**UNIT III**

**Team building**

Team Essentials

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**Team building**

# Intro to Team Building

To be effective people need to work together toward a common goal in a coordinated and cooperative way. Therefore, you could say that team building is a systematic process designed to improve working relationships and team functioning such as problem solving, decision making and conflict resolution that enables the group to overcome any goal blocking barrier.

For many this result orientated mission is the real purpose for team building. A team building goal therefore could be simply to identify and develop effective communication.

Another way of looking at it is that team building is like coaching but for a collective group.

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” JD Rockefeller

### ****Why is team building important?****

Team Building formalizes the power of collaboration among what otherwise might be excluded or often alienated individuals. For many team building is a way to blend talent, skills and the creativity of a group. With collaboration at its heart, team building improves cooperation, time and resource management for their benefit of an organization or team.

The consequence is that effective team building produces better, faster results and provides a satisfying and motivating experience for team members.

Reasons why team building is so important are:

1. Most organizations are so complex and with de-layering there has to be team building for them to succeed.
2. Everyone needs to be working towards common goals (that team building will generate and nurture) which need to be attainable and clearly communicated.
3. Team building environments will outperform none team based environments.

Let us consider further why is team building is so important – team building will make favorable impact in six key areas:

1. Task Achievement – teams are not designed for dealing with simple, repetitive tasks, as individuals will generally be quicker. However, team building comes into its own when faced with complex tasks, and associated problems, where probably there is no single, correct answer.
2. Quality of Decisions – team building can generate more ideas than any one individual therefore, it has the choice of many possibilities before it and the ultimate quality of the decision is likely to be better than an individual’s decision.
3. Accuracy of Decisions – judgments are far better through team building than through individual assessment of tasks that involve random error because team deliberation tends to purge ill-conceived notions and weak individual thinking.
4. Risk taking – it has been shown that team building creates confidence to take greater, but measured, risks (and seize opportunities) than individuals would.
5. Motivation – team building enhances morale and spurs individuals on to perform effectively at a higher level.
6. Speed of learning – team building creates a progressive, but nurturing, environment enabling team members to learn faster than individuals working alone.

Put more straightforwardly team building is important because it helps the group to capitalise on their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. The synergy that comes from team building can be very powerful.

### **Team building goals**

For many organizations team building has become an integral part of their organisational strategy. Their specific team building goals are to provide team members with:

1. Clarification of mission and vision
2. Establishment of team members roles and responsibilities
3. Faster start up for new teams or teams with new leaders
4. Mechanisms for resolving conflict and elimination of dysfunctional behaviour
5. An appreciation of differences in work styles and preferences

### **Team building roles**

For team building to work the roles and duties contained within team working structures have to be determined.

### ****What is the team building process?****

Everyone at work whether they are an operator, or the Managing Director have worked with others in a team. Therefore, all can express views on what constitutes an effective team building process. However, making team building succeed is often not as simple as it sounds. Problems with team building tend to be caused by team members who do not know very much about the team building process.

The task of team building is first to establish what the team was established to achieve. The team building process therefore must consists of all the things which go to make up how the team goes about achieving the task, and what influences it whilst doing so.

Aspects of team building are:

* The team building structure – if there are a large number of team members it is often difficult to get a reasonably fair discussion going. If there are too few there may be a series of silences. If some of the team members are of a higher status in the organisation than others, then this could be inhibiting discussion and therefore arrest the team building process. If there is insufficient expert knowledge in the team then opinions rather than facts will be offered which can often lead to arguments and therefore destroy the team building process..
* The nature of the individuals – Differences in personality and mood often show up during team building – some people can’t seem to stop talking whilst others keep quiet, and others try to act as umpires or referees. All team building discussions need to be controlled by the individuals and by a chairperson.
* The environment of the team meeting – The size of the meeting areas, its shape, heating, ventilation, lighting, seating, acoustics and decorations can all affect the efficiency of team meetings and therefore the team building process.
* The way decisions are made – For team building behaviour to take place, in a team meeting trying to reach a decision, then the communication process must cultivate listening and foster fairness if commitment and consensus and with it team building is to be realized.

A key to team building is that of creating a shared vision but that takes time and requires the full participation of all. If team members do not have a personal vision or lack confidence to it then team building will become difficult if not untenable.

### **Team member selection for effective team building**

To make team building effective team member selection is clearly very important. All to often team building is dismissed as the assembly of a group of individuals, calling them a team and telling them to get on with it. (This may explain why so many have difficulty getting the team building process to deliver the potential organizational benefits).

The essence of effective team building is that the members of the team work well together either as a group from the outset or initially simply compliment each other as individuals in which case the team building process will progress smoothly. The potential compatibility of any particular individual with the rest of the team is therefore critically important for team building to succeed. (Meredith Belbin has done much work in support of team building in the area of team roles analysis).

Individuals need to understand and learn the skills that make effective team building possible. Most know how to work independently or to give up uniqueness to aid team building, but to maintain some individuality during the team building process and subsequently during team working is to many too great an evolutionary step to take. Team members need to understand that team building succeeds with diversity and creativity. Try some [team building activities](https://www.ventureteambuilding.co.uk/team-building-activities/) and identify areas for improvement and team development.

**TEAM ESSENTIALS**

**“Teamwork is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” Andrew Carnegie**

We believe every business must function as a collaborative team because it improves goal setting, inspires better decision making, promotes outstanding innovation and calls forth the highest level of performance from each team member.

The best team leaders have a deep understanding of how productive their teams are based on the results they are producing.  Leaders must be constantly asking themselves what is functional and dysfunctional with regard to our systems and processes.

The ultimate goal of team building is to achieve the desired results collectively agreed upon. Essentials of a successful team are described below.

**Create a Culture of Trust**

We believe trust is better earned than expected. It is not a matter of technique; it is one of character.  People are trusted more because of what they do than what they say.  Let your team members know they have been heard and act on their requests.  When you make a promise, be sure to fulfill it.  Ask for feedback frequently.

It is the responsibility of the team leaders to cultivate the confidence of their team members.  It is impossible to motivate teammates and attain their respect without trust.  It is a two-way street.

High levels of assurance shared between team leaders and members generate longer member retention, exceptional morale, strong loyalty, increased productivity and heightened profitability.

**Be Accountable**

Full accountability for each team member is based on establishing effective guidelines, procedures, and practices.  There must be a straightforward delivery of reasonable and positive explanations for each of the team’s actions.

**Increase Clarity**

Clarity starts with the team leader and spreads throughout the entire organization.  Does everyone have a solid grasp of the team’s goals?  Ask your team members what their goals with regard are to complete a specific project. How are people performing relative to the achievement of those goals?  Ask questions consistently throughout this process.

**Establish Alignment**

Once everyone is clear on the goals, determine whether each goal is aligned or opposed to each other throughout the business as a whole.  Objectives can be misaligned depending on the desired outcome of each goal.  For example, if sales goals surpass the production department’s ability to fulfill orders timely, customers will get frustrated and may go to a different supplier.

**Reward Ability**

Does the team have the talent it needs to complete its goals on time and on budget?

Team leaders should be surrounding themselves with people who are strong in abilities they are not as proficient in.  Exceptional leaders encourage their team members to work alongside them in achieving high productivity, increased profitability and unsurpassed growth for the organization.

**Resolve Conflicts**

All sustainable relationships are built on resolving conflicts in order to deepen the relationship.  The process of conflict resolution is the best way to find the most powerful solutions in the shortest period of time. It is imperative to encourage all team members to contribute their best ideas and to put them on the table for open discussion.

**Increase Commitment**

Commitment requires the ability to move forward with the agreement of the team.  Successful teams know they must commit even when the outcome of their efforts may be uncertain.

**NEGOTIATION SKILLS**

Negotiation is a method by which people settle differences. It is a process by which compromise, or agreement is reached while avoiding argument and dispute.

In any disagreement, individuals understandably aim to achieve the best possible outcome for their position (or perhaps an organization they represent). However, the principles of fairness, seeking mutual benefit and maintaining a relationship are the keys to a successful outcome.

Specific forms of negotiation are used in many situations: international affairs, the legal system, government, industrial disputes or domestic relationships as examples. However, general negotiation skills can be learned and applied in a wide range of activities. Negotiation skills can be of great benefit in resolving any differences that arise between you and others.

## Stages of Negotiation

**To achieve a desirable outcome, it may be useful to follow a structured approach to negotiation. For example, in a work situation a meeting may need to be arranged in which all parties involved can come together.**

**The process of negotiation includes the following stages:**

1. **Preparation**
2. **Discussion**
3. **Clarification of goals**
4. **Negotiate towards a Win-Win outcome**
5. **Agreement**
6. **Implementation of a course of action**

### 1. Preparation

**Before any negotiation takes place, a decision needs to be taken as to when and where a meeting will take place to discuss the problem and who will attend.  Setting a limited timescale can also be helpful to prevent the disagreement continuing.**

This stage involves ensuring all the pertinent facts of the situation are known in order to clarify your own position.  In the work example above, this would include knowing the ‘rules’ of your organization, to whom help is given, when help is not felt appropriate and the grounds for such refusals.  Your organization may well have policies to which you can refer in preparation for the negotiation.

Undertaking preparation before discussing the disagreement will help to avoid further conflict and unnecessarily wasting time during the meeting.

### 2. Discussion

**During this stage, individuals or members of each side put forward the case as they see it, i.e. their understanding of the situation.**

Key skills during this stage include questioning, listening and clarifying.

Sometimes it is helpful to take notes during the discussion stage to record all points put forward in case there is need for further clarification.  It is extremely important to listen, as when disagreement takes place it is easy to make the mistake of saying too much and listening too little.  Each side should have an equal opportunity to present their case.

**3.** Clarifying Goals

**From the discussion, the goals, interests and viewpoints of both sides of the disagreement need to be clarified.**

It is helpful to list these factors in order of priority.  Through this clarification it is often possible to identify or establish some common ground. Clarification is an essential part of the negotiation process, without it misunderstandings are likely to occur which may cause problems and barriers to reaching a beneficial outcome.

### 4. Negotiate Towards a Win-Win Outcome

**This stage focuses on what is termed a 'win-win' outcome where both sides feel they have gained something positive through the process of negotiation and both sides feel their point of view has been taken into consideration.**

A win-win outcome is usually the best result. Although this may not always be possible, through negotiation, it should be the goal.

Suggestions of alternative strategies and compromises need to be considered at this point.  Compromises are often positive alternatives which can often achieve greater benefit for all concerned compared to holding to the original positions.

**5.** Agreement

**Agreement can be achieved once understanding of both sides’ viewpoints and interests have been considered.**

It is essential to for everybody involved to keep an open mind in order to achieve an acceptable solution.  Any agreement needs to be made perfectly clear so that both sides know what has been decided.

### 6. Implementing a Course of Action

**From the agreement, a course of action must be implemented to carry through the decision.**

See our pages: [**Strategic Thinking**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/lead/strategic-thinking.html) and [**Action Planning**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/lead/action-planning.html) for more information.

## Failure to Agree

If the process of negotiation breaks down and agreement cannot be reached, then re-scheduling a further meeting is called for.  This avoids all parties becoming embroiled in heated discussion or argument, which not only wastes time but can also damage future relationships.

At the subsequent meeting, the stages of negotiation should be repeated.  Any new ideas or interests should be considered and the situation looked at afresh.  At this stage it may also be helpful to look at other alternative solutions and/or bring in another person to mediate.

In any negotiation, the following three elements are important and likely to affect the ultimate outcome of the negotiation:

1. **Attitudes**
2. **Knowledge**
3. **Interpersonal Skills**

### Attitudes

All negotiation is strongly influenced by underlying attitudes to the process itself, for example attitudes to the issues and personalities involved in the particular case or attitudes linked to personal needs for recognition.

### Knowledge

**The more knowledge you possess of the issues in question, the greater your participation in the process of negotiation.  In other words, good preparation is essential.**

**Interpersonal Skills**

Interpersonal skills are sometimes referred to as social skills, people skills, soft skills, or life skills.  
  
 Communication Skills - which in turn covers:

* [Verbal Communication](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/verbal-communication.html) – what we say and how we say it:
* [Non-Verbal Communication](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/nonverbal-communication.html) – what we communicate without words, for example through body language, or tone of voice; and
* [Listening Skills](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html) – how we interpret both the verbal and non-verbal messages sent by others.

 Emotional Intelligence – being able to understand and manage your own and others’ emotions.

 Team-working – being able to work with others in groups and teams, both formal and informal.

 Negotiation, Persuasion, and Influencing Skills– working with others to find a mutually agreeable (Win/Win) outcome. This may be considered a subset of communication, but it is often treated separately.

 Conflict resolution and Mediation – working with others to resolve interpersonal conflict and disagreements in a positive way, which again may be considered a subset of communication.

 Problem solving skills and Decision-making - working with others to identify, define and solve problems, which includes making decisions about the best course of ac

**LEADERSHIP SKILLS**



**Many people consider leadership to be an essentially work-based characteristic. However, leadership roles are all around us and not just in work environments.**

Ideally, leaders become leaders because they have credibility, and because people want to follow them. Using this definition, it becomes clear that leadership skills can be applied to any situation where you are required to take the lead, professionally, socially, and at home in family settings. Examples of situations where leadership might be called for, but which you might not immediately associate with that.

**Skills Good Leaders Need**

**There are a number of broad skill areas that are particularly important for leaders.**

**These include strategic thinking, planning and delivery, people management, change management, communication, and persuasion and influencing.**

### 1. Strategic Thinking Skills

**Perhaps the most important skill a leader needs—and what really distinguishes leaders from managers—is to be able to think strategically.**

This means, in simple terms, **having an idea or vision of where you want to be and working to achieve that.**

The best strategic thinkers see the big picture and are not distracted by side issues or minor details. All their decisions are likely to be broadly based on their answer to the question ‘does this take me closer to where I want to be?’

