

Chapter

7

Verbal and Written Communications

Terms to Know

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| adjective | noun |
| adverb | paragraph |
| capitalization | parts of speech |
| complex sentence | preposition |
| compound sentence | pronoun |
| conjunction | proxemics |
| consonants | punctuation |
| contraction | simple sentence |
| grammar | verbal communication |
| interjection | verb |
| nonverbal communication | vowels |

Chapter Objectives

- Describe the role that verbal communication skills play in the workplace.
- Identify potential communication barriers and challenges.
- Describe how to take a complete telephone message.
- Describe strategies for giving a successful presentation.
- Discuss some general rules for attending and holding a meeting.
- Discuss the significance of nonverbal communication.
- Define *proxemics* and discuss the types and significance of personal territory.
- Explain the importance of active listening and the barriers that can occur.
- Explain and demonstrate the importance of mastering the elements of effective writing, including recognizing the parts of speech, and the use of proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Reinforce your learning with additional online resources

- **Practice** vocabulary with flashcards and interactive games
- **Assess** with posttests and image labeling
- **Expand** with activities and animations

www.g-wlearning.com/healthsciences



Study on the Go

Use a mobile device to practice vocabulary terms and review with self-assessment quizzes.

www.m.g-wlearning.com



If you chart your daily activities, you will find that much of your time is spent communicating in some way, be it verbal, nonverbal, or written communication. Communication skills affect your ability to be understood and to understand others, establish positive relationships, and perform your job well. For some people, communicating with others is one of the biggest challenges they face in their jobs. This chapter will provide you with tips and tools for improving your communication skills.

Being a good communicator is important in both personal and professional aspects of life. Being able to communicate clearly with patients and coworkers is vital in the healthcare industry. Miscommunication can lead to serious physical, and even legal, consequences. When you become a healthcare worker, you *must* be able to communicate precisely and effectively. One tip to remember is that a simple smile can improve your ability to communicate. A smile can reassure an anxious patient or welcome a new coworker on their first day (Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1 A smile enhances communication.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication, also known as *speaking*, is an important form of communication in a healthcare facility. During the course of a work day most healthcare workers spend time talking with coworkers, supervisors, managers, or patients. Planning and organizing your thoughts is a critical part of verbal communication. This involves thinking about who will receive the message and what you want to convey. Making notes before a phone call, having an agenda for a meeting, or researching information you wish to give to someone in advance are all methods you can use to ensure clear communication.

According to motivational speaker and entrepreneur Pat Croce, effective communication involves much more than choosing the right words. Mr. Croce recommends five rules to incorporate while conveying a message, known as the *5 Cs of Communication*:

1. **Clear.** Speak in black-and-white terms to clearly state your message. Allow questions from the recipient of your communication to ensure you are understood.
2. **Concise.** Do not ramble. Your important message can be lost in the nonessential information you include—get to the point.
3. **Consistent.** Make the message consistent at all times. If you are telling your supervisor about an incident that you have observed, do not change your story to make it more dramatic. Report your findings in a consistent, accurate manner. Do not tell one person what you saw and later change your observations as you retell the story to another person.
4. **Credible.** People can tell if your words are insincere—make sure your message is real. Do not heap praise on someone just because you want to win their favor. It is important that you mean what you say.

verbal communication
expressing your thoughts out loud; speaking

5. **Courteous.** Words and phrases such as “hello,” “thank you,” “please,” “excuse me,” and “I’m sorry” are easy, effective ways to demonstrate respect. Being courteous when you communicate sets the right tone and attitude. Courtesy is mandatory in the workplace, even if you are interacting with someone you dislike. Keep your personal feelings out of your work interactions.

Having an open mind during verbal communication is also very important. Making assumptions about what someone is going to say before he or she speaks might cause you to miss the essence of the message. If you have had disagreements with the speaker, you might negatively translate a message into your assumption about what you are hearing. Keeping an open mind and listening respectfully without emotion is critical to open, clear communication.

Did You Know?

Listening and Attention

Several studies have shown that 20 minutes is about the maximum amount of time listeners can stay attentive (Figure 7.2). After 20 minutes, listeners’ attention levels begin to drop. Speaking is more stimulating than listening, so although it may be exciting to talk for long periods of time, chances are your listeners may be having a hard time staying focused.



Figure 7.2 When a speaker sees that the audience is being inattentive, he may call for a break.

The most successful communicators in the healthcare profession form positive relationships with coworkers and patients through mutual respect and professionalism (Figure 7.3). Having a bad day is no excuse for using an irritated tone when speaking with a patient or coworker. Personal problems should not be brought into the workplace.



Figure 7.3 A medical professional can put a patient at ease with a warm greeting.

It is also important to be cognizant of how patients wish to be addressed. Some patients, especially the elderly, may feel disrespected if you call them by their first names. To be safe, use the titles Mrs., Mr., or Ms. and their last name when speaking to adult patients. They may ask you to call them by their first name, which is acceptable with permission. Pet names like “Honey” or “Sweetie” could offend many patients who feel you are talking down to them.

