say. These notes are often placed on notecards. A 4"x6" notecard or 5"x7" size card works well. This size of notecards can be purchased at any office supply store. Speakers should determine what needs to go on each card by reading through their speech notes and giving themselves phrases to say out loud. These notes are not full sentences, but help the speakers, who turn them into a full sentence when spoken aloud. Note that if a quote is being used, listing that quote verbatim is fine.

The advantage of extemporaneous speaking is that the speakers are able to speak in a more conversational tone by letting the cards guide them, but not dictate every word they say. This method allows for the speakers to make more eye contact with the audience. The shorter note forms also prevent speakers from getting lost in their words. Numbering these cards also helps if one gets out of order. Also, these notes are not ones the teacher sees or collects. While you may be required to turn in your speech outline, your extemporaneous notecards are not seen by anyone but you. Therefore, you can also write yourself notes to speak up, slow down, emphasize a point, go to the next slide, etc.

The disadvantage to extemporaneous is the speakers may forget what else was planned to say or find a card to be out of order. This problem can be avoided through rehearsal and double-checking the note order before speaking. Many speakers consider the extemporaneous method to be the ideal speaking method because it allows them to be prepared, keeps the audience engaged, and makes the speakers more natural in their delivery. In your public speaking class, most of your speeches will probably be delivered extemporaneously.

Presentation Techniques

Maintain eye contact while presenting and smile

In order to give each of your listeners the feeling of being important and to make them feel personally addressed, it is particularly important to maintain eye contact with the audience during the presentation. Not only does this exude confidence, but it also helps your audience to connect with you and your subject. It also helps you feel less nervous.

Easier said than done right? Here's what can help:

- Find someone in the audience who seems to be genuinely interested in the topic and is listening attentively (for example, your lecturer). Make eye contact with this person at the beginning of the presentation. Once you start feeling more calm and confident let your gaze drift over the audience to address the other listeners as well. Keep returning your gaze to the initial person to stay calm throughout the whole presentation.
- Another alternative is to find a fixed point in the room (preferably on the wall behind the audience) which you fix at the beginning of the presentation. Similar to the first example, after you have achieved confidence, you can let your gaze wander over the audience and return to the previously selected fixed point again and again.

Use of gestures and facial expressions

To emphasise the content of your presentation, it is advisable to use appropriate gestures and body language to get your message across. Avoid crossed arms, hands behind your back, or in your pockets during a presentation.

Always stand up straight, and try not to appear tense or stressed. You can do that by using your hands and arms to emphasise what you are saying and get your message across.

Your facial expressions should always be friendly and open. Smile and show that you enjoy the topic and you are confident in the information you are presenting.

Avoid distractions

Often you will not be able to avoid the use of aids. For example, you may need to use a laser pointer to show something on the screen, or you may need to use a pen to write something down on a flipchart.

To avoid distractions for you and the audience, get into the habit of putting down tools you don't need! That way you will not be tempted to deal with them in the first place. You will also have your hands free for gestures.

Be prepared: Practice makes perfect

Practice makes perfect, right? If you prepare well before the presentation, you will feel more relaxed and confident while presenting and it will also improve your body language.

Here are some ways to help you prepare for a presentation:

- Rehearse in front of a crowd
- Take notes
- Experiment
- Time yourself
- Record yourself

Be confident

By appearing self-confident, you convey to the listener that you are confident in your topic and have prepared yourself sufficiently. Try to relax and not appear too stressed or nervous.

Another tip for advanced speakers: Step out in front of the podium and walk around the room and get closer to the audience. This also exudes self-confidence and helps in attracting your audience's attention.

Effective beginning/end

Good presentation skills can help you in captivating your audience straight away. In order to do that, you should start your presentation with a bang. Many studies show that if you can capture someone's interest straight away, there's a good chance they'll listen to the rest of the presentation. Shock the audience, ask them to imagine something or think of a what-if situation, share a personal story, share a joke, use a quote, or a video. You should also give an overview of the time and structure of your presentation. This outline should run through your presentation so that you can always assign the individual contents to an outline point. It is also helpful for your audience to have the outline displayed in a slimmed-down form during the whole presentation.

How you end the presentation is as important as how you start it. A weak ending will leave the audience uninspired. But a good ending will motivate them and help them walk away on a positive note. For example, include a call to action, end the presentation with a memorable quote, or a personal story, and don't forget to thank and acknowledge the audience.

Avoid filler words

In order to make your presentation flow as smoothly and confidently as possible, you should avoid using filler words such as "um," "so," and so on. For your listeners, these words convey insecurity and inadequate preparation.

Use different types of media

A presentation can quickly become boring and monotonous. To avoid this, it is advisable to use different types of media. For example, combine videos and flipcharts, use the whiteboard, or show something practical on a model. This will increase the attention of your audience enormously and will help in keeping them engaged until the end.

Use effective pauses

When giving a presentation, you should keep in mind that you have already heard the content several times - your audience probably hasn't! Therefore, give your audience enough time to read and understand the content of your slides.

Effective use of speech pauses is a master technique. It is one of the most versatile tools in a presenter's toolbox. Yet very few people perform it well. A pause, if used correctly, can add a great deal to your presentation or speech. Pause before, during, or after saying something that you would like to emphasise. Pausing between two different parts of your presentation can indicate to the audience that something new is coming. A quick pause could also help you in remembering your next point, without the audience noticing that you forgot what to say.

Speak the language of the audience

When creating your presentation, you should already think about your target audience. This will help you present successfully later on. It is especially important that you speak the language of the audience. Use appropriate and relevant examples. Use "strong" and meaningful words in short sentences to avoid losing the audience.

Make sure to use appropriate analogies and anecdotes and avoid foreign words, empty phrases, and clichés. If you have to use foreign words, explain them in a handout or footnote within the presentation.

Engage with the audience

Always try to keep the attention of your audience and keep them engaged during a presentation. To do this, it is advisable to regularly involve the audience. One way to do this is to ask questions. Deliberately ask "easy" questions so that can easily be answered by your audience.

Another way to involve the audience in your presentation is by interacting with them. To make a point clearer, you can use an example to explain it in more detail, using a person (whose name you should know). You can address participants directly and refer to their work.