Of course, as well as being able to create a compelling vision, they must also be able to communicate it effectively to their followers, which is partly why communication skills are also vital to leaders.

### 2. Planning and Delivery Skills

**While it is important to be personally organized and motivated as a leader—and see our pages on Time Management and Self-Motivation for more about these areas—it is perhaps even more important to be able to plan and deliver for the organization.**

These areas are key management skills, but the best leaders will also be able to turn their hand to these. The best vision in the world is no good without the plan to turn it into reality.

Alongside strategic thinking, therefore, go organizing and action planning, both essential for delivery of your vision and strategy. Project management and project planning are also helpful skills for both managers and leaders. Good risk management is also important to help you avoid things going wrong and manage when they do.

### 3. People Management Skills

**Without followers, there are no leaders. Leaders therefore need skills in working with others on a one-to-one and group basis, and a range of tools in their armory to deal with a wide range of situations. Many of these skills are also vital for managers.**

In particular, leaders are expected to motivate and encourage their followers.

One of the first skills that new leaders need to master is how to delegate. This is a difficult skill for many people but, done well, delegation can give team members responsibility and a taste of leadership themselves, and help them to remain motivated. There are further challenges to delegating work within a team, including balancing workloads, and ensuring that everyone is given opportunities to help them develop. Leaders and managers both need to understand how to build and manage a team. They need to know how to recruit effectively and bring people ‘on board’ through induction processes. They also need to understand the importance of performance management, both on a regular basis, and to manage poor performance.

### 4. Change Management and Innovation Skills

**Change management may seem like an odd companion to people management and communication, but leadership is often particularly important at times of change.**

A leader needs to understand change management in order to lead an organization through the process. For example, change management requires the creation and communication of a compelling vision. It also requires the change to be driven forward firmly, and leadership to make it ‘stick’ if the organization is not to revert within a very short period.

### 5. Communication Skills

**While communication skills are important for everyone, leaders and managers perhaps need them even more. These skills are general interpersonal skills, not specific to leadership, but successful leaders tend to show high levels of skill when communicating.**

Good leaders tend to be extremely good listeners, able to listen actively and elicit information by good questioning. They are also likely to show high levels of assertiveness, which enables them to make their point without aggression, but firmly. They know how to build rapport quickly and effectively, to develop good, strong relationships with others, whether peers or subordinates. These skills come together to help to build charisma, that quality of ‘brightness’ which makes people want to follow a leader.

Leaders also need to know how to give others their views on personal performance in a way that will be constructive rather than destructive, and also hear others’ opinions of them. They are usually very good at effective speaking, equally skilled at getting their point across in a formal presentation or Board meeting, or in an informal meeting or casual corridor conversation. They have also honed their ability to communicate in difficult situations, usually by practice over time.

### 6. Persuasion and Influencing Skills

**Finally, one particular area of communicating that is especially important for leaders is being able to persuade and influence others.**

Good leaders use a range of tools for this. Leaders also need tools to help them understand the way that others behave and create positive interactions. As a first step, it may be helpful to understand more about emotional intelligence - another vital quality for leaders to possess—but there are a number of other tools that may also be useful, including transactional Analysis and Myers-Briggs Type Indicators.

### But what exactly is a leader?

A leader can be defined fairly simply as ‘a person who leads or commands a group, organization or country’.

This definition is broad and could include both formal and informal roles—that is, both appointed leaders and those who emerge spontaneously in response to events.

In recent years, considerable evidence has emerged that the strongest organizations and groups tend to permit and actively encourage each member of the group or organization to take the lead at the appropriate point. Organizations and families with particularly controlling leaders, by contrast, tend to be fairly dysfunctional.

**Leadership, therefore, is in practice fairly fluid: leaders are made by circumstances. The crucial issue is that people are prepared to follow them at the right moment.**

People also struggle with the concept of how being a leader is different from being a manager. You may have heard the idea that ‘leaders do the right thing, and managers do things right’. This is a fairly delicate distinction, and many leaders are also managers (and vice versa). Perhaps the key difference is that leaders are expected to create and communicate a compelling vision, often associated with change. Managers, on the other hand, are perhaps more often associated with maintaining the status quo.

**DECISION MAKING Needed for a Leader**

People often say that they find it hard to make decisions.

We all have to make decisions all the time, ranging from trivial issues like what to have for lunch, right up to life-changing decisions like where and what to study, and who to marry.

Some people put off making decisions by endlessly searching for more information or getting other people to offer their recommendations.

Others resort to decision-making by taking a vote, sticking a pin in a list or tossing a coin.

## What is Decision Making?

**In its simplest sense, decision-making is the act of choosing between two or more courses of action.**

In the wider process of [**problem-solving**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/problem-solving.html), decision-making involves choosing between possible solutions to a problem. Decisions can be made through either an **intuitive** or **reasoned** process, or a **combination of the two**.

### Intuition

**Intuition is using your ‘gut feeling’ about possible courses of action.**

Although people talk about it as if it was a magical ‘sense’, intuition is actually a combination of past experience and your personal values. It is worth taking your intuition into account, because it reflects your learning about life. It is, however, not always based on reality, only your perceptions, many of which may have started in childhood and may not be very mature as a result.

It is therefore worth examining your gut feeling closely, especially if you have a very strong feeling against a particular course of action, to see if you can work out why, and whether the feeling is justified.

### Reasoning

**Reasoning is using the facts and figures in front of you to make decisions.**

Reasoning has its roots in the here-and-now, and in facts. It can, however, ignore emotional aspects to the decision, and in particular, issues from the past that may affect the way that the decision is implemented.

**Intuition is a perfectly acceptable means of making a decision, although it is generally more appropriate when the decision is of a simple nature or needs to be made quickly**.

More complicated decisions tend to require a more formal, structured approach, usually involving both intuition and reasoning. It is important to be wary of impulsive reactions to a situation.

## Effective Decision-Making

Decisions need to be capable of being implemented, whether on a personal or organisational level. You do, therefore, need to be committed to the decision personally, and be able to persuade others of its merits.

**An effective decision-making process, therefore, needs to ensure that you are able to do so.**

### What Can Prevent Effective Decision-Making?

**There are a number of problems that can prevent effective decision-making. These include:**

#### 1. Not Enough Information

If you do not have enough information, it can feel like you are making a decision without any basis.

Take some time to gather the necessary data to inform your decision, even if the timescale is very tight. If necessary, prioritize your information-gathering by identifying which information will be most important to you.

#### 2. Too Much Information

The opposite problem, but one that is seen surprisingly often: having so much conflicting information that it is impossible to see ‘the wood for the trees’.

This is sometimes called analysis paralysis, and is also used as a tactic to delay organisational decision-making, with those involved demanding ever more information before they can decide.

This problem can often be resolved by getting everyone together to decide what information is really important and why, and by setting a clear timescale for decision-making, including an information-gathering stage.

#### 3. Too Many People

Making decisions by committee is difficult. Everyone has their own views, and their own values. And while it’s important to know what these views are, and why and how they are important, it may be essential for one person to take responsibility for making a decision. Sometimes, any decision is better than none.

#### 4. Vested Interests

Decision-making processes often founder under the weight of vested interests. These vested interests are often not overtly expressed, but may be a crucial blockage. Because they are not overtly expressed, it is hard to identify them clearly, and therefore address them, but it can sometimes be possible to do so by exploring them with someone outside the process, but in a similar position.

It can also help to explore the rational/intuitive aspects with all stakeholders, usually with an external facilitator to support the process.

#### 5. Emotional Attachments

People are often very attached to the status quo. Decisions tend to involve the prospect of change, which many people find difficult.

For more about overcoming this, see our pages on **[Change Management](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/lead/change-management.html)**, but also remember that ‘deciding not to decide’ is also a decision.

#### 6. No Emotional Attachment

Sometimes it’s difficult to make a decision because you just don’t care one way or the other. In this case, a structured decision-making process can often help by identifying some very real pros and cons of particular actions, that perhaps you hadn’t thought about before.

Many of these issues can be overcome by using a structured decision-making process. This will help to:

* Reduce more complicated decisions down to simpler steps;
* See how any decisions are arrived at; and
* Plan decision making to meet deadlines.

**GROUP DISCUSSION – FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS**

Discussions of any sort are supposed to help us develop a better perspective on issues by bringing out diverse viewpoints. Whenever we exchange differing views on an issue, we get a clearer picture of the problem and are able to understand it. The understanding makes us better equipped to deal with the problem. This is precisely the main purpose of a discussion. The dictionary meaning of the word Group Discussion is to talk about a subject in detail. So, group discussion may refer to a communicative situation that allows its participants to express views and opinions and share with other participants. It is a systematic oral exchange of information, views and opinions about a topic, issue, problem or situation among members of a group who share certain common objectives.

G D is essentially an interactive oral process. The group members need to listen to each other and use voice and gesture effectively, use clear language and persuasive style.

GD is structured: the exchange of ideas in a GD takes place in a systematic and structured way. Each of the participants gets an opportunity to express his/her views and comments on the views expressed by other members of the group.

GD involves a lot of group dynamics, that is, it involves both -person to person as well as group to group interactions. every group member has to develop a goal oriented or group oriented interaction. A participant needs to be aware of needs of other group members and overall objectives of the discussion.

Definition: Group discussion may be defined as – a form of systematic and purposeful oral process characterized by the formal and structured exchange of views on a particular topic, issue, problem or situation for developing information and understanding essential for decision making or problem solving.

**Group Discussion and Other forms of Oral Communication**

There are several types of oral group communication. In Public Speaking, the speaker is evaluated by the audience; however, there is not much interaction between audience and speaker. Audience, for the most part would only listen to the speaker. In the interview, a panel of members would assess the candidate for the requirement of selection or promotion etc. In meetings, there are discussions on issues mentioned in the agenda. Meetings may have multiple agenda. A chairperson conducts the meeting and controls and concludes the deliberations. Group Discussion differs from debate in nature, approach and procedure. Debates include representation of two contrasting viewpoints while GD can include multiple views. A GD may help achieve group goals as well as individual needs. The examiner observes the personality traits of several candidates who participate in the G.D.

**Importance of Group Discussion skills**

A Group Discussion helps problem solving, decision making and personality assessment. Whether one is a student, a job seeker, a professional engineer or a company executive one needs effective GD skills. Students need to participate in academic discussions, meetings, classroom sessions or selection GDs for admission to professional courses. A jobseeker may be required to face selection GDs as part of the selection process. Professionals have to participate in different meetings at the workplace. In all these situations, an ability to make a significant contribution to group deliberation and helping the group in the process of decision making is required. The importance of GD has increased in recent times due to its increasing role as an effective tool in a) problem solving b) decision making c) personality assessment. In any situation of problem, the perceptions of different people are discussed, possible solutions are suggested. The best option is chosen by the group. While taking a decision, the matter is discussed, analyzed, interpreted and evaluated.

While using GD as a tool for personality assessment, a topic-a problem, an opinion or a case - is given to the group consisting of eight to ten members seated in a circle. The total time given for discussion is usually 30 minutes. Each candidate is expected to voice his opinion and offer counter arguments. The selection committee evaluates the candidates on the basis of their personality, knowledge, communication skills and leadership skills. Hence it is important to be able to take part in the GD effectively and confidently. Participants should know how to persuade their group members, how to reflect leadership qualities and how to make the group achieve its goal.

**Characteristics Of Successful Group Discussion**

For any group discussion to be successful, achieving group goal is essential. Following characteristics are necessary:

Having a clear objective: The participants need to know the purpose of group discussion so that they can concentrate during the discussion and contribute to achieving the group goal. An effective GD typically begins with a purpose stated by the initiator.

Motivated Interaction: When there is a good level of motivation among the members, they learn to subordinate the personal interests to the group interest and the discussions are more fruitful.

Logical Presentation: Participants decide how they will organize the presentation of individual views, how an exchange of the views will take place, and how they will reach a group consensus. If the mode of interaction is not decided, few of the members in the group may dominate the discussion and thus will make the entire process meaningless.

Cordial Atmosphere: Development of a cooperative, friendly, and cordial atmosphere avoid the confrontation between the group members.

Effective Communication skills: The success of a GD depends on an effective use of communication techniques. Like any other oral communication, clear pronunciation, simple language, right pitch are the pre-requisites of a GD. Non-verbal communication has to be paid attention to since means like body language convey a lot in any communication.

Participation by all candidates: When all the members participate, the GD becomes effective. Members need to encourage each other in the GD.

Leadership Skills: Qualities like initiation, logical presentation, encouraging all the group members to participate, summarizing the discussion reflect the leadership qualities.

In any kind of GD, the aim is to judge the participants based on personality, knowledge, communicative ability to present the knowledge and leadership skills. Today team players are considered more important than individual contributors. Hence the potential to be a leader is evaluated and also ability to work in a team is tested. The evaluators generally assess the oral competence of a candidate in terms of team listening, appropriate language, clarity of expression, positive speech attitudes and adjustments, clear articulation, and effective non-verbal communication.

Personality:

Even before one starts communicating, impression is created by the appearance, the body language, eye-contact, mannerisms used etc. The attire of a participant creates an impression; hence it is essential to be dressed appropriately. The hairstyle also needs to suit the occasion. Other accessories also have to be suitable for the occasion. The facial expression helps to convey attitudes like optimism, self-confidence and friendliness. The body language, a non-verbal communication skill gives important cues to personality assessment. It includes the posture of a person, the eye-contact and overall manner in which one moves and acts. In the entire participation in the GD, the body language has an important role in the impact created. As non-verbal cues such as eye contact, body movements, gestures, facial expressions, and so on can speak louder than words, examiners closely watch the non-verbal behaviour of candidates. They generally evaluate the body language cues of candidates to determine personality factors such as nervousness, cooperation, frustration, weakness, insecurity, self-confidence, defensiveness, and so forth. So, it is important to be careful while using non-verbal messages. However, one should recognize the power of non-verbal messages and use them effectively.