When addressing your patient, speak clearly and use a tone that can be easily heard. Shouting or mumbling will not help get your point across. Careless slang expressions, especially vulgarities, are also unacceptable when dealing with patients.



Check Your Understanding

In order to comply with HIPAA regulations, you should not call patients by their full names in the reception area. In the interest of confidentiality, use their first or last name only. For example, when addressing a patient in front of other patients, use Mr. Mercer rather than John Mercer.

Some people have a tendency to be sarcastic, or use words that mean the opposite of what you feel, to express frustration or in an attempt to be funny. Sarcasm must be avoided with patients and coworkers. Sarcasm adds a biting edge to words and can be hurtful or misunderstood.

Verbal Communication Challenges

Anything that interferes with communication can lead to a misinterpretation of your message. However, various factors can interfere specifically with your ability to communicate verbally with your patients. Patients such as the hearing impaired, some intellectually disabled individuals, or a patient who does not speak your language pose challenges for verbal communication, possibly requiring the use of a translator. Speaking may be difficult for a patient who has suffered a stroke or stutters badly.

In addition to these considerations, communication must be geared toward a patient’s ability to understand. This often means substituting basic terms for challenging medical terms that could confuse some people. Even if a coworker is translating for you, you can’t assume that a fellow employee unfamiliar with your specific field will understand your use of technical terms. You may want to simplify your language for both the translator and the patient.

Hearing Impaired Patients

Communicating with someone who is hearing impaired presents special challenges. If you have the opportunity, learning American Sign Language (ASL) would be valuable as a healthcare facility employee (Figure 7.4). However, many deaf people can read lips. If this is the case with your hearing-impaired patient, speak slowly and face the patient in a well-lighted area.

When a hearing-impaired patient is accompanied by an ASL interpreter, your conversation is still with the patient, not the interpreter. Face your patient and speak directly with him or her. Speak in a normal tone of voice, slowly, and clearly. People often speak loudly when talking to a deaf person, but this tendency is unhelpful and should be avoided.

Think It Through

Have you had an experience communicating with a hearing-impaired individual? If so, what methods have worked for you to ensure the hearing-impaired person understands what you are saying?

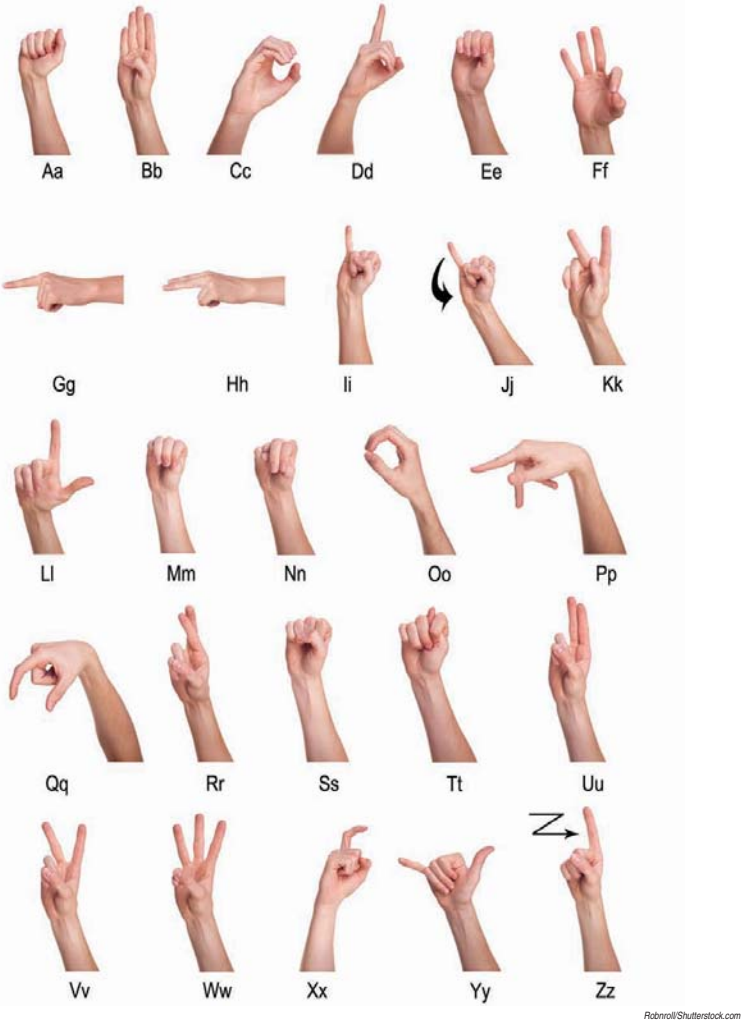


Figure 7.4 The ASL alphabet

Visually Impaired Patients

Patients with visual impairments present unique communication challenges. Verbal communication is one of the main ways a visually challenged person communicates with the outside world. When working with a visually impaired person, you must hone your verbal skills so you are able to communicate successfully with your patient.

Many blind patients will be accompanied by someone who will help them adjust to the environment. However, the patient may be left with you temporarily, perhaps in a treatment room. Introduce yourself and address the patient by name, so he or she knows you are addressing them and not another person in the room. If the patient is standing, guide the patient to a chair by placing his or her hand on the chair. Remember to ask the patient what assistance is needed instead of assuming what is needed.

