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Effective Communication and the STAR Method

You will learn how to improve your written, verbal, and non-verbal communication skills.

What you will learn

At the core of the lesson

You will learn how to:

- Improve your written, verbal, and non-verbal communication
- Give effective presentations
- Use the situation, task, actions, and tesults (STAR) method to describe and understand a professional experience

Key terms

- Verbal and oral communication
- Written and non-verbal communication
- Congruence
- Presentation outline
- Situation, task, actions, and results (STAR) method

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1. Verbal communication means using language to exchange messages.
2. Oral communication is a form of verbal communication. It refers to the use of speech (spoken language) to send messages.
3. Written communication is a form of verbal communication. It refers to sending messages in writing.
4. Non-verbal communication is communication without the use of language. For example, it includes communicating with icons, eye contact, or body language.
5. Congruence means sending the same message in both verbal and non-verbal communication.
6. A presentation outline is a plan that summarizes what you want to say. It enables you to organize your speaking points in a logical order.
7. The STAR method is a tool for self-reflection. The acronym stands for *situation, task, actions, and results.*

Types of communication

Non-verbal communication

- *Non-verbal communication* is communication without the use of language.

- There's no agreement about the ratio of non-verbal communication to verbal communication, but it's generally accepted that communication is largely non-verbal.

- Thus, non-verbal communication is essential for building successful workplace relationships. Keep in mind that facial expression, posture, and tone of voice help determine how others understand your message.

- An important consideration –
    - *Congruence*: Make sure that your posture, facial expression, and tone match your verbal message. For example, if you're excited, you could express your excitement through gestures or facial expressions.

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Congruence means sending the same message in both verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

Types of communication, continued

Oral communication

- *Oral communication* is the use of speech to send messages

- In a professional environment, most oral communication takes place in conversations between one or more team members.

- Thus, it's important to –
  - Listen carefully and confirm whether you understood someone correctly.
  - Ask questions to get information and to show an interest in someone's work.
  - Show appreciation. Congratulate team members with their great ideas or thank them for their help or input.

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Oral communication is a form of verbal communication. It is the use of speech to send messages.

Types of communication, continued

Written communication

- *Written communication* is the sending of messages in writing.

- The digital age transformed how people communicate professionally. Written communication is now the most common type of professional communication. Email messages, reports, contracts, websites, and instant messages are all types of written communication.

- A few ways to improve your written communication –
    - Plan before you start writing. Determine what you want the reader to take away from your message and keep that in mind as you write.
    - Be straightforward. Write your key point on the top of the document.
    - Less is more. The message should be clear by using only as much words as necessary.
    - Review before you send. Pay attention to content, grammar, and punctuation.

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Written communication is a form of verbal communication. It is the sending of messages in writing.

Types of communication: Pair activity

What are do's and don'ts in professional communication?

Each type of communication has its own *etiquette*, or set of implied rules about what you can do and what you can't do. For example, when you participate in an online meeting, you are expected to introduce yourself so that everyone knows who's in the meeting session.

- Pair activity.
- Time: 15 minutes.
- Activity
    - Work in pairs and note two do's and 2 don'ts for the following communication types (you can use a search engine):
        » Online meeting
        » Phone call
        » Email
- Evaluation
    - Write down your results. You will discuss them briefly as a class.

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After explaining the pair activity, form learner pairs.
Evaluate the activity by collecting all the sticky notes. You can place the sticky notes on a whiteboard and discuss them briefly.

Verbal communication: Giving effective presentations

Giving effective presentations

Three-step process

Giving a presentation can be approached as a process.

1. Planning your presentation
   - Decide what your main topic is and you want to say about it.
   - Plan your presentation by making a list of key terms.

2. Writing your presentation
   - You can use a framework as a way to structure your writing.

3. Establishing a presence
   - Use your personality and body language to connect with your audience.

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A framework as a writing tool. It's explained on slide #11.

Giving effective presentations, continued

Planning your presentation

Select a topic

- If possible, select a topic that's interesting both for the audience and for yourself. It will be much easier to deliver a presentation that the audience finds interesting.

Analyze your audience

- Learn more about the audience you'll be presenting to. It's a good idea to have information about the backgrounds and interests of the audience so that you have an idea of what they might expect from your presentation.

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Giving effective presentations, continued

Planning your presentation

- Define the objective of your presentation

- Write the objective of your presentation in one sentence. The objective must describe exactly what you want the audience to learn from your presentation.

- Use the objective statement as a way to maintain your focus as you research and develop the presentation.

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Giving effective presentations

Writing your presentation

- Start with an outline or framework –
  - Introduction
  - Main body
    - » Point A
    - » Point B
    - » Point C
  - Conclusion
  - Questions and answers (Q and A)
- Say lines out loud as you write.
- Build in repetition of your core ideas.

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Giving effective presentations, continued

Establishing a presence

- Confirm that all the required equipment works. For example, your laptop, microphone, projector, and so on.

- Take a moment to…. breath and move around on stage. Try to get comfortable with your position in front of the audience.

- Make eye contact with your audience.

- Present yourself with a loud and clear voice.

- Don't forget to smile!

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STAR method

STAR method

A tool to describe and understand professional experiences

- **Situation**
  - Describe the situation that you were in. For example, the second day in class while working on operating systems

- **Task**
  - What goal were you working toward, or which task was given?

- **Actions**
  - What specific steps did you take, or what was your contribution? Focus on your input.

- **Results**
  - Describe the outcome of your actions. What happened?

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Each experience in a class or in a professional environment is an opportunity to learn. Reflecting on experiences helps you to learn from them. The STAR method is a tool that helps you to reflect on and learn from experiences.

STAR method, continued

An example

- **Situation:** As an AWS student, I was in class. The instructor gave us an assignment.

- **Task:** We needed to prepare and give a presentation about the basics of switching, routing, and using gateways. We were required to use slides, and the presentation needed to contain only correct and accurate information.

- **Actions:** First, we gathered information individually. Then, we exchanged information that we found. Our next step was to create an outline of the presentation by using key terms. Then, we assigned the key terms to each other. Each of us prepared a section of the presentation, which contained our respective key terms.

- **Results:** The presentation went well. I was able to describe the information that we prepared. I was also able to answer some questions from the teacher and rest of the class.

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STAR method: Individual activity

Describe a classroom experience using STAR

Reflecting on how you worked on a task can help you understand how you can perform tasks more efficiently in the future.

- Individual activity
- Time: 15 minutes
- Activity
    - Use the STAR method to describe an experience that you had working on a task.
- Evaluation
    - Two learners will be asked to present their reflection.

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Appoint two learners to present their results to the class.

Giving presentations

Group activity

Each group will give a formal presentation on a technical subject that was introduced in week 1 (for example, cloud computing).

- Preparation time: 30 minutes
- Presentation time: 10 minutes per presentation
- Criteria
  - The presentation must contain correct information.
  - You will use PowerPoint or Keynote slides. Email the slides to your instructor.
  - The presentation will help the audience to increase their knowledge about the subject.
  - The presentation must be the result of group collaboration.
- Evaluation
  - After each presentation, the class will give feedback on the group's presentation skills.

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1. Form groups of five learners.
2. For evaluation, ask the class for feedback on *tops* (what went well) and *tips* (what can be improved).
3. The evaluation should take 5 minutes per group.