Content:

Content is a combination of knowledge and ability to create coherent, logical arguments on the basis of that knowledge. Also, a balanced response is what is expected and not an emotional response. In a group discussion, greater the knowledge of the subject more confident and enthusiastic would be the participation. Participants need to have a fair amount of knowledge on a wide range of subjects. The discussion of the subject must be relevant, rational, convincing and appealing to the listeners. One needs to keep abreast with national and international news, political, scientific, economic, cultural events, key newsmakers etc. This has to be supplemented by one's own personal reasoning and analysis. People with depth and range of knowledge are always preferred by dynamic companies and organizations. The topics for GD tests may include interesting and relevant ideas pertaining to social, economic, political or environmental problems; controversial issues, innovations or case studies. To read daily newspapers, relevant magazines and periodicals, to watch news bulletins and informative programs on television are is a simple way to gather the general knowledge. One can use the Internet to improve one's knowledge about recent developments in different areas. Internet is a valuable source to acquire information along with multimedia form. Subject knowledge also includes the ability to analyze facts or information in a systematic way and to place them in the context of the framework of one’s personal experiences. For the expertise in the GD, the only way is to practice wherever one can. The other members can evaluate the performance and give suggestions.

Communication Skills:

First and foremost, feature of communication skills is that it is a two-way process. Hence the communicator must keep in mind the listeners and their expectations. The participants need to observe the group dynamics. Since GD tests one’s behavior as well as one’s influence on the group, formal language and mutual respect are obvious requirements. One may not take strong views in the beginning itself but wait and analyze the pros and cons of any situation. If one needs to disagree, learn to do so politely. One can directly put forward the personal viewpoint also. One may appreciate the good points made by others; can make a positive contribution by agreeing to and expanding an argument made by another participant. An idea can be appreciated only when expressed effectively. A leader or an administrator can put across the idea in an influential manner. Hence the participants in a group discussion must possess not only subject knowledge but also the ability to present that knowledge in an effective way. Since oral skills are used to put across the ideas, the ability to speak confidently and convincingly makes a participant an impressive speaker. The members of the selection committee closely evaluate the oral communication skills of the candidates. The effective communication would imply use of correct grammar and vocabulary, using the right pitch, good voice quality, clear articulation, logical presentation of the ideas and above all, a positive attitude. It is expected that there are no errors of grammar or usage and that appropriate words, phrases etc. are used. One should try to use simple and specific language. One should avoid ornamental language. Clarity of expression is one of the important criteria of communication. When there is clarity of thinking, there is clarity in usage of language. Positive Speech Attitudes is another criterion of evaluation in the GD whereby the participant’s attitude towards listeners including other group members is judged. The temperament of the participant is also evaluated through the speech pattern.

Listening Skills:

Lack of active listening is often a reason for failure of communication. In the GD, participants often forget that it is a group activity and not a solo performance as in elocution. By participating as an active listener, he/she may be able to contribute significantly to the group deliberations. The listening skills are closely linked to the leadership skills as well.

Leadership Skills:

The success of any group depends to a large extent upon the leader. One of the common misconceptions about leadership is that the leader is the one who controls the group. There are different approaches to the concept of leadership. By studying the personality traits of great leaders or actual dimensions of behavior to identify leadership one can learn to cultivate essential traits of leaders. In a GD, a participant with more knowledge, one who is confident, one who can find some solution to the problem and display initiative and responsibility will be identified as the leader. A candidate's success in a GD test will depend not only on his/her subject knowledge and oral skills but also on his/her ability to provide leadership to the group. Adaptability, analysis, assertiveness, composure, self-confidence, decision making, discretion, initiative, objectivity, patience, and persuasiveness are some of the leadership skills that are useful in proving oneself as a natural leader in a GD. The leader in a group discussion should be able to manage the group despite differences of opinion and steer the discussion to a logical conclusion within the fixed time limit. The examiners will assess whether each participant is a team player who can get along with people or an individualist who is always fighting to save his/her ego. Employers today look for candidates who can work in a team-oriented environment. GD participants need a number of team management skills in order to function effectively in a team. Some of the skills needed to manage a group effectively include adaptability, positive attitude, cooperation, and coordination.

In a selection GD, the group, which may consist of six to ten persons, is given a topic to discuss within 30 to 45 minutes. After announcing the topic, the total GD time, and explaining the general guidelines and procedures governing the GD, the examiner withdraws to the background leaving the group completely free to carry on with the discussion on its own without any outside interference. In the absence of a designated leader to initiate the proceedings of the discussion, the group is likely to waste time in cross talks, low-key conversations, cross-consultations, asides, and so on. The confusion may last until someone in the group takes an assertive position and restores the chaos into order. It could be any candidate. To get the GD started, the assertive, natural leader will have to remind the group of its goal and request them to start the discussion without wasting time. A few examples of the opening lines are given below:

• Well friends, may I request your kind attention? I am sure all of us are keen to begin the GD and complete it within the allotted time. Let me remind you that we have only thirty minutes to complete the task. So, let us get started. • My dear friends, may I have your attention please? As you all know, we have to complete the discussion in 45 minutes, and we have already used up five minutes. I think we should start the discussion now. Hello everybody. I am sorry to interrupt but I have something very important to say. We are here to discuss the topic — " Human cloning should be banned."—and the time given to us is just 30 minutes. Let us begin, shall we?

Leadership functions during a GD include initiative, analysis, assertiveness and so on. GD does not have a formal leader, hence one of the participants is expected to take the initiative. The leader will promote positive group interactions; point out areas of agreement and disagreement. help keep the discussion on the right track and lead the discussion to a positive and successful conclusion within the stipulated time. The ability to analyze a situation is a quality of leadership. Analytical skills and objectivity in expressing opinions are absolute requirements for leadership. With patience and composure one can develop the analytical skills. Reaching consensus by considering the group opinion will make the GD successful. Assertiveness, that is an ability to bring order to the group by handling the conflict is another desirable quality of leadership. Self-confidence is a quality which helps win the agreement from other participants. In GD, participants can make a favourable and forceful impact on the group by being persuasive and convincing. To be persuasive, one has to advance strong, convincing, and logical arguments properly supported by factual data and forceful illustrations. A firm tone and a sober voice would also help in establishing oneself. A leader's ability to convince others and make them accept his/her views and suggestions will establish his/her credentials for leadership. Leaders are characterized by a high level of motivation and can motivate others too. A person with motivation can work hard to do the best job possible and can achieve targets. Team Management skills are important for a leader to manage the members of varied interests. Some of the skills needed to manage a group effectively include adaptability, positive attitude, cooperation, and coordination.

**UNIT IV**

**LOGICAL THINKING & ANALYTICAL REASONING**

Decision Making

Problem Solving

Conflict Management

Case Studies

DECISION MAKING

**DECISION MAKING**

People often say that they find it hard to make decisions.

We all have to make decisions all the time, ranging from trivial issues like what to have for lunch, right up to life-changing decisions like where and what to study, and who to marry.

Some people put off making decisions by endlessly searching for more information or getting other people to offer their recommendations.

Others resort to decision-making by taking a vote, sticking a pin in a list or tossing a coin.

## What is Decision Making?

**In its simplest sense, decision-making is the act of choosing between two or more courses of action.**

In the wider process of [**problem-solving**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/problem-solving.html), decision-making involves choosing between possible solutions to a problem. Decisions can be made through either an **intuitive** or **reasoned** process, or a **combination of the two**.

### Intuition

**Intuition is using your ‘gut feeling’ about possible courses of action.**

Although people talk about it as if it was a magical ‘sense’, intuition is actually a combination of past experience and your personal values. It is worth taking your intuition into account, because it reflects your learning about life. It is, however, not always based on reality, only your perceptions, many of which may have started in childhood and may not be very mature as a result.

It is therefore worth examining your gut feeling closely, especially if you have a very strong feeling against a particular course of action, to see if you can work out why, and whether the feeling is justified.

### Reasoning

**Reasoning is using the facts and figures in front of you to make decisions.**

Reasoning has its roots in the here-and-now, and in facts. It can, however, ignore emotional aspects to the decision, and in particular, issues from the past that may affect the way that the decision is implemented.

**Intuition is a perfectly acceptable means of making a decision, although it is generally more appropriate when the decision is of a simple nature or needs to be made quickly**.

More complicated decisions tend to require a more formal, structured approach, usually involving both intuition and reasoning. It is important to be wary of impulsive reactions to a situation.

The Guiding Questions for Making Decisions

1. Why is the decision necessary?

2. What are my options?

3. What are the likely consequences of each option?

4. Which option is the best in the given situation and consequences?

DEFINITION: Choices based on values, personal beliefs and attitudes that influence the options that one

takes in life is called decision making. The ability of making a well informed and wise decision and taking

the responsibility of the consequences thereafter is an important skill. You should be able to evaluate

the impact of your personal and professional decisions on yourself and on others who are involved or

may be affected.

Decisions are not necessary unless there is more than one option or alternative to consider.

Snap Decisions: These are simple, habitual or thoughtless decisions with no or insignificant

consequences. They are mostly governed by emotions.

Responsible Decisions: These are complex, difficult or challenging decisions, in which others may be

involved or affected. They must be governed by intelligence, experience and lot of care and thought.

DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING DECISION:

 Unknown facts

 Several inter-related factors

 Impact of the decision may be significant

 Various alternatives with their own uncertainties and consequences

 Predicting the reactions of the others involved or affected

“Worrying and not deciding is like a rocking chair---it gives you a movement but does

not get you anywhere.

SYSTEMATIC APPROACH FOR MAKING DECISIONS

1. Constructive Environment: include people who are involved or affected to explore the

situation and to consider options together.

2. Investigate the situation in detail: use various methods like the ‘5 whys method’ to

gather all the necessary information and facts

3. Generate several Alternatives: The more the options you explore the better your final

decision is likely to be. Look at the problems from different angles. Use ‘Brainstorming’

and ‘Reverse Brainstorming’ methods.

4. Explore your Options: evaluate the feasibility, risks and implications of your options

5. Select the best Solution: one particular alternative will be clearly better than the rest.

Therefore your choice will be obvious.

6. Evaluate your Plan: Design a plan of action to execute your decision.

7. Take Action

# DECISION MAKING SKILLS

Decision-making skills are about your ability to choose a good option out of two or more alternatives. As a type of problem-solving skill, there’s three main ways to approach decision-making: using intuition, reasoning, or a combination of both.

Intuition is your default response, or the gut feeling you get when presented with a problem or decision to make. This first reaction comes from a combination of things you’ve learned, experiences you’ve had, and opinions you hold, so everyone’s intuition is different. Using intuition allows you to base your decision off of your lived experiences, so it can be subjective.

Reasoning, on the other hand, is rooted in data. You reason when you use the data available to you and only base a decision off facts and figures instead of your instinctive reaction. This is a more objective way to come to a decision and its usually how bigger decisions are made.

Typically, decisions are made with both intuition and reasoning. Using both is a good way to check and make sure your choice is logical. Since we make decisions all the time, we usually don’t stop to think about whether we should make a intuition-based or reason-based decision, instead we naturally use a combination of the two.

Decisions are largely about intuition and reasoning, but other skills come into play too. If you’re good at making decisions, then you’re also good at a host of other skills required to come to a logical choice.

Reasoning, processing information, using intuition, asking questions, analyzing potential outcomes, and more are all required to make a good decision. Employers look for good decision-making skills since it encapsulates so many other necessary skills to thrive in a professional environment.

## THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Effective decision-makers use a seven-step process to tackle decision-making. While it’s not necessary to go through these exact steps when you make a basic decision, like what to cook for dinner, it can be a great way to check your thinking as you make a big work decision, like which strategy will lead to better sales.

1. **Identify the problem.** First, you need to see the decision that you need to make and understand what will go into making that decision. This step is crucial since everything else builds upon what you do here. Make sure you properly understand the situation, what’s being asked of you, and what tools you have available to you before moving to the next step.
2. **Do some digging.** For any decision you’ll need some background information to help you choose the right option. Sometimes this means just thinking back to details from meetings, or it can be doing more sophisticated research. You can step one to help you identify what information you’ll need to make a good decision.
3. **Think creatively.** In this step you want to think of as many solutions as possible. It doesn’t matter if they’re good or bad, you just want to consider all of your options. Feel free to be as creative in your thinking as you want with this step. There are no bad options here since you want to think of every possible outcome. You’ll have a chance to check all your brainstormed options later.
4. **Evaluate your options.** Here’s the part where you’ll give all your potential outcomes a second check. Go through the list of solutions you came up with in step three and test which ones feel better or sound more logical to you. Don’t forget to keep your end goal in mind when you consider all the choices, that way you’re sure to make a good decision.
5. **Make the decision.** It’s time to pick one of the options you came up with. Keep in mind that you can choose a solution you came up with or even combine solutions to make the best decision possible. Reflect on your process for step four and pick the decision you feel best about.
6. **Act on your decision.** Once you’ve decided what to do, you need to start taking the actions that will help you implement the decision. These can be big or small steps but stay focused and resolved to get the job done. Don’t be afraid to bring other people into your process in this step. Especially for large workplace decisions you might want to call on your coworkers to help you get things done.
7. **Look back.** When your decision is made and you’ve had some time to see its effects, take a second to evaluate that decision. Think about whether the decision had the outcome you wanted it to, or if it wasn’t so successful. Taking this time to reflect on your decision-making is a great way to not only improve your ability to make a good decision, but also to learn more about yourself. You can even ask other people for their opinion on the effects of a decision to see how your perception of the impacts line up with others’ opinions.

## TYPES OF DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

Decision-making is such an important skill since it requires many other key skills to be a good decision-maker. Let’s look at other skills you can build to help you make the best decisions.