Ensure that the patient is included in discussions about procedures and medical plans. Visually impaired individuals can still hear and understand what is being said. Be sure to inform the patient what you are doing throughout each step of the procedure. For instance, you do not want the patient to be startled when you apply a blood pressure cuff. Let the patient know what you are about to do by saying, “Now I’m going to place the cuff around your arm.”

Visually impaired patients may have a service animal (Figure 7.5). The animal must stay with the patient throughout the entire visit, including when the patient visits other facilities. Remember that the service animal is working and should not be petted or otherwise distracted.



Figure 7.5 Do not distract a service dog who is accompanying a visually impaired patient.

Mentally Ill or Incompetent Patients

Mental illness may affect a person's judgment, making them incompetent, or unqualified to make decisions on their own. Most patients who have a mental illness that interferes with their judgment will be accompanied by a legal guardian. When communicating with someone who is mentally ill or incompetent, you should speak to the patient first and then to the guardian. Repeat any instructions you may give the patient, making sure that the guardian understands as well. You might also want to demonstrate to the guardian any task that the patient has been shown.

Distressed Patients

Patients can become nervous, confused, scared, sick, and angry when they enter the unfamiliar environment of a healthcare facility. Becoming angry or frustrated with an unsettled patient will only make the situation worse. Remain calm and speak in a steady, confident voice.

Be sympathetic when you see the patient's distress. Sentiments such as "I am so sorry you are upset," and "let's see if we can make things easier for you" can be very helpful and calming to the patient. Put yourself in the patient's place and respond with compassion. Hopefully, the distressed patient has brought someone to help him or her understand what you are trying to communicate. If not, proceed slowly and carefully as you work with distressed, unaccompanied patients.

Communicating with Young Patients

When treating children, you must remember that the child is the patient, but the parent is also important in such interactions. Serious illness in children is overwhelming for all parents, but even minor illness can be frightening. The following points are important to remember when you work with children, especially in a healthcare facility environment:

- Find out where the child is most comfortable—on a parent's lap or on the floor playing with toys.
- Pay attention to the distance between you and the child—many children like you to physically be at their level.
- Work with the child using an unstructured, open approach, perhaps even incorporating play during your time with a small child.
- Take the child seriously and do not talk down to him or her.
- Offer the child support and praise.
- A child may be more relaxed during a procedure if you first demonstrate the procedure on a stuffed animal so the child will know what to expect (Figure 7.6).



Figure 7.6 Toys can make a child more comfortable during a medical examination.



Children and the Truth

Part of treating a child with respect is being honest with him or her. Telling a child that a shot or a blood test is not going to hurt may cause lasting distrust of healthcare professionals. Telling a child, "you may feel a little pinch" might be more appropriate.

Language Barriers to Communication

Some patients will not be able to communicate with you because they speak another language. Most hospitals have a policy in place to deal with this situation. Additionally, many facilities have a list of employees who speak other languages in addition to English. Be particularly careful to avoid slang expressions as these can be especially confusing to non-English speakers.

Most importantly, make sure that the patient can understand the information being communicated. You should also make sure you understand any questions that the patient wants to communicate.

Telephone Etiquette

Regardless of where you will work in a healthcare facility, sooner or later you will be answering the telephone. The following steps are an introduction to proper telephone etiquette.

- Answer a ringing phone promptly! If you need to put someone on hold, get their permission before doing so. For example, you might say, "May I put you on hold, please?" Do not leave the caller on hold for more than a minute or two without returning to see if they wish to continue to hold.
- When answering the phone, identify the facility or department in which you work, and give your name and title. For example, "Laboratory, this is Jean Smith, laboratory secretary. May I help you?"
- Before making a call, plan what you are going to say.
- When you leave a telephone number, speak slowly and repeat the number twice.
- Speak clearly with a pleasant, professional tone (Figure 7.7).
- Take a clear, concise message. Ask the caller to repeat the message if you are not sure whether you have heard or recorded it properly.
- A proper message must include the date and time of the call, the caller's name spelled correctly, and the telephone number (including the area code). You should also include your name as the person who took the call. Always repeat all numbers, including telephone numbers, addresses, numerical results, and



Figure 7.7 You sound friendlier on the telephone when smiling.

times. Be sure to double-check that you have taken the message down correctly.

- If the message is for someone else, be sure you deliver the message to the correct person. If you are the recipient of a message, return the call as soon as possible.
- Pay special attention to the spelling of the caller's name. Ask for a full name in case the caller has a common name.
- Use "please" and "thank you" and avoid using slang expressions.
- Hold the receiver an inch or an inch and a half from your mouth and speak directly into the receiver.
- Make sure you have confirmed all aspects of the message before you hang up.
- When a doctor calls, answer questions promptly, or transfer the call as soon as possible.
- Remember that you are not authorized to give medical information to a family member or friend of a patient unless the patient has given written permission to do so.
- Do not allow any conversation that identifies a patient or contains personal information to be overheard by other patients or visitors.