* **Problem-solving.** The number one skill you need to be an effective decision-maker is problem-solving. Since decisions are just a type of problem (determining which option is the best), having strong problem-solving skills is an asset. If you approach a decision from a logical mindset, as if it were a problem to solve, odds are that the solutions you come up with and your final decision will be stronger.
* **Collaboration.** Decisions can’t always be made by one person. You need to have good collaboration and compromise skills to make the best decision sometimes when it involves a group. Even when you’re deciding on your own, getting extra input from friends or coworkers can help you brainstorm the best outcome. Collaboration is your friend, both when you need to make a group decision and when you’re the one responsible for making the decision.
* **Emotional intelligence.** Emotional intelligence, or EQ, is the ability to observe and understand your own emotions and the emotions of the people around you. Being able to take emotions into account will make you a stronger decision maker. Think of this as related to intuitive decision-making. It’s your ability to balance facts, figures, and emotions to come to a good decision.
* **Logical reasoning.** This skill is key for the middle steps of the decision-making process. Being able to fully evaluate and analyze your information, options, and decisions will make your decisions stronger. This skill is more closely related to reasoning, the side of decision-making that relies on facts and figures instead of on emotions.

While the skills listed above are the key skills of decision-making- meaning you can’t make any decision without using those skills- there are many more that will help you sharpen your ability to make good decisions. Look at this list and see what you’re already good at and where you could improve.

* **Organization.** Being organized can help you keep all your background information, options, and other tools in order.
* **Time management.** Making decisions in a timely manner isn’t just about making a quick, hasty decision. Managing your time to properly work through the seven steps is a skill that will put you above everyone else.
* **Leadership.** When collaborating and making a group decision, someone needs to take charge and make sure the decision is implemented, which is when good leadership skills are needed.
* **Creativity.** The more creative you are in your problem-solving, the better options and potential outcomes you’ll have to work with, as well as having creative ways to implement your decision.
* **Ethics.** Making ethical decisions is a necessary skill to have, so knowing how to weigh the ethical pros and cons is key.
* **Research.** The better research you can gather in the first steps of the decision-making process, the better prepared you’ll be to make a good decision.
* **Analysis.** Having strong analytical skills will help you ensure that your decisions are logical and reasonable.
* **Flexibility.** Quick-thinking and flexibility are your friends when it comes to making decisions since sometimes, you’ll have to compromise or new constraints will pop up, changing how you approach a decision.

## EXAMPLES OF DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

It’s easy to list skills that are required to make a good decision, but it can be hard to understand exactly when and how those skills will help you. Let’s look at some real-world workplace examples of decision-making and the skills required to tackle them effectively.

* **Choosing a manufacturer to supply the product you sell.** You need to be able to evaluate all manufacturers and what they offer, then analyze their pros and cons to choose one.
* **Brainstorming potential names for a new product.** You must be creative in your thinking and be good at understanding what your boss and the consumers are looking for.
* **Comparing different candidates for a job opening or promotion.** Evaluation and analytical skills will help you determine the best candidate depending on the job description and the candidates’ qualifications.
* **Evaluating where to cut spending.** For a project of this size, you’ll need organization, time management, and strong reasoning skills.
* **Proposing the best way to boost sales.** You’ll need good evaluation, analysis, and creative skills, plus more, to think of good ways to drive sales.
* **Choosing which employee or employees to lay off.** Again, evaluation, comparison, and critical thinking skills are key here.
* **Deciding how bonuses will be given for the year.** Strong analytical, financial, and reasoning skills are necessary for a decision like this.

## Effective Decision-Making

Decisions need to be capable of being implemented, whether on a personal or organizational level. You do, therefore, need to be committed to the decision personally, and be able to persuade others of its merits.

**An effective decision-making process, therefore, needs to ensure that you can do so.**

### What Can Prevent Effective Decision-Making?

**There are a number of problems that can prevent effective decision-making. These include:**

#### 1. Not Enough Information

If you do not have enough information, it can feel like you are deciding without any basis.

Take some time to gather the necessary data to inform your decision, even if the timescale is very tight. If necessary, prioritize your information-gathering by identifying which information will be most important to you.

#### 2. Too Much Information

The opposite problem, but one that is seen surprisingly often: having so much conflicting information that it is impossible to see ‘the wood for the trees’.

This is sometimes called analysis paralysis, and is also used as a tactic to delay organizational decision-making, with those involved demanding ever more information before they can decide.

This problem can often be resolved by getting everyone together to decide what information is really important and why, and by setting a clear timescale for decision-making, including an information-gathering stage.

#### 3. Too Many People

Making decisions by committee is difficult. Everyone has their own views, and their own values. And while it’s important to know what these views are, and why and how they are important, it may be essential for one person to take responsibility for deciding. Sometimes, any decision is better than none.

#### 4. Vested Interests

Decision-making processes often founder under the weight of vested interests. These vested interests are often not overtly expressed, but may be a crucial blockage. Because they are not overtly expressed, it is hard to identify them clearly, and therefore address them, but it can sometimes be possible to do so by exploring them with someone outside the process, but in a similar position.

It can also help to explore the rational/intuitive aspects with all stakeholders, usually with an external facilitator to support the process.

#### 5. Emotional Attachments

People are often very attached to the status quo. Decisions tend to involve the prospect of change, which many people find difficult.

For more about overcoming this, see our pages on **[Change Management](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/lead/change-management.html)**, but also remember that ‘deciding not to decide’ is also a decision.

#### 6. No Emotional Attachment

Sometimes it’s difficult to decide because you just don’t care one way or the other. In this case, a structured decision-making process can often help by identifying some very real pros and cons of particular actions, that perhaps you hadn’t thought about before.

Many of these issues can be overcome by using a structured decision-making process. This will help to:

* Reduce more complicated decisions down to simpler steps;
* See how any decisions are arrived at; and
* Plan decision making to meet deadlines.

THE DECISION-MAKING WHEEL

Refer to your class notes for the Decision-making wheel. The segments in the wheel are as below

1. Problem (in the center of the wheel)

Segment 1: Choices

Segment 2: Consequences

Segment 3: Values and Beliefs

Segment 4: Feelings

Segment 5: More Information

Segment 6: Who can help

Segment 7: Decision

Segment 8: Assess Decision

THE OAR APPROACH

The OAR approach in decision making refers to Objectives, Alternatives and Risks. It is knowing why it is necessary or important to take that decision (Objective), knowing what are the various options that are available to you for making that decision (Alternatives) and knowing the consequences of the option that you have decided to choose (Risks).

WHEN SHOULD ONE NOT TAKE IMPORTANT AND SERIOUS DECISIONS?

 When angry, hurt, depressed, desperate, or frightened

 When with the intent of harming or avenging others

 When one is incapable of rational thought (e.g in a very emotional state of mind or

under the influence of intoxicating substances)

**PROBLEM SOLVING**

Problem solving and troubleshooting is a systematic and scientific process of searching for the source of

a problem and resolving it. Doing this proactively (not reactively) is a smart skill.

FOUR BASIC STEPS IN PROBLEM SOLVING

1. Defining the problem

2. Generating solutions

3. Evaluating the solutions

4. Selecting the most appropriate solution

METHODS OF TROUBLESHOOTING

1. The 5 Whys Method

PROBLEM: WHY----------WHY---------WHY------------WHY------------WHY-------------ROOT CAUSE

2. THE FISH BONE METHOD

Refer to your class notes for the diagram. It is also known as the Ishikawa, after Prof

Kaoru Ishikawa. It is proven to be very effective for doing the root cause analysis of a

problem especially of the engineering field. The factors that form the bones of the fish

are:

a) Method

b) Machine

c) Material

d) Men (People)

e) Nature (Environment)

or

a) Site

b) Task

c) People

d) Equipment

e) Control

The choices of the factors depend on the type and nature of the operations of

the company and its requirements.

The factors for instance, used in Management and Marketing for the same purpose are known

as the 4 P’s of Marketing: Product----Place----Price and Promotion.

For Business companies and organizations, the Mc Kinsey 7 S framework is used for problem

solving. The 7 S are: Strategy---Structure----Systems------Shared Values-----Skills----Style and Staff.

Definition – What is a Fishbone Diagram?

The fishbone diagram or Ishikawa diagram is a cause-and-effect diagram that helps managers to track down the reasons for imperfections, variations, defects, or failures.

The diagram looks just like a fish’s skeleton with the problem at its head and the causes for the problem feeding into the spine. Once all the causes that underlie the problem have been identified, managers can start looking for solutions to ensure that the problem doesn’t become a recurring one.

The fishbone diagram strives to pinpoint everything that’s wrong with current market offerings so that you can develop an innovation that doesn’t have these problems.

Finally, the fishbone diagram is also a great way to look for and prevent quality problems before they ever arise. Use it to troubleshoot before there is trouble, and you can overcome all or most of the teething troubles when introducing something new.

**The Fishbone Diagram: A Decades-Old Concept That’s Still Relevant**

Karou Ishikawa revived the idea of the fishbone diagram to solve problems at the Kawasaki shipyards in the 1960s, and the idea soon caught on. Even back in the 60s, the fishbone diagram wasn’t anything new. In the 1920s it was seen as an important quality control tool.

The iconic Mazda Miata car was designed to overcome the issues identified in a fishbone diagram. Even details such as designing the sportscar’s doors so that the driver could rest his arm on it while driving was considered.

There are four basic steps in solving a problem:

1. Defining the problem.
2. Generating alternatives.
3. Evaluating and selecting alternatives.
4. Implementing solutions.

### 1. Define the problem

Diagnose the situation so that your focus is on the problem, not just its symptoms. Helpful problem-solving techniques include using [flowcharts](https://asq.org/quality-resources/flowchart) to identify the expected steps of a process and [cause-and-effect diagrams](https://asq.org/quality-resources/fishbone) to define and analyze [root causes](https://asq.org/quality-resources/root-cause-analysis).

The sections below help explain key problem-solving steps. These steps support the involvement of interested parties, the use of information, comparison of expectations to reality, and a focus on root causes of a problem. You should begin by:

* Reviewing and documenting how processes currently work (i.e., who does what, with what information, using what tools, communicating with what organizations and individuals, in what time frame, using what format).
* Evaluating the possible impact of new tools and revised policies in the development of your "what should be" model.

### 2. Generate alternative solutions

Postpone the selection of one solution until several problem-solving alternatives have been proposed. Considering multiple alternatives can significantly enhance the value of your ideal solution. Once you have decided on the "what should be" model, this target standard becomes the basis for developing a road map for investigating alternatives. [Brainstorming](https://asq.org/quality-resources/brainstorming) and team problem-solving techniques are both useful tools in this stage of problem solving.

Many alternative solutions to the problem should be generated before final evaluation. A common mistake in problem solving is that alternatives are evaluated as they are proposed, so the first acceptable solution is chosen, even if it’s not the best fit. If we focus on trying to get the results we want, we miss the potential for learning something new that will allow for real improvement in the problem-solving process.

### 3. Evaluate and select an alternative

Skilled problem solvers use a series of considerations when selecting the best alternative. They consider the extent to which:

* A particular alternative will solve the problem without causing other unanticipated problems.
* All the individuals involved will accept the alternative.
* Implementation of the alternative is likely.
* The alternative fits within the organizational constraints.

### 4. Implement and follow up on the solution

Leaders may be called upon to direct others to implement the solution, "sell" the solution, or facilitate the implementation with the help of others. Involving others in the implementation is an effective way to gain buy-in and support and minimize resistance to subsequent changes.

Regardless of how the solution is rolled out, feedback channels should be built into the implementation. This allows for continuous monitoring and testing of actual events against expectations. Problem solving, and the techniques used to gain clarity, are most effective if the solution remains in place and is updated to respond to future changes.

# 5 Whys

## Getting to the Root of a Problem Quickly

Stubborn or recurrent problems are often symptoms of deeper issues. "Quick fixes" may seem convenient, but they often solve only the surface issues and waste resources that could otherwise be used to tackle the real cause.

This is a simple but powerful tool for cutting quickly through the outward symptoms of a problem to reveal its underlying causes, so that you can deal with it once and for all.

## Origins of the 5 Whys Technique

Sakichi Toyoda, the Japanese industrialist, inventor, and founder of Toyota Industries, developed the 5 Whys technique in the 1930s. It became popular in the 1970s, and Toyota still uses it to solve problems today.

Toyota has a "go and see" philosophy. This means that its decision making is based on an in-depth understanding of what's **happening**, rather than on what someone in a boardroom **thinks**might be happening.

The method is remarkably simple: when a problem occurs, you drill down to its root cause by asking "Why?" five times. Then, when a counter-measure becomes apparent, you follow it through to prevent the issue from recurring.

You can use 5 Whys for troubleshooting, quality improvement, and problem solving, but it is most effective when used to resolve simple or moderately difficult problems.

It may not be suitable if you need to tackle a complex or critical problem. This is because 5 Whys can lead you to pursue a single track, or a limited number of tracks, of inquiry when, in fact, there could be multiple causes.

## How to Use the 5 Whys

The model follows a very simple seven-step process:

### 1. Assemble a Team

Gather people who are familiar with the specifics of the problem, and with the process that you're trying to fix. Include someone to act as a facilitator, who can keep the team focused on identifying effective counter-measures.

### 2. Define the Problem

If you can, observe the problem in action. Discuss it with your team and write a brief, clear problem statement that you all agree on. For example, "Team A isn't meeting its response time targets" or "Software release B resulted in too many rollback failures."

Then, write your statement on a whiteboard or sticky note, leaving enough space around it to add your answers to the repeated question, "Why?"

### 3. Ask the First "Why?"

Ask your team why the problem is occurring. (For example, "Why isn't Team A meeting its response time targets?")

Asking "Why?" sounds simple, but answering it requires serious thought. Search for answers that are grounded in fact: they must be accounts of things that have happened, not guesses at what might have happened.