Public Speaking

You may be called upon to give a presentation in class or in your role as a healthcare worker. Whether you are giving a short talk to fellow classmates or explaining a procedure to fellow workers, there are several public speaking strategies to keep in mind.



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Figure 7.8 Direct eye contact is critical when giving a presentation.

- **Be prepared.** Practice your presentation several times. Know more about your material than you include in your speech. Use humor, personal stories, and conversational language if relevant.
- **Look at the audience and establish direct eye contact.** Smile, develop rapport, and notice if your audience looks like they are following what you are saying or if they look puzzled or confused (Figure 7.8).
- **Relax and slowly count to three before beginning** to allow yourself time to calm down. Don't apologize for being nervous. Realize that people want you to succeed.
- **Know your room.** Arrive early to the venue and walk around the speaking area. Practice using the microphone if possible, and make sure any visual aids you may have are present and in working order.
- **Remember to be concise and avoid a long, repetitive presentation.** Be aware of signs of lagging attention in your audience.

- **Develop visuals if appropriate.** You may use projected visuals, hand-outs, PowerPoint® presentations, or demonstrations. Visuals can effectively reinforce your speech. Make sure any technology you might need to use for your visuals is working before the presentation begins.
- **Be well-acquainted with your topic.** Reading continually from note cards loses your audience's attention. Write down key phrases, quotes, and stories in large letters on note cards to jog your memory as you are talking. Show enthusiasm for your topic.
- **Practice, practice, practice!** Speak slowly and calmly, but louder than your usual speaking voice (unless you are using a microphone).

Meetings

When you become a healthcare worker, you will be asked to attend many meetings. As you take on more responsibility in your job, you may be asked to hold meetings as well.

Attending a Meeting

Meetings vary in importance. Some will be brief, others will be lengthy. Whatever type of meeting you are asked to attend, there are some general rules that need to be followed:

- **Know the details of the meeting.** Where will it be? What time does it start? What topics will be discussed? Reconfirm these details before the meeting starts to make sure the location and time have not changed.
- **Be on time!** Arrive a few minutes early so that you can get organized before the meeting begins.
- **Come prepared.** You may need paper and pen to take notes. What you will need to bring with you will depend on the type of meeting you're attending.
- **Dress respectfully, yet comfortably.** Your appearance will vary depending on what type of meeting you're attending. If you wear a uniform, make sure it is clean and free from stains. If the meeting is more formal, make sure you wear nicer clothing. Check ahead of time to make sure you won't be underdressed or overdressed.
- **Pay close attention and listen carefully.** Turn your cell phone off and resist the temptation to bring other electronic devices that could divert your attention. The organizer of the meeting will expect you to understand what is being said. If you do not, ask questions at an appropriate time to make sure you understand. Try not to yawn.
- **If your participation is needed or expected, make sure you take part in the meeting.** Participation shows that you are listening and are engaged in the conversation. Make sure you show respect for everyone attending.

Holding a Meeting

Meetings can be very productive, but they can also be a waste of time. Ineffective meetings not only stop normal workflow with little gain, but they also affect employee morale. You need to know how to run a meeting that will produce productive results. Here are some techniques to follow:

1. **Send out a meeting request.** Make sure key players can attend at the requested time. Set up another time if the people you want to attend cannot come due to scheduling conflicts. In your request, state the purpose of the meeting. Also, prepare an agenda after thinking through and preparing each topic of discussion. Your meeting request should be accompanied with meeting material, such as an agenda, at least two days before the meeting.
2. **Make copies of relevant materials for everyone attending the meeting. It is important to supply each attendee with the documents to be discussed during the meeting.**
3. **Start the meeting on time.** Wait no more than five minutes for latecomers.
4. **Set up ground rules for the meeting.** Make it clear that you will need attendees' full attention, and ask them to turn off all electronic devices.
5. **Get to the point!** Allow a minute or two of pleasantries; make it clear when it is time to get down to business.
6. **Prioritize meeting subjects.** If you have ten topics to discuss, start with the most important items.
7. **Follow your agenda.** Do not allow anyone to get off topic. Be firm when it is time to move on.
8. **Take notes.** This will assure participants that you are listening to their points. If the meeting is complex with many topics, try to have someone else take minutes, or notes, for you.
9. **Know when to end the meeting.** If you have set a time to end the meeting, do not go over your time limit. If topics are not discussed, you may have to hold a follow-up meeting. Watch for signs from your audience that you have talked long enough. If the group starts to fidget, look at their watches, or seem inattentive, it is time to stop. Go over action items that may have been discussed during the meeting and ask for questions.
10. **Send out an overview after the meeting.** The overview should contain a record of who attended, what was discussed, any agreements that were reached, and action items that were assigned. The overview should be completed soon after the meeting is over.

When done correctly, meetings are a good way to make employees feel valued and in the loop.

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication, or *body language*, is a critical form of communication. This natural, unconscious language reveals your true feelings and intentions in any given moment.