This prevents 5 Whys from becoming just a process of deductive reasoning, which can generate a large number of possible causes and, sometimes, create more confusion as you chase down hypothetical problems.

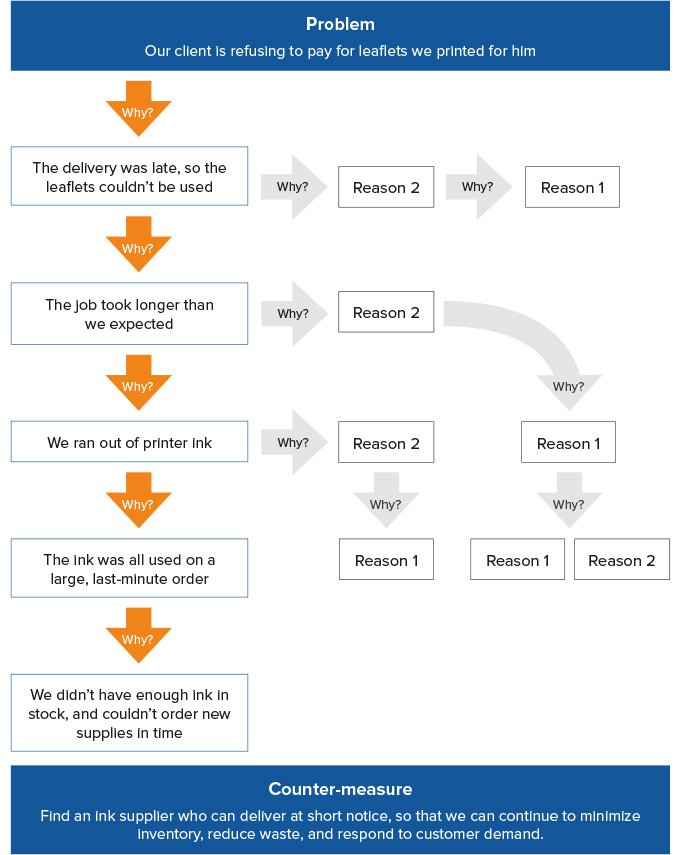
### 4. Ask "Why?" Four More Times

For each of the answers that you generated in Step 3, ask four further "whys" in succession. Each time, frame the question in response to the answer you've just recorded.

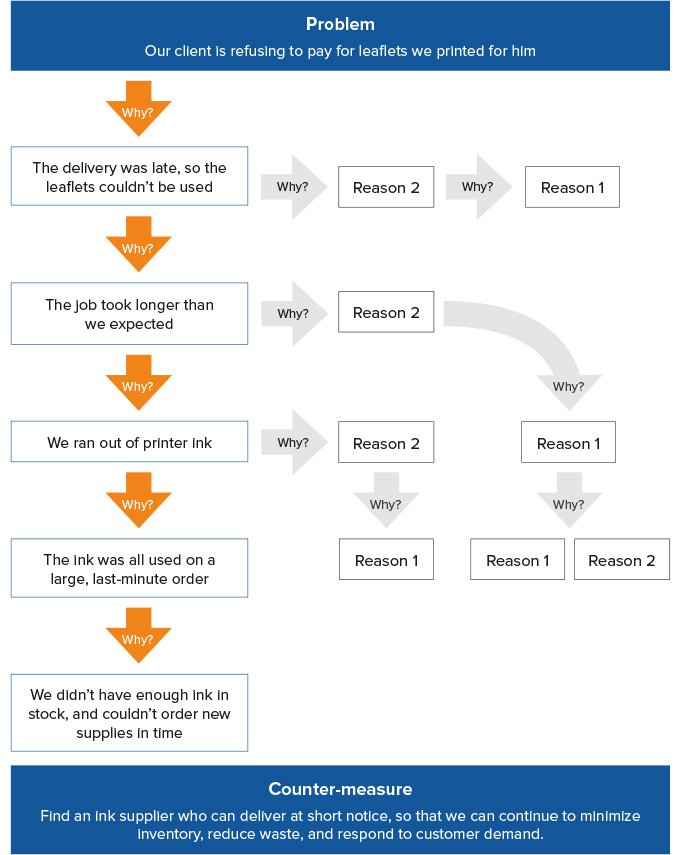
### Step 5. Know When to Stop

You'll know that you've revealed the root cause of the problem when asking "why" produces no more useful responses, and you can go no further. An appropriate counter-measure or process change should then become evident.

**Whys Example (Multiple Lanes)**

**[](https://www.mindtools.com/media/Diagrams/5_Whys_Figure_2_multiple_lanes.pdf)**

**Example (Multiple Lanes)**

**[](https://www.mindtools.com/media/Diagrams/5_Whys_Figure_2_multiple_lanes.pdf)**

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

Strong conflict management skills are an advantage in most positions, as conflict is virtually impossible to avoid. It is human nature to disagree, and disagreements are healthy when approached correctly.

Eliminating conflict entirely would cause its own problems: there would be no diversity of opinion, and no way to catch and correct flawed plans and policies.

Conflict management, also known as conflict resolution, involves having a workplace that precludes conflict and a management team that successfully handles and resolves workplace issues.

The aim for professionals in the workplace should not be to avoid conflict, but to resolve it in an effective manner. Employees with strong conflict resolution skills are able to effectively handle workplace issues.

Individuals who handle conflict in a respectful, optimistic way create the chance for growth and learning within an organization.

Communicating clearly, empathetically, and patiently leads to favorable outcomes and keeps professional relationships strong.

Poor communication or interpersonal tension can easily cause simple disagreements to flare up into resentment or worse.

Conflicts that are allowed to fester and grow will ultimately diminish productivity and damage staff morale. Therefore, employers seek employees with the skills to manage and diffuse conflict.

## Types of Conflict Management Skills

### Communication

Much unnecessary conflict can be avoided simply with clear, accurate written and verbal communication; a single lost email could lead to failed plans and fingers pointed.

Assumptions about what other people already know, think, or intend can cause resentment or worse. Some people argue just because they want to feel heard.

Simply being a good listener can be enough to inspire trust and resolve hurt feelings.

Examples of good communication skills include:

* Quickly Addressing Problems
* Understanding Reluctant Participants
* Formalizing Agreements
* Active listening
* Leadership skills
* Written Communication
* Negotiation Skills

### Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand your own feelings and those of others, and to handle those feelings well. People who have high emotional intelligence are good at identifying and meeting the needs of others while taking responsibility for their own needs and feelings.

A few ways they do this are:

* Being Adaptable
* Being Analytical
* Asserting Feelings
* Compromising
* Showing Curiosity
* Being Motivated
* Being Optimistic
* Being Self-Aware
* Displaying Self-Regulation

### Empathy

Empathy means feeling what others feel. The ability to see a situation from someone else’s viewpoint, and to understand their needs, motivations, and possible misunderstandings, is critical to effective conflict management.

Some people are naturally more empathetic than others, but empathy can be developed.

At its most useful, empathy is augmented by an intellectual understanding of another’s situation since emotional empathy alone can sometimes create complicated scenarios. Empathy is best applied in a work environment when paired with critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and other types of discernment.

Hallmarks of empathy include:

* Accountability
* Asking for Feedback
* Building Trust
* Showing Compassion
* Giving Constructive Feedback
* Handling Difficult People
* High Emotional Intelligence
* Good Self-Control
* Ability to Embrace Different Opinions

### Creative Problem Solving

Understanding and communication are all very well and good, but do not help much if you don’t have a solution for the underlying problem, whatever that problem may be.

Conflict often happens because no one can come up with a workable solution, so resolving the conflict depends on creating a solution.

That makes problem-solving an in-demand skill for employers. Examples of problem-solving conflicts in the workplace include:

* Conflict Analysis
* Brainstorming Solutions
* Collaborating
* Verbal Communication
* Creativity
* Decision Making

Conflict management

Wherever there are human beings there will be conflicts. Whether it is in public places,

or among team members, within departments, between an organization and its clients

or between boss and subordinates—conflicts are bound to occur. Therefore the skill of

managing a conflict and resolving it becomes necessary.

DEFINITION: The practice of recognizing and dealing with disputes in a rational, balanced and

effective way is called Conflict Management. It involves effective communication, problem

resolving abilities and good negotiating skills. The ability of diffusing a hostile situation is essential

for all professionals to have.

TECHNIQUES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

1. COMPETING OR FORCING: pushing or pursuing your interests despite resistance

from the other person. Mostly used by employers of labour-intensive industries and

factories.

2. COLLABORATING: collaborating with the other person to find a win-win solution. A

win-win solution is the one in which both parties are benefited with the resolution.

This is the most ideal situation of resolving a conflict.

3. COMPROMISING: opting for a mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies

both parties. This technique must be adopted when there is no possibility of

collaborating.

4. AVOIDING OR COMPROMISING: not addressing the conflict for various reasons.

Sidestepping, postponing or simply withdrawing.

5. ACCOMODATING: accommodating other person’s interests and concerns rather than

one’s own. This technique is the reverse situation of the competing or forcing

technique.

USEFUL TIPS FOR HANDLING CONFLICTS EFFECTIVELY

1. Remember that good relationships are a priority rather than winning the argument.

2. Separate the problem from the person

3. Listen empathetically to different point of views

4. Listen first --- talk second

5. Find out the facts

6. Explore the solution together

7. Have good understanding of body language

8. Be emotionally intelligent

9. Use anger management techniques

10. Do not use written forms of communication

11. Use humour to diffuse a situation.

12. Manage emotion and exhibit control.

# Negotiation Skills: Definitions, Benefits and Examples

Negotiation is a dialogue between two parties to resolve conflicts or issues so that both parties find the solution acceptable. Usually, it is a compromise involving give and take. Negotiation results when each party compromises to resolve a conflict for everyone's benefits. In the workplace, negotiations may take place between managers, departments, colleagues or between a team member and a manager. Even before you join the workplace, you may negotiate the job offer with the interviewer or HR manager.

In this article, we will discuss what negotiation skills are, its benefits, examples and tips for improving your negotiation skills.

## What are negotiation skills?

Negotiation skills are inherent qualities that help two or more parties agree to a common logical solution. In the workplace, you may have to display your negotiating skills in various situations such as:

* Negotiating a salary hike with the HR manager after promotion
* Negotiating a project deadline with your team lead or manager
* Negotiating few days off for a family holiday with your manager
* Negotiating contract terms with a potential customer

Lack of negotiation skills affects the business bottom line and could ruin customer relationship. Negotiation skills are soft skills and essential to become a negotiator and resolve workplace conflicts.

However, this skill set depends on the work environment, the parties involved and outcome desired. Often, when one party is ready for reaching a compromise, the other party may be resistant. This makes negotiation difficult and you are likely to encounter such situations in the workplace. That is why you need to master your negotiation skills.

## Benefits of negotiation skills

Negotiation is a coveted leadership skill which helps businesses reach their business objective. Here are a few reasons negotiation skills are essential in the workplace:

* **Builds a relationship:** Despite the difference in opinion, negotiation skills help strike a solution and focus more on creating goodwill and value. This builds a long-term relationship.
* **Delivers excellent solutions:** Good negotiation skills ensure that solutions to the conflicts are not short-term. It focuses on creating long-lasting solutions because both parties make a concession only when the solution is satisfactory.
* **Avoids future conflicts:** As both parties agree to a common solution, the chances of future conflicts reduce to a great extent.
* **Create an environment of business success:** Good negotiation skills ensure the accomplishment of business goals, which creates an environment of business success. This also increases the chances of future business transaction.

## Examples of negotiation skills

Here are a few examples of negotiation skills that can make you an excellent negotiator at the workplace:

### Communication

Communication is the backbone of negotiation. The way you communicate decides the fate of the negotiation. It involves identifying the nonverbal cues, using the right words and expressing your thoughts in a compelling and engaging way. Without being verbose, you need to communicate the right message to the party. Often, negotiators are active listeners that help them understand the other party's message. A healthy conversation ensures a mutually beneficial deal and avoids misunderstanding that could prevent the parties from reaching a compromise.

### Strategizing

There may be instances where the other party disagree with the solution you provide. Good negotiators often come with one or more backup plans. Consider all solutions to the problem before entering a negotiation. For example, when negotiating your salary, the HR manager may refuse to increase your dearness allowance (DA). Instead of focusing on the DA, you could ask for better retirement or gratuity benefits.

### Planning

Proper planning before the negotiation ensures you know the long-term consequences of the negotiation terms. Planning comes in handy during the negotiation process and ensures the successful execution of the decision.

### Persuasion

Successful negotiators can influence other parties. Unless you possess the persuasion skills, it becomes difficult to justify how your solution will benefit both parties. Your persuasion skills decide whether the other party agrees to your solution.

### Listening

Active listening is the key to a successful negotiation as it ensures that you listen to the other party and understand what they are trying to say. Also, with active listening, you do not miss out on crucial information, which builds trust and helps reach a consensus faster.

### Problem-solving

Most negotiations occur to find a solution to an issue. With excellent problem-solving skills, you propose viable and intelligent solutions that are beneficial for both parties.

**Related:** [**Problem-Solving Skills: Definitions and Examples**](https://in.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/problem-solving-skills)

### Emotional intelligence

The ability to control and manage your emotions and deal with the other party's emotions differentiates a successful negotiator from an unsuccessful one. People high on emotional intelligence (EI) can accurately perceive and express their emotion, recognise others' emotions and use these emotions to facilitate solutions.

## Types of negotiation strategies

The negotiation strategies or approaches to negotiation you use depends on your situation. Most workplace negotiation are "win-lose" or "win-win". Here are 4 types of negotiation strategies:

### Distributive negotiation

It is also sometimes called "hard bargaining" because both parties argue over a single conflict. Distributive negotiation is a win-lose strategy because each party considers that their loss would benefit the counterparty. For example, when purchasing a SaaS tool, you may not want to lower the price as it would cause financial loss, whereas your customer feels you are overcharging them for your product by not giving discounts.