When you interact with others, you continuously give and receive wordless signals. All of your nonverbal behaviors—the gestures you make, the way you sit, how fast or loud you talk, how close you stand to others, whether or not you make eye contact—send strong messages. These messages do not stop when you stop speaking. Even when you are quiet, you're still communicating your thoughts and feelings (Figure 7.9).

Some nonverbal messages are subtle, such as posture. What message does the posture of the students in Figure 7.10 give to their instructor during a lecture?

Frequently, what we say and what we communicate through body language are two different things. When faced with these mixed signals, the listener has to choose whether to believe your verbal or nonverbal message. Often, a listener will be more influenced by nonverbal signals because these tend to be more reliable than words.

Real Life Scenario

Inattention

Rusty is quite anxious to discuss an upcoming exam, so he makes an appointment with his instructor. The instructor greets Rusty and asks him to sit down. However, as Rusty begins to ask questions, the instructor continues to look at his e-mail. What message does the instructor's inattention send to Rusty?

nonverbal communication
any form of communication that does not involve speech, including gestures, the way one sits, eye contact (or lack of), and facial expressions; body language



auremar/Shutterstock.com

Figure 7.9 What does this man's body language suggest? Does he seem welcoming?



Simone van den Berg/Shutterstock.com

Figure 7.10 Do these students look like they are listening to the instructor?

Gender Differences in Nonverbal Communication

Studies have shown that men and women differ in their use of non-verbal communication. Women use facial expressions to express emotion more often than men. Women are more likely to smile and use facial and body expressions to show friendliness. Men do not smile as much. Women may demonstrate more friendly nonverbal cues, but their posture tends to be tenser than men's. Men seem more relaxed and will use more gestures, whereas women tend to rely more on verbal communication.

Women tend not to stare, while men use staring to challenge a powerful person. Men will often wait for the other person to turn away from an initial gaze, whereas women are more likely to avert their eyes. The differences in nonverbal signals between men and women further add to the complexity of communication.

Cultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication

Hand and arm gestures, touch, and eye contact (or lack of eye contact) are some aspects of nonverbal communication that can vary significantly depending on a person's cultural background. Of course, it is important to remember that, within cultures, there is great variation in communication. This discussion can be used to guide you in your communication so that you do not needlessly offend someone.

Gestures

Some gestures commonly used in the United States may be offensive to someone from another culture. An example of this is the use of a finger or hand to indicate for someone to "come here". In some cultures, this gesture may be used to call dogs. Pointing with one finger is not done in some Asian cultures and may be considered rude. Some cultures use the entire hand to point to something.

Touch

In the United States, it is common for someone to pat a child's head as an affectionate gesture. However, in some Asian cultures, this might be considered inappropriate because they believe the head to be a sacred part of the body. In many Muslim cultures, touch between persons of the opposite sex who are not related is inappropriate.

Eye Contact

In Western culture, direct eye contact is understood as being attentive and honest. In many cultures (Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern for

example), eye contact may seem disrespectful and rude. Women in some cultures may especially avoid eye contact with men as it could be taken as a sign of sexual interest.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of our use of space. Proxemics can be divided into two categories: physical territory (rooms and furniture arrangements) and personal territory (the distance you keep between yourself and others).

Personal territory is the area surrounding a person that they psychologically regard as their own. Most people value their personal territory and feel uncomfortable, angry, or anxious when another person enters, or "invades," their personal territory (Figure 7.11). How much you permit another person to enter into your personal territory, or to what degree you enter somebody else's personal territory, can reveal your relationship with another person. Understanding the concept of personal territory when working with patients, staff, and visitors increases your ability to provide the best possible care.

There are four types of personal territory. These include intimate space, personal space, social space, and public space (Figure 7.12).

The size of an individual's personal territory can vary by locale. People living in a densely populated area tend to have a smaller personal territory, whereas people living in less crowded areas may have a much larger personal territory. What is considered intimate space in one culture may fit another culture's description of social space.

Men and women may also differ in their personal territory requirements. Women tend to stand close to others, while men seek more personal territory. However, men may be more likely to invade another's personal territory if necessary when asserting themselves during disagreements or emergencies.

proxemics
the study of humans' use of space; includes physical territory and personal territory



Figure 7.11 Has this woman's space been violated? Does she seem comfortable with his touch?

| Proxemics | | |
|--------------------|--|----------------------|
| Personal Territory | Reserved For | Distance |
| intimate space | significant others, children, close family | 18 inches or less |
| personal space | friends, work associates | 1.5–4 feet |
| social space | new acquaintances, strangers | 4–12 feet |
| public space | speeches, lectures, and theater | Greater than 12 feet |

Figure 7.12 Distances of personal territory can vary among cultures as well as individuals.

Personal Territory and Touch

There are various types of touch, and each type can be received in many ways. Touch can be comforting—such as a pat on the back—or it can be offensive, possibly leading to a sexual harassment lawsuit. People who have experienced sexual abuse or other traumatic experiences may not want to be touched at all. You must be extremely careful when using touch as a communication tool.

In today's society lawsuits flourish, and any touching without a person's consent could be mistaken for something unwanted. Touch should be used with great caution. While providing care, many healthcare workers have to enter a patient's intimate space and should be sensitive to the patient's reaction.

Although a common method of greeting is the handshake, it is not appropriate in many situations in the healthcare facility. Handshakes are typically avoided to help reduce the spread of infection among the patients and healthcare workers.

The type and amount of touching that is appropriate varies with culture, age, gender, and family background. Some families hug every time they part, while others rarely hug. In some cultures and in many of the healing arts, touch is used to promote healing.

If you want to communicate more successfully in all areas of your life, you should strive to become more sensitive to body language and other nonverbal cues. This sensitivity will help you be more in tune with the thoughts and feelings of others. You also need to be aware of the signals you are sending, to ensure that the messages you are sending match what you really want to communicate.

Active Listening Skills

When you think of communication, listening skills may not immediately come to mind. However, listening is a key element in all communication. If you do not receive the message that is being sent, communication has not taken place. If you understand how to be a good listener, you will be a far better healthcare worker, spouse, friend, and communicator.

As you learned in chapter 5, active listening is not the same as simply hearing what has been said. Active listening is the decision to be fully attentive and to understand the intent of the speaker. It requires physical and mental attention, energy, concentration, and discipline. As part of your career in healthcare, you will be attending meetings, following directions from your supervisor, working with patients, and giving and receiving feedback.

Strategies for Active Listening

Applying the following active listening strategies can help you build effective relationships in school, in the healthcare environment, and in life.

1. **Desire to be a good listener.** You must want to be a better listener. Is your intention to learn about and understand the other person? Or do you feel restless until the speaker stops talking because you want to prove your intelligence and have a chance to shine?
2. **Be open and willing to learn.** When listening to someone giving you instruction, are you resistant to learning new information? Be open to different points of view, different styles of lecturing, and new ideas.
3. **Show interest.** When speaking one-on-one with a patient, it is important to show interest in the other person. Good eye contact, a gentle touch if appropriate, and other body language shows that you are interested in what the patient has to say. If you tune out the message due to disinterest, communication will not take place. Pay attention to the speaker.
4. **Resist judgment.** If the speaker is wearing strange clothing, has a reputation for being troublesome, speaks in an annoying voice, or displays other distracting features, focus on the message the person is conveying. Try not to be distracted by these less important aspects of the person.
5. **Do not interrupt.** Have you ever been continually interrupted when trying to get a point across to a friend? Recall how frustrating you found the interruptions. Allow the speaker to give you his entire message without interrupting him. If you need to ask a question, wait until the speaker finishes his general message.
6. **Show empathy and respect.** Focus on understanding the message and viewpoint of the speaker. Look for common views and ways in which you are alike. Listen with the intent to understand.
7. **Look as if you are listening.** Active listening requires high energy—sit up and uncross your legs. Maintain eye contact with the speaker and lean slightly forward.
8. **Give feedback.** Repeat what you think the speaker meant. For example: “If I understand you correctly...,” “Please correct me if my understanding is wrong...,” “What I believe you are saying is...”

Check Your Understanding

Ethel is an 84-year-old woman who is a bit confused and in pain. You are a nurse assigned to assess this patient's problems. Ethel speaks slowly, has many concerns, and is desperate to tell you about her situation. You are very busy and have many tasks ahead of you. How do you handle this interaction?

Barriers to Active Listening

There are many situations in which active listening is challenging. It is important to listen closely to your patients and coworkers, particularly in a healthcare facility where the well-being of your patients may be concerned. People often fail to listen when they face the following situations:

- You are interrupted by someone coming into the room, a ringing telephone, or other people talking loudly nearby.
- You move ahead in the listening process when you think you have heard what the person is saying, thinking to yourself, “I’ve heard all this before.”
- You do not agree with what is being said and, therefore, refuse to listen (Figure 7.13).
- You cannot hear what the patient is saying because of the speaker’s soft voice.
- You do not understand what the patient is saying because of a speech problem, the speaker uses challenging vocabulary, or has a thick accent.
- Your mind starts wandering, interfering with your concentration.

To be a good listener, you must concentrate on what is being said, showing a sincere interest in what the speaker is saying. To avoid being distracted, block out everything except the speaker’s voice. Do not interrupt the speaker unless you cannot understand what is being said. Ask the speaker to explain what he or she is saying in greater detail. Remember that active listening can be improved with practice. Being a good listener makes you a much better employee.



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Figure 7.13 Are these two people demonstrating active listening?

Think It Through

Can you remember times when you have felt that someone was not listening to you? How did it make you feel? How did you make yourself heard, if at all? How can you be a better listener?

Written Communication Skills

Many employers consider written communication skills to be one of the most important job skills an employee can have. Studies have indicated that the ability to write well seems to be diminishing among students. Therefore, if you can write a message clearly and accurately, that skill will benefit you in the working world. As you study to become a healthcare worker, you must practice using clear, concise writing in your assignments.

Composing written communications can be done effectively if you possess good writing skills. Written communication requires the presentation of clear, logical thoughts. Today, few written communications are actually written by hand, except quick notes like telephone messages. The vast majority of written communications are prepared electronically. As a result, keyboard skills are essential in today’s healthcare world. We will learn more about computer skills in Chapter 11, *Healthcare Technology*.