### Integrative negotiation

It is also sometimes called "interest-based bargaining" because it asserts that both parties can gain something and create value by offering trade-offs. This is a win-win strategy because the negotiation creates mutual gains for both parties. For example, when purchasing a SaaS tool, you quote the price as ₹ 2,000 per month, but the customer is adamant about paying only ₹1,600 per month. Both you may negotiate ₹1,800 per month price. It is a win-win situation because both parties win ₹ 200 per month.

### Negotiation with coworkers

Your job may require working closely with different departments and without strong negotiation skills, it might be difficult for you to reach your goals. For example, when working as a software developer, a test automation engineer may flag a part of your code as a critical error. When you negotiate with the automation engineer, you both agree that the error is no longer valid because of the product's changed functionality. As a result, you develop a plan to ensure such instances do not happen again.

### Negotiation with management

One of the most challenging types of negotiation is with your manager or senior management. Often, you negotiate with such senior-level people for your job duties and salary benefits. This is a crucial workplace negotiation because your job satisfaction depends on it. Therefore, when negotiating about your salary and other perks, be clear and polite with what you expect.

## Tips to improve your negotiation skills

As negotiations skills are paramount in every business, you need to hone these skills continually. Here are a few important tips to improve your negotiation skills:

### Prepare for the negotiation

Enter a negotiation only after you know what you want and how willing you are to compromise to resolve the conflict.

### Be ready to compromise

Without compromise, it is impossible to reach a common consensus that is beneficial for both parties. Leave your ego behind when negotiating at the workplace and be ready to compromise on best fit terms.

### Set a timeline

Without setting a timeline, a negotiation may go on for months or years. Setting a deadline or timeline motivates the parties to reach a compromise before the deadline.

### Offer multiple solutions

If a conflict is solvable in more than one way, it makes sense to present all the possible solutions at the beginning of a negotiation. This saves time and increases the probability of both parties choosing one solution of their preferred outcome.

### Speak with confidence

Negotiation is not about what you say; it is more about how you say. Therefore, it is imperative to speak confidently to make the other party believe that your solution is beneficial. Lack of confidence and self-assurance could result in negotiation terms that are more beneficial for the other party.

### Learn to accept failures

Often, when both parties' requirements are a world apart, reaching a compromise becomes difficult. You may fail at negotiation but never take this failure personally. Instead, accept it and revisit the entire negotiation to understand ways to improve your efforts.

### Work on your weakness

Your planning, communication, persuasion, problem-solving and listening skills will always complement your negotiation skills. So, it becomes essential to sharpen these skills. If you lack the power of persuasion or find it difficult to listen to others, you should work on these weaknesses to improve your negotiation skills.

### Practice negotiation

One of the best ways to improve your negotiation skills is by practicing. Create a mock negotiation scenario and practice it with your family or friends. The more you practice, the better negotiator you will become.

# Decision-Making Skills: Definition and Examples

Decision-making skills can be the difference in making a choice that improves your organization. The aptitude to make decisions is a leadership trait, which portrays your ability to think objectively and relates concepts to the goals you're trying to reach. Your capacity to make a quick decision can help establish a strong bond with all employees that strengthens your company's culture.

In this article, we will talk about what decision-making skills are, examples of decision-making skills, how to improve decision-making skills and how to highlight them when applying for a job.

## What are decision-making skills?

Decision-making skills show your proficiency in choosing between two or more alternatives. You can make decisions once you process all the information available to you and speak with the right points of contact involved in a certain situation. Overall, it's important to identify processes that help you make the right decision on behalf of the organization and make a concerted effort to uncover biases that may affect the outcome of it.

## Examples of decision-making skills

You must incorporate a wide variety of skills to make the right decisions. Check out these decision-making skills below that you can add to your resume to stand out to your future employer:

* Problem-solving
* Leadership
* Reasoning
* Intuition
* Teamwork
* Emotional Intelligence
* Creativity
* Time management
* Organization

### Problem-solving

Leaders can employ their problem-solving skills to make critical decisions for their company. You need to factor in different viewpoints to consider the numerous variables required to make a thoughtful decision. It's a necessity that you separate the emotions from the conversations you have with people that'll influence your decision-making. The essence of having adept problem-solving skills is that you can formulate decisions quickly and effectively, so you need to do your research and pay close attention to detail to match the facts with the situation you're addressing.

### Leadership

Leadership is defined as the act of organizing several employees within your organization, and good leadership can establish a consensus about a particular decision. In this case, leadership involves working with people to evaluate the present and motivate them to achieve their goals once a decision is made.

Make sure that you take the time to build a strong relationship with your coworkers, so you can get to know them and have them be comfortable to speak freely around you. The more engaged and personable you are, the higher the likelihood there is to work cohesively with your team and making productive choices that have a long-term impact.

### Reasoning

Reasoning is one of the main skills needed to be informed about the decision you can make. Make sure that you review all the advantages and disadvantages of the decisions that you're considering taking action on. This is the best way to reason with the present and plan for the future while staying objective and grounded during this process.

Consider all available and relevant points of data to help you guide your decision-making and take a stance about who you're making it with. You want to keep your reasoning aligned with the people you trust and aim to stay committed to the goals you're trying to achieve.

### Intuition

Intuition is about deciding and trusting your instincts. Your instincts come from the experiences you've witnessed in the past and the core values that drive you each day. The sum of the experiences and the lessons you've learned from them factor into your decision-making. You need to associate your instincts with the potential actions you can take to see if your decision is logical and actionable.

### Teamwork

You must collaborate with your coworkers at some point to make a sound decision. For example, you may have to work with your marketing manager on the best way to work with the client and improve the results of their marketing campaign last quarter.

Here, you use reasoning to break down options to help the client improve their campaign, so a status report can give you applicable data. After, you can weigh the possible key performance indicators (KPIs) that can measure its success going forward. Overall, your ability to work with a team determines the results you earn and the number of people affected by the decision your team made.

### Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence makes you critically aware of your emotions, and you can express them in a way that encourages action. Your emotions should lay the groundwork for your inspiration regarding a specific cause or mission that motivates you. However, the way you analyze data on the subject matter is going to dictate how well-informed you are when making your final decision.

### Creativity

Your creativity harnesses your logical and emotional thinking to generate a unique solution. You need to have trusted employees within your organization to exchange ideas to come up with short and long-term solutions. You can also use your creativity to frame the conversations you have with employees during meetings and the amount of time allocated to ensure that everyone's voice can be heard. Consider having weekly brainstorming sessions to maximize employees' creativity to gain noteworthy input.

### Time management

Since decisions need to be made quickly, you have to outline the amount of time you have to make your decision. You always have to work within the confines of your situation, but time management allows you to structure how you can make a decision. If you make have to decide by the end of the week, you can spend the time on each stage of the decision-making process including possible actions and purposed solutions you can take.

**Read more:**[**Time Management Skills: Definitions and Examples**](https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/time-management-skills)

### Organization

Organization is vital in your making a final decision. You should use this skill to find out what results you're looking for and if it's a top priority. If you're giving surveys about your product, your priority is to gain feedback from your target audience and see if you're using the correct user personal for your marketing campaign.

## How to improve decision-making skills

Check out this guide to aid you in improving your decision-making skills:

1. Identify the situation.
2. Note potential solutions or actions.
3. List the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
4. Choose the decision you want to proceed with and measure the results.

### 1. Identify the situation

Problems can be recognized by any member of the organization. They should be reported to a department manager or human resources depending on the seriousness of it. The executive team may also be informed if it's tied to the long-term goals they set out. Schedule a meeting with all parties involved first before proceeding with informing the rest of the organization.

### 2. Note potential solutions or actions

Document all possible solutions for the problem in front of you and keep a record of them. List them in front of your team during a meeting, so they can actively participate in this process. They should also be sent an email to keep a record of it for themselves. Once you have the solutions listed, list potential action items to all team members to execute the decision agreed upon.

### 3. List the advantages and disadvantages of each option

Discuss the pros and cons extensively to see which options can proceed to the decision-making stage. Take your time and calculate the pros and cons wisely to see if it matches your goals and KPIs that measure its success.

### 4. Choose the decision you want to proceed with and measure the results

Think of the decision you make as one with a short and long-term impact. The good news is that you'll always learn from the decisions you make, so track the performance of this decision to align the outcome with the pros and cons you listed.

## How to highlight decision-making skills

Take a look at three ways you can showcase your decision-making skills on your resume:

### Use applicable verbs shown in the job description

Word association is key to properly display your skills to the hiring manager. Verbs like selected, decided and strategized and executed all exemplify a decision-maker. The caveat is that you need to expand on substance within the description to earn an interview.

### Underscore the metrics you earned in different roles

List the top-performing metrics at each position you held to get the interest of the recruiter. For instance, your last position in a leadership role made you responsible for managing a 10-person team and guided them through a six-step content creation process that boosted engagement by 20%.

### Check out examples from job posting websites

Since you're tailoring your resume to the company in your targeted industry, browse multiple job postings sites to compare the experiences of other applicants and see if you can showcase your decision-making skills in the same way.

**UNIT V**

**PRESENTATION SKILLS**

Poster Presentation

Oral Presentation – Individual Presentation, Team Presentation, Thematic Presentation

**EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION STRATEGIES**

**DEFINITION:** A structured, prepared and speech-based means of communicating information, ideas or arguments to a group of interested people in order to inform or persuade them is called a Presentation. The ability to make effective and memorable oral presentations is one the most important qualities you need to develop for a successful career.

OBJECTIVE: to inform, inspire, entertain, demonstrate, prove and to persuade.

DEFINING PURPOSE: It is to know your objective. The purpose of your presentation decides the content and style. Depending upon your purpose--- to inform, to analyze, or to persuade---you should be flexible enough to adjust to new inputs or unexpected reactions.

ANALYSING AUDIENCE AND LOCALE:

Since your audience is at the receiving end of your communication, the nature of your audience has a direct impact on your strategy of presentation. Prior knowledge of the following characteristics of your audience is hence necessary:

* Know your audience
* Their interests, likes or dislikes
* Attitude
* Size of the group
* Age range
* Gender distribution
* Linguistic or Cultural Backgrounds

Whatever may be the purpose of your presentation, give your audience an impression that you want to share your views with them. Make eye contact with your audience at the start of your presentation to assess whether they are excited, resistant, dull or hostile. Always begin with a smile and greet them in a pleasant tone. Work to achieve effectiveness in your communication by responding to audience feedback. Speak with confidence and conviction. Make your points crystal clear and easy to understand. Maintain an attitude of alertness and confidence. Encourage questions from audience. In addition to the audience, you need to know the following information about the location of your presentation:

* Size of the room
* Podium or a table
* Public address system
* Seating arrangement
* Room temperature and lighting

If you identify such problems in advance, you can either ask for alternative arrangements or modify your material, visual aids and style to suit the environment.

ORGANIZING CONTENT:

Arrange the contents of your presentation into three major parts namely: Introduction, Main

body and Conclusion. In other words: Say what you want to say; say it; then say what you have

already said.

Always prepare more material than required as this will help you feel confident. You may memorize the first few sentences so that you can move ahead easily. When you get on the stage, take your time to arrange your notes.

* Introduction--- The introduction comprises the porch or the opening statement, the aim, and

the layout. Depending upon the topic, you can use a question, a quotation, a statement, or an

anecdote to grab the attention of the audience. After the porch, state clearly and precisely the

purpose of your presentation. After giving a preview, make sure that you provide a smooth

transition to the main body of the speech.

* Main Body--- The main body supports your specific aim or purpose. Depending upon your topic you can chose from any of the following patterns to organize the main body:

a. Chronological (e.g. the changing face of the earth, history of sports etc.)

b. Categorical (e.g. the role of advertising, environmental protection etc.)

c. Cause and effect (e.g. impact of cinema on youth, internet- boon or bane etc)

d. Problem-Solution (e.g. population explosion, pollution etc)

You can support your arguments or ideas by providing examples, illustrations, statistics, testimony, analogy, or definitions. Do not include more than four or five main points. Summarize your points as you progress. Use transitional expressions to link your ideas and transit smoothly from one point to the next.

* Conclusion--- You can conclude your presentation by reviewing the main points. Give a clear

indication to the audience that you are concluding and remind them of the purpose. Do not wrap up in a hurry or add anything new in this part of your presentation.

PREPARING AN OUTLINE: An outline is a framework containing your main and sub points. It serves as a guide to show you the right path for your presentation. So, spending time in developing an outline never goes waste.

VISUAL AIDS: Visual aids like handouts, white boards, slides, charts, films etc., deliver its message more accurately and quickly than a verbal explanation. Ensure that your slides are well designed and professional. Do not use slides as a verbal crutch. Use the following tips:

a) Check the computer system and transfer your file to the hard disk

b) Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the operation of the slides.

c) Proofread for errors and rehearse

d) Keep a printed copy of your slides in case of computer malfunction

e) Do not read from your slides

f) Do not use too much of written matter

g) Do not use too many slides

* KINESICS: Kinesics is the study of body’s physical movements. It is called body language or nonverbal communication in simpler terms. It refers to all communication that occurs without the use of words (either spoken or written). It is concerned with body movements (Kinesics), space (Proxemics) and vocal features (paralinguistics). It is important to have an appropriate body language as it constitutes more than 65% of any oral communication. Kinesics consists of the following:

a) Personal Appearance: You are seen before you are heard. Therefore, you should be dressed

appositely. Appearance includes clothes, hair, jewelry, cosmetics etc. Expect appearance to be

a part of the message you communicate. You should be clean and well groomed, conforming to

the need of the occasion.

b) Posture: it refers to the way we hold ourselves when we stand, sit or walk. Be natural and

relaxed. Being comfortably upright and evenly distributing your weight are all aspects of posture

that communicate professionalism, confidence, attention to detail and organization. Be and

appear at ease. Neither remain static nor fidget.

c) Gesture: Gesture is the movement made by hands, arms, shoulders, head, and torso. They add value and enhance the impact of the message. Gestures should be well suited to the content and occasion. Gestures are more numerous than any forms of nonverbal communication. There are 7000,000 varied hand gestures alone. Gestures should be natural and spontaneous. Avoid irritating gestures like playing with a ring or pen, cracking knuckles etc

Facial Expressions: facial expressions can be used to aid or inhibit or complement your communication. Keep your expressions subtle. Smile.

d) Eye Contact: eyes are the windows of the soul. It is a direct and powerful form of nonverbal

communication. Look directly at the listeners to build rapport. Maintaining an eye contact of 3

to 5 seconds is recommended. Use your eyes to cull information and feedback.