Patients entering a healthcare facility may find the experience complicated, and many people struggle with understanding medications, instructions, and follow-up plans. The way the healthcare worker communicates with patients through written instructions helps to minimize confusion and lead to better patient care.

Written communications offer an excellent opportunity to make a good impression on others, but developing these skills takes time and effort. Writing requires thought, preparation, skill, and confidence. Throughout your healthcare career, you might be asked to write a variety of communications such as original letters, memos, responses to information requests, telephone messages, e-mails, patient instructions, and supply orders. You will also fill out a variety of forms on a regular basis.

Of course, to obtain a job you may be asked to present a cover letter, job application, and a résumé, all of which will require you to possess good writing skills. Job seeking information is covered in-depth in Chapter 12, *Employability Skills*.

Good writing means using several key elements to get your point across. Those elements include using grammar correctly, recognizing and correctly using the parts of speech, spelling and punctuating properly, and using clear, concise words.

Writing an Effective E-mail

When you are writing a business e-mail—to an instructor, a fellow employee, or supervisor about a work-related subject—keep the following guidelines in mind:

- **Include a specific subject line.** If you do not put anything in the subject line, chances are your e-mail will not be a top priority. Instead of a subject line that says “Quiz,” a better effort would be “Question concerning 12/8 quiz for Anatomy Class, Section 4.”

- **Keep your message focused.** E-mails are meant to be short and to the point. Long, rambling messages may be only partially read or ignored.
- **Identify yourself.** When e-mailing an instructor, be sure to include the following: your name; the course name and its section number (if it has one); the days on which the course is offered; and your brief, focused message. Do not assume that the instructor knows immediately who you are by your name.
- **Do not e-mail an angry message.** If you find yourself e-mailing in anger, resist the urge. Ask the intended recipient (maybe it is your instructor or supervisor) politely if you may have a meeting with them concerning the topic you wish to discuss. By the time you have the meeting, you may have calmed down and will be able to speak rationally.
- **Proofread your e-mail.** Your point will be taken more seriously if you express yourself intelligently with excellent spelling and grammar.
- **Be courteous.** When asking for assistance and requesting a response, thank the sender by saying something like, “thank you for your quick response,” or “I appreciate your assistance in this matter.”
- **Do not assume that your e-mail is private.** Your message can be easily intercepted. Do not include any private information about a patient. Be professional in your communications and refrain from gossiping.
- **Avoid any fancy fonts.** Keep your message clear by using a standard font such as Times New Roman or Helvetica.

Grammar Review

grammar
the study of how words and their components combine to form sentences

When speaking or writing, using correct grammar helps you send a clear message that is easily understood. **Grammar** is the study of how words and their components combine to form sentences. Writing that contains grammatical errors makes the writer appear uneducated. As harsh as this seems, there are many times when individuals are judged simply on the basis of poor writing skills and grammatical mistakes. Poor grammar can cause setbacks in certain situations, including your education and career.

It is important that you proofread, or review, your writing for grammatical errors. However, proofreading your own work is not effective if you do not know grammar rules or the correct spelling of words. You will present an unprofessional image to potential employers, patients, and coworkers if your writing has grammatical errors, misused words, and spelling mistakes. Instead of relying on a friend to review your work, use an online grammar check program, read a grammar reference book, and edit your writing once more.

Real Life Scenario

Is Grammar an Advantage?

Jenny and Drew are applying for the same job. They have each put together a résumé and filled out an application for the position. Drew took a considerable amount of time to craft his résumé and to fill out the application, paying close attention to grammar and spelling. Jenny has a very busy schedule. She didn't take the time to carefully review her résumé and application for grammar and spelling mistakes, but felt that her qualifications would be enough to get the job. Who is at an advantage if their qualifications are similar?

Vowels and Consonants

When formulating words in the English language, the most basic building blocks are **vowels** and **consonants**. Written English has five vowel letters—a, e, i, o, and u (y may substitute for i). Consonants in the English language are the remaining letters of the alphabet—b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, and z. Together, vowels and consonants form words. There are distinct sounds for each letter, depending on where it appears in the word.

vowels
five letters in the English language: a, e, i, o, and u (sometimes y is substituted for i)

Parts of Speech

Words in the English language are divided into eight different **parts of speech**. Parts of speech can be combined to form a complete thought, or *sentence*. A sentence can combine any or even all of the parts of speech listed in Figure 7.14.

consonants
all letters of the English alphabet except a, e, i, o, and u

parts of speech
collective term for eight classifications of words that denote each word's function; in English these include noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, preposition, and interjection

| Parts of Speech | | |
|-----------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Part | Definition | Examples |
| noun | a word naming a person, place, or thing | patient, clinic, medication |
| pronoun | a word taking the place of a noun | he, it, they |
| verb | a word showing action or state of being | help, run, is |
| adjective | a word describing a noun or pronoun | healthy, young, happy |
| adverb | a word describing a verb, adjective, or another adverb | rapidly, very, nearby |
| conjunction | a word connecting words, phrases, or sentences | and, or, but |
| preposition | a word relating nouns or pronouns to other words in a sentence | above, to, for |
| interjection | a word expressing strong emotion | STAT! |

Figure 7.14 All English words can be categorized as one of the eight parts of speech.

noun
a word representing a person, place, or thing

Nouns

A **noun** is a type of word that represents a person, place, or thing, like *doctor, heart, and ambulance*. Nouns can be singular or plural (Figure 7.15).