* PROXEMICS: Proxemics is the study of physical space in interpersonal relations. Space is related to behavioural norms. The way people use space tells you a lot about them. In a professional setting space is used to signal power or status. Your gestures must be in accordance with the space available. Proxemics, like Kinesics has cultural variations for example a Latin American or a French is likely to stand closer while conversing than an American. Studies show that Americans unlike many other nationals, avoid close contact with one another in public places. Space is divided into four distinct zones:

1. Intimate: This zone is within one and a half feet. Other individuals come in this zone but for a very brief period eg to congratulate, shake hands to pat or to hug.

2. Personal: This zone is from one and a half feet to four feet. Close friends, family,

colleagues, peers etc fall in this category. This zone is a casual and relaxed space with

spontaneous communication.

3. Social: It lies between 4 feet to 12 feet. Relationships in this layer are more formal and official. People are more cautious and less emotional in their movements in this zone of communication

4. Public: this zone starts from 12 feet and may extend up to 30 feet or more. It is a formal event. Degree of detachment is very high. Public address system is used to communicate with the audience.

* PARALINGUISTICS: Paralinguistic features are nonverbal vocal cues related to your voice. It gives extra life to your speech delivery. Pay attention to the following characteristic nuances of voice:

a) Quality: characteristic that distinguishes one voice from the other depending upon its resonating mechanism

b) Volume: Loudness or softness of the voice. Vary your volume to make your voice audible and clear

c) Pace/Rate: number of words that you speak per minute. The normal rate is 120 -150 wpm. Vary your speaking pace to fit in a reasonable time. A well-paced message suggests enthusiasm and awareness of audience.

d) Pitch: refers to the number of vibrations per second of your voice. The rise and fall of the voice convey various emotions. Inflections (appropriate rise and fall) give life to your speech. A well-balanced pitch results in a clear and effective tone.

e) Articulation: Utter all the sounds in the words distinctly without slopping, slurring, chopping,

truncating or omitting them.

f) Pronunciation: Pronounce words correctly along with word stress.

g) Voice Modulation: It is the way we regulate, vary, and adjust the tone, pitch and volume of our voice to express emotions. This will embellish your voice and avoid sounding dull and

monotonous.

h) Pauses: It allows the listener to reflect on the message and guides you from one point to another. Be spontaneous and give natural pauses. Vocalized pauses like, uh, hmm, a, aah, ahem etc must be substituted by silent pauses. Strictly avoid phrases like, I mean, well, like, ok, got it, actually etc.

* CHRONEMICS: It is the study of how human beings communicate through their use of time. In the professional world time is a valuable commodity. Always be on time. You communicate both subtly and explicitly through time. Good timing is very crucial for a presentation. Stay within your time limits as a mark of courtesy and professionalism. Careful planning, effective visuals and diligent rehearsal therefore are necessary.

USEFUL TIPS AT A GLANCE: (SUMMARY)

* Practice is the key to acquire and perfect this skill
* Expect to feel nervous
* Always prepare more material than required
* Once on stage, take time to arrange your notes
* Take a few deep breaths before you start speaking
* Begin with a smile Memorize the first few sentences
* If you get the impression of disinterest, then change your tone
* Respond to the nonverbal feedback of your audience
* Anecdotes can work wonders for wandering attention of the audience
* Use visual aids effectively
* Speak with confidence and conviction
* Make your points clear and easy to understand
* Maintain an attitude of alertness
* Encourage questions from audience
* Anticipate problems
* Be yourself
* Make sure you are well- rehearsed

Icon

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**POSTER PRESENTATION**

For academic purposes a poster is a presentation of research information by an individual or members of a research team. Poster presentations have become a major format of communication at academic conferences and meetings. A research poster is a **visual communication tool** that allows you to present your research in a clear, concise, graphic format. It attracts attention, conveys information clearly, and initiates conversations, and can represent any stage of the research process.

***Layout and Design of a Poster:***

Font size and lettering

* Title should be legible from a distance of 5 -10 feet. Text should be legible from 1-2 feet.
* Try to establish a hierarchy of importance using the font size as follows:

        -Title:  Largest font size: - 65 -108 pts

        - Subtitles:  Next largest font size: 36- 45 pts

        - Body text:  18-27 pts

       - Avoid using all caps

* Font selection is critical.  *Sans serif fonts* work well for titles and labels because of the clarity and simplicity
* All text should be at least between 18-27 (Preferably 24) font size
* Refrain from using more than two font styles
* Use bold, italics or underline to emphasize a word.

Colors and white space

* Colors should be limited to 2 or 3 - If you choose to use multiple colors, use them in a consistent manner
* Use consistent spacing between each element of the poster.

Formatting

* Map out the sections of the poster. Consider using gray-filled boxes as a placeholders for

graphics or text.

* Most people read left to right and top to bottom therefore design your poster accordingly.
* Avoid the common mistake of including too much information.

Statistics and graphs (illustrations, photographs, charts, and graphs)

* Make sure the lines on any graphs are labeled correctly.
* Graphs and figures should be the same size for consistency.

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[**General format**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-SRWog-5Is)**:**

* Determine the one essential concept you would like to get across to the audience.
* Determine the size of the poster. Common dimensions for posters are 42 x 42 inches, 42 x 48 inches, or 42 x 52 inches.A picture containing diagram

  Description automatically generated

Preparing a poster will take as much time as you let it. Allocate your time wisely. If you have little experience making posters, it will take longer.

**A good way to start: Sketch it out!** (**or use a poster template; see Software and Hardware Options**)

Make a sketch of the poster. Arrange the contents in a series of 3, 4, or 5 columns. This will facilitate the flow of traffic past the poster.

Timeline

Description automatically generated

Place the elements of the poster in position:

* The title will appear across the top.
* A brief introduction will appear at the upper left.
* The conclusions will appear at the lower right.
* Methods and Results will fill the remaining space.

Chart, histogram

Description automatically generated

**The Title**

This part of the poster includes the title of the work, the authors names, & the institutional affiliations. Think BIG!

* The title should be readable from 5- 10 feet or sometimes even 15 - 20 feet away.
* If space permits, use first names for authors to facilitate interactions.
* Middle initials and titles are seldom necessary.
* Use abbreviations where possible.

**Sequencing contents**

A poster should use photos, figures, and tables to tell the story of the study. For clarity, present the information in a sequence that is easy to follow:

* Determine a logical sequence for the material you will be presenting.
* Organize that material into sections, e.g., Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusions, &, if necessary, Literature Cited. (Avoid using too many citations. If only a few are used, a literature cited section is unnecessary. Instead, cite as follows in the text:  Clinton, B. 1993. Auk 107:234-246.).
* You may wish to use numbers to help sequence sections of the poster.
* Arrange the material into columns.
* The poster should not rely upon your verbal explanation to link together the various portions.

Timeline

Description automatically generated

**Edit Ruthlessly!**

**There is almost always too much text in a poster.**

   1. **Posters primarily are visual presentations**; the text should support the graphics.

Text, whiteboard

Description automatically generated  
Source: [http://www.biology.lsa.umich.edu/research/labs/ktosney/file/PostersHome.html](http://www.biology.lsa.umich.edu/research.labs/ktosney/file/PostersHome.html)

   2. Look critically at the layout. Some poster 'experts' suggest that if there is about 20-25% text, 40-45% graphics and 30-40% empty space, you are doing well.

   3. **Use active voice**when writing the text.

   4. Delete all redundant references and filler phrases (such as see Figure 1).

   5. An abstract may not be necessary. **If you've kept the amount of text on your poster to a minimum, an abstract is likely redundant.**

   The poster is not a publication of record, so excessive detail about methods, or vast tables of data are not necessary. Such material can be discussed with interested persons individually during or after the session or presented in a handout.

**Illustrations**

   The success of a poster directly relates to the clarity of the illustrations and tables.

* **Self-explanatory graphics should dominate the poster.**
* A minimal amount of text should supplement the graphic materials.
* Use empty space between poster elements to differentiate and accentuate these elements.
* Graphic materials should be visible easily from a minimum distance of 6 feet.
* Restrained use of 2 - 3 colors for emphasis is valuable; overuse is not.

Timeline

Description automatically generated

**Show no mercy when editing visual materials!**

* Use short sentences, simple words, and bullets to illustrate discrete points.
* Remove all non-essential information from graphs and tables.
* **If possible, label data lines in graphs directly**, using large type & color.
* **Lines in illustrations should be larger than normal.** Use contrast and colors for emphasis.
* Use colors to distinguish different data groups in graphs. Avoid using patterns or open bars in histograms.

**Poster text**

**Double-space all text,**using left-justification; text with even left sides and jagged right sides is easiest to read. **The text should be large enough to be read easily from at least 6 feet away.**

Diagram, text

Description automatically generated

For section headings (e.g., Introduction), use bold, maybe a font size of about 36-42. For supporting text (e.g., text within each section & figure captions), use font sizes of about 24-28 (bold, if appropriate). In general, use font sizes proportional to importance:

* largest font size- Title
* next largest font size - Section headings
* medium font size - Supporting material
* smallest font size - Details

A picture containing timeline

Description automatically generated

**Keep in mind that san serif fonts (having characters without curliques or other embellishments) are easiest to read.** Finally, be consistent. Choose one font and then use it throughout the poster. Add emphasis by using boldface, underlining, or color; italics are difficult to read.                                             .

**The Poster's Background**

The choice of a background color is up to you. However, softer colors (pastels & greys) may work best as a background - they are easiest to view for hours at a time, and offer the best contrast for text, graphic, and photographic elements.


Use a colored background to unify your poster:

   1. Muted colors, or shades of gray, are best for the background. Use more intense colors as borders or for emphasis but be conservative - overuse of color is distracting.

   2. Two to three related background colors (Methods, Results, & Discussion) will unify the poster.

 Color can enhance the hues or contrast of photographs:

   1. Use a light background with darker photos; a dark background with lighter photos.

   2. Use a neutral background (gray) to emphasize color in photos; a white background to reduce the impact of colored photos.

   3. Most poster sessions are held in halls lit with harsh fluorescent light. If exact colors are important to the data, balance those colors for use with fluorescent lighting. Also, all colors will be intensified; bright (saturated) colors may become unpleasent to view.

**Miscellaneous comments**

* Because a poster is a visual presentation, try to find ways to show what was done - use schematic diagrams, arrows, and other strategies to direct the visual attention of the viewer, rather than explaining it all using text alone (i.e., like the poster with way too much text below).

A close up of a newspaper

Description automatically generated

* Design the poster to address one central question. State the question clearly in the poster, then use your discussion time with individuals to expand or expound upon issues surrounding that central theme.
* Provide an explicit take-home message.
* Summarize implications and conclusions briefly, and in user-friendly language.
* Give credit where it is due. Have an acknowledgments section, in smaller font size (maybe 14 - 18 point), where you acknowledge contributors and funding organizations.
* Vary the size and spacing of the poster sections to add visual interest, but do so in moderation.
* Do not wander too far away from your poster during the session; be available for discussion!

**Software and Hardware Options:**

Posters can be generated and printed as one large document using a variety of software packages such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Adobe Photoshop, or Canvas. Large-format printers come in various sizes. Our department's printer can handle posters up to 42 inches wide (& length is flexible).

Posters are a key component of communicating your science and an important element in a successful scientific career. Posters, while delivering the same high-quality science, offer a different medium from either oral presentations or published papers, and should be treated accordingly. Posters should be considered a snapshot of your work intended to engage colleagues in a dialog about the work, or, if you are not present, to be a summary that will encourage the reader to want to learn more. Many a lifelong collaboration has begun in front of a poster board. Here are ten simple rules for maximizing the return on the time-consuming process of preparing and presenting an effective poster.

### Rule 1: Define the Purpose

The purpose will vary depending on the status and nature of the work being presented, as well as the intent. Some posters are designed to be used again and again; for example, those making conference attendees aware of a shared resource. Others will likely be used once at a conference and then be relegated to the wall in the laboratory. Before you start preparing the poster, ask yourself the following questions: What do you want the person passing by your poster to do? Engage in a discussion about the content? Learn enough to go off and want to try something for themselves? Want to collaborate? All the above, or none of the above but something else? Style your poster accordingly.

### Rule 2: Sell Your Work in Ten Seconds

Some conferences will present hundreds of posters; you will need to fight for attention. The first impressions of your poster, and to a lesser extent what you might say when standing in front of it, are crucial. It is analogous to being in an elevator and having a few seconds to peak someone's interest before they get off. The sad truth is that you have to sell your work. One approach is to pose your work as addressing a decisive question, which you then address as best you can. Once you have posed the question, which may well also be the motivation for the study, the focus of your poster should be on addressing that question in a clear and concise way.

### Rule 3: The Title Is Important

The title is a good way to sell your work. It may be the only thing the conference attendee sees before they reach your poster. The title should make them want to come and visit. The title might pose a decisive question, define the scope of the study, or hint at a new finding. Above all, the title should be short and comprehensible to a broad audience. The title is your equivalent of a newspaper headline—short, sharp, and compelling.

### Rule 4: Poster Acceptance Means Nothing

Do not take the acceptance of a poster as an endorsement of your work. Conferences need attendees to be financially viable. Many attendees who are there on grants cannot justify attending a conference unless they present. There are a small number of speaking slots compared with attendees. How to solve the dilemma? Enter posters; this way everyone can present. In other words, your poster has not been endorsed, just accepted. To get endorsement from your peers, do good science and present it well on the poster.

### Rule 5: Many of the Rules for Writing a Good Paper Apply to Posters, Too

Identify your audience and provide the appropriate scope and depth of content. If the conference includes non-specialists, cater to them. Just as the abstract of a paper needs to be a succinct summary of the motivation, hypothesis to be tested, major results, and conclusions, so does your poster.

### Rule 6: Good Posters Have Unique Features Not Pertinent to Papers

The amount of material presented in a paper far outweighs what is presented on a poster. A poster requires you to distill the work, yet not lose the message or the logical flow. Posters need to be viewed from a distance but can take advantage of your presence. Posters can be used as a distribution medium for copies of associated papers, supplementary information, and other handouts. Posters allow you to be more speculative. Often only the titles or at most the abstracts of posters can be considered published; that is, widely distributed. Mostly, they may never be seen again. There is the opportunity to say more than you would in the traditional literature, which for all intents and purposes will be part of the immutable record. Take advantage of these unique features.

### Rule 7: Layout and Format Are Critical

Pop musician Keith Richards put the matter well in an interview with Der Spiegel: “If you are a painter, then the most important thing is the bare canvas. A good painter will never cover all the space but will always leave some blank. My canvas is silence.” Your canvas as poster presenter is also white space. Guide the passerby's eyes from one succinct frame to another in a logical fashion from beginning to end. Unlike the literature, which is linear by virtue of one page following another, the reader of a poster is free to wander over the pages as if they are tacked to the poster board in a random order. Guide the reader with arrows, numbering, or whatever else makes sense in getting them to move from one logical step to another. Try to do this guiding in an unusual and eye-catching way. Look for appropriate layouts in the posters of others and adopt some of their approaches. Finally, never use less than a size 24-point font, and make sure the main points can be read at eye level.

### Rule 8: Content Is Important, but Keep It Concise

Everything on the poster should help convey the message. The text must conform to the norms of sound scientific reporting: clarity, precision of expression, and economy of words. The latter is particularly important for posters because of their inherent space limitations. Use of first-rate pictorial material to illustrate a poster can sometimes transform what would otherwise be a bewildering mass of complex data into a coherent and convincing story. One carefully produced chart or graph often says more than hundreds of words. Use graphics for “clear portrayal of complexity” , not to impress (and possibly bewilder) viewers with complex artistry. Allow a figure to be viewed in both a superficial and a detailed way. For example, a large table might have bold swaths of color indicating relative contributions from different categories, and the smaller text in the table would provide gritty details for those who want them. Likewise, a graph could provide a bold trend line (with its interpretation clearly and concisely stated), and also have many detailed points with error bars. Have a clear and obvious set of conclusions—after the abstract, this is where the passerby's eyes will wander. Only then will they go to the results, followed by the methods.

### Rule 9: Posters Should Have Your Personality

A poster is a different medium from a paper, which is conventionally dry and impersonal. Think of your poster as an extension of your personality. Use it to draw the passerby to take a closer look or to want to talk to you. Scientific collaboration often starts for reasons other than the shared scientific interest, such as a personal interest. A photo of you on the poster not only helps someone find you at the conference when you are not at the poster, it can also be used to illustrate a hobby or an interest that can open a conversation.

### Rule 10: The Impact of a Poster Happens Both During and After the Poster Session

When the considerable effort of making a poster is done, do not blow it on presentation day by failing to have the poster achieve maximum impact. This requires the right presenter–audience interaction. Work to get a crowd by being engaging; one engaged viewer will attract others. Don't badger people, let them read. Be ready with Rule 2. Work all the audience at once, do not leave visitors waiting for your attention. Make eye contact with every visitor.

Make it easy for a conference attendee to contact you afterward. Have copies of relevant papers on hand as well as copies of the poster on standard-sized paper. For work that is more mature, have the poster online and make the URL available as a handout. Have your e-mail and other demographics clearly displayed. Follow up with people who come to the poster by having a signup sheet.

The visitor is more likely to remember you than the content of your poster. Make yourself easy to remember. As the host of the work presented on the poster, be attentive, open, and curious, and self-confident but never arrogant and aggressive. Leave the visitors space and time—they can “travel” through your poster at their own discretion and pace. If a visitor asks a question, talk simply and openly about the work. This is likely your opportunity to get feedback on the work before it goes to publication. Better to be tripped up in front of your poster than by a reviewer of the manuscript.

Good posters and their presentations can improve your reputation, both within and outside your working group and institution, and may also contribute to a certain scientific freedom. Poster prizes count when peers look at your resume.

These ten rules are used in preparing better posters. For a more humorous view on what not to do in preparing a poster, see, and for further information, including the opportunity to practice your German, see

# Ways to Improve Your Presentation Skills

I've been doing a lot of presenting recently, and I have no problem admitting that it's tough. For those not born with natural eloquence, public speaking can be remarkably nerve-racking. But I’m getting a lot better!

One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned over the last few years is that to be a [great public speaker](https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2015/07/17/great-public-speakers), it’s key to develop a personal speaking style. Since I know I’m not the most eloquent speaker in the world, I make up for it by packing my presentations with enthusiasm, unique/proprietary data, and tons of useful content as well as plenty of dumb jokes.

We can't all deliver the next Gettysburg Address, but there are lots of small things you can do prior to your presentation that will help calm your nerves and set you up for a [better presentation](https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2016/03/15/awesome-marketing-presentations). Here are my **20 best tips to improve your presentation skills**.

## **1. Practice!**

Naturally, you'll want to rehearse your presentation multiple times. While it can be difficult for those with packed schedules to spare time to practice, it's essential if you want to deliver a rousing presentation. I’m famous around the office for staying up late the night before a big presentation, practicing over and over. If you really want to sound great, write out your speech rather than taking chances winging it – if you get nervous about speaking, a script is your best friend.

Try to practice where you'll be delivering your talk. Some acting strategists suggest rehearsing lines in various positions – standing up, sitting down, with arms open wide, on one leg, while sitting on the toilet, etc. (OK, that last one may be optional.) The more you mix up your position and setting, the more comfortable you'll feel with your speech. Do a practice run for a friend or colleague, or try recording your presentation and playing it back to evaluate which areas need work. Listening to recordings of your past talks can clue you in to bad habits you may be unaware of, as well as inspiring the age-old question: "Is that what I really sound like?"

## **2. Transform Nervous Energy Into Enthusiasm.**

It may sound strange, but I'll often down an energy drink and blast hip-hop music in my earphones before presenting. Why? It pumps me up and helps me turn jitters into focused enthusiasm. Studies have shown that an enthusiastic speech can win out over an eloquent one, and since I'm not exactly the Winston Churchill of presenters, I make sure that I'm as enthusiastic and energetic as possible before going on stage. Of course, individuals respond differently to caffeine overload, so know your own body before guzzling those monster energy drinks.

## **3. Attend Other Presentations.**

If you're giving a talk as part of a conference, try to attend some of the earlier talks by other presenters to scope out their presentation [skills](https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2020/02/17/digital-marketing-skills) and get some context. This shows respect for your fellow presenters while also giving you a chance to feel out the audience. What's the mood of the crowd? Are folks in the mood to laugh or are they a bit more stiff? Are the presentations more strategic or tactical in nature? Another speaker may also say something that you can play off of later in your own presentation.

## **4. Arrive Early.**

It's always best to allow yourself plenty of time to settle in before your talk. Extra time ensures you won't be late (even if Google Maps shuts down) and gives you plenty of time to get adapted to your presentation space.

## **5. Adjust to Your Surroundings.**

The more adjusted to your environment you are, the more comfortable you'll feel. Make sure to spend some in the room where you will be delivering your presentation. If possible, practice with the microphone and lighting, make sure you understand the seating and be aware of any distractions potentially posed by the venue (e.g., a noisy road outside).

## **6. Meet and Greet.**

Do your best to chat with people before your presentation. Talking with audiences makes you seem more likeable and approachable. Ask event attendees questions and take in their responses. They may even give you some inspiration to weave into your talk.

## **7. Use Positive Visualization.**

Whether or not you’re a Zen master, know that plenty of studies have proven the effectiveness of positive visualization. When we imagine a positive outcome to a scenario in our mind, it's more likely to play out the way we envision.

Instead of thinking "I'm going to be terrible out there" and visualizing yourself throwing up mid-presentation, imagine yourself getting tons of laughs while presenting with the enthusiasm of Jimmy Fallon and the poise of Audrey Hepburn (the charm of George Clooney wouldn't hurt either). Positive thoughts can be incredibly effective – give them a shot.

## **8. Remember That Most Audiences Are Sympathetic.**

One of the hardest fears to shake when speaking in public is that the audience is secretly waiting to laugh at your missteps or mistakes. Fortunately, this isn’t the case in most presentations.

The audience wants to see you succeed. In fact, many people have a fear of public speaking, so even if the audience seems indifferent, the chances are pretty good that most people listening to your presentation can relate to how nerve-racking it can be. If you start to feel nervous, remind yourself that the audience gets it, and wants to see you nail it.

## **9. Take Deep Breaths.**

The go-to advice for jitters has truth to it. When we're nervous, our muscles tighten--you may even catch yourself holding your breath. Instead, go ahead and take those deep breaths to get oxygen to your brain and relax your body.

## **10. Smile.**

Smiling increases endorphins, replacing anxiety with calm and making you feel good about your presentation. Smiling also exhibits confidence and enthusiasm to the crowd. And this tip works even if you're [doing a webinar](https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2014/08/26/how-to-do-a-webinar) and people can't see you.

Just don't overdo it – no one enjoys the maniacal clown look.

Don’t be like this guy.

## **11. Exercise**.

Exercise earlier in the day prior to your presentation to boost endorphins, which will help alleviate anxiety. Better pre-register for that Zumba class!

## **12. Work on Your Pauses.**

When you're nervous, it's easy to speed up your presentation and end up talking too fast, which in turn causes you to run out of breath, get more nervous, and panic! Ahh!

Don't be afraid to slow down and use pauses in your speech. Pausing can be used to emphasize certain points and to help your talk feel more conversational. If you feel yourself losing control of your pacing, just take a nice pause and keep cool.

## **13. Don’t Try to Cover Too Much Material.**

Yes, your presentations should be full of useful, insightful, and actionable information, but that doesn’t mean you should try to condense a vast and complex topic into a 10-minute presentation.

Knowing what to include, and what to leave out, is crucial to the success of a good presentation. I’m not suggesting you skimp when it comes to data or including useful slides (some of my webinars have featured 80+ slides), but I am advocating for a rigorous editing process. If it feels too off-topic, or is only marginally relevant to your main points, leave it out. You can always use the excess material in another presentation.

## **14. Actively Engage the Audience.**

People love to talk and make their opinions heard, but the nature of presentations can often seem like a one-sided proposition. It doesn’t have to be, though.

Asking the audience what they think, inviting questions, and other means of welcoming audience participation can boost engagement and make attendees feel like a part of a conversation. It also makes you, the presenter, seem much more relatable. Consider starting with a poll or Survey. Don’t be put off by unexpected questions – instead, see them as an opportunity to give your audience what they want.

## **15. Be Entertaining.**

Even if your presentation is packed with useful information, if your delivery bombs, so will your session.

I find that including some jokes and light-hearted slides is a great way to help the audience (and myself) feel more comfortable, especially when presenting them with a great deal of information. However, it’s important to maintain a balance – after all, you’re not performing a stand-up routine, and people didn’t come to your presentation with the sole intention of being entertained. That said, don’t be afraid to inject a little humor into your talk. If you’re not sure about whether a presentation is “too much,” run through it for a couple of friends and ask them to tell it to you straight.

## **16. Admit You Don’t Have All the Answers.**

Very few presenters are willing to publicly concede that they don’t know everything because they feel it undermines their authority. However, since we all know that nobody can ever know everything about a given topic, admitting so in a presentation can improve your credibility.

If someone asks a question that stumps you, it’s okay to admit it. This can also increase your credibility with the audience, as it demonstrates that, no matter how knowledgeable a person might be, we’re all learning, all the time. Nobody expects you to be an omniscient oracle of forbidden knowledge – they just want to learn from you.

## **17. Use a Power Stance.**

Practicing confident body language is another way to boost your pre-presentation jitters. When your body is physically demonstrating confidence, your mind will follow suit. While you don't want to be jutting out your chest in an alpha gorilla pose all afternoon (somebody enjoyed Dawn of the Planet of the Apes a bit too much), studies have shown that using power stances a few minutes before giving a talk (or heading to a big interview) creates a lasting sense of confidence and assurance. Whatever you do, don't sit--sitting is passive. Standing or walking a bit will help you harness those stomach bats (isn't that more appropriate than butterflies?). Before you go on stage, strike your best Power Ranger stance, and hold your head high!

## **18. Drink Water & Don't Fight the Fear.**

Dry mouth is a common result of anxiety. Prevent cottonmouth blues by staying hydrated and drinking plenty of water before your talk (just don't forget to hit the bathroom before starting). Keep a bottle of water at arm's reach while presenting in case you get dry mouth while chatting up a storm. It also provides a solid object to hurl at potential hecklers. (That'll show 'em.)

Accept your fear rather than trying to fight it. Getting yourself worked up by wondering if people notice your nervousness will only intensify your anxiety. Remember, those jitters aren't all bad – harness that nervous energy and transform it into positive enthusiasm and you'll be golden. We salute you, O Captain! My Captain!