Proper Nouns. Nouns can be classified as *proper* or *common*. A proper noun begins with a capital letter no matter where it occurs in a sentence. Proper nouns name a specific item. A common noun is not capitalized and does not name a specific person, thing, or place.

- Example** (common noun): writer
- Example** (proper noun): Ernest Hemingway
- Example** (common noun): city
- Example** (proper noun): Chicago

Possessive Nouns. A possessive noun indicates ownership by the noun or a characteristic of the noun. The possessive form of a noun is created by adding an apostrophe and an “s.”

In most cases, plural nouns that end with an “s” are made possessive

| Making Singular Nouns Plural | | |
|---|----------|------------|
| Guidelines | Singular | Plural |
| For most nouns, add s to the singular form to create the plural form. | doctor | doctors |
| | X-ray | X-rays |
| | glove | gloves |
| For nouns that end in sh, ch, s, x, z, or similar sounds , add es to the singular form. In the case of z , the z is often doubled. | crutch | crutches |
| | box | boxes |
| | class | classes |
| | quiz | quizzes |
| For nouns that end in a consonant and a y , change the y to i and add es . | pharmacy | pharmacies |
| | nursery | nurseries |
| For nouns that end in o preceded by a vowel, add s to the singular form. For most nouns that end in o preceded by a consonant, add s to form the plural. For some exceptions, add es . | albino | albinos |
| | radio | radios |
| | memo | memos |
| | placebo | placeboes |
| For many nouns that end in f or fe , change the f sound to a v and add s or es to the singular form. For others, keep the f and add an s . | life | lives |
| | knife | knives |
| | strife | strives |

Figure 7.15 Singular nouns can be made plural by following these guidelines.

by adding an apostrophe after the “s”.

Example: The brothers' names all began with an M.

Plural nouns that do not end in “s” are usually made possessive by adding an apostrophe “s”.

Examples: *toys of children* would read: children's toys
The nurse's smile made me feel welcome.

Pronouns

A **pronoun** is a substitute for a noun. Common pronouns include *I, me, she, hers, he, him, it, you, they, and them*. Pronouns allow writing to flow smoothly without repeating nouns over and over.

pronoun
a substitute word for a noun

Example: Jason didn't get the job, and *he* was very upset.

Verbs

A **verb** is a type of word that describes an action or a state of being, such as *waddle, walk, run, jump, have, or think*.

verb
any word describing an action or a state of being

Example: Doctor Martin *diagnosed* his patient with strep throat.

Verbs such as *be, is, are, was, were, and am* can also show a state of being.

Example: I *am* hungry.

Helping Verbs. There are verbs that work with the main verb to show action. These are called *helping verbs*. These verbs have little meaning on their own, but they help make the main verb clearer. Helping verbs include *be, been, am, is, are, was, were, has, had, have, do, does, did, can, could, may, might, will, would, should, shall, and must*.

Examples: I *have* interviewed for that position.
I *should* study for the science examination.

Voice. Verbs also have different properties, including voice, mood, tense, person, and number. Voice can be either active or passive. Sentences using an active voice verb are considered to be more direct and easier to understand than those using passive voice. Passive voice is appropriate in some cases, such as in scientific papers to make conclusions sound more objective.

Example (passive voice): The lecture *was given* by Dr. Brown.
Example (active voice): Dr. Brown *gave* the lecture.

Extend Your Knowledge

Passive Voice

To become more aware of the use of passive voice, scan a newspaper article and underline every example you can find of passive voice verbs.

Mood. The mood of a verb is the way in which the writer wants the sentence to be understood. Mood can be used to ask a question or express a fact or opinion.

Example: The patient in pain *raged* at the doctor.

A mood can also be a command or request.

Example: Please *assist* the doctor with the procedure.

A mood can also express an idea or suggestion.

Example: I *recommend* that you read the examination carefully before you start.

Verb Tense. Verb tense will tell you if the action takes place in the present, past, or future.

Example: Jerry *arrived* at the hospital last night. His doctors *are reviewing* his test results now, but he *will have* more lab work done tomorrow.



Speaking and Verb Tense

Many speakers are inconsistent when expressing verb tense. Some languages do not have verb tenses, so non-native English speakers sometimes find this very challenging. When in doubt, consult a grammar text.

Verb Person. The person of a verb determines to whom the action or state of being refers. Verbs can refer to one of three persons: the person who is speaking (first person); the person being addressed (second person); or a person, or group of people being discussed (third person).

A first person verb is an action of the person who is speaking or writing.

Example: I *am deciding* which career to pursue.

A second person verb refers to an action of someone who is being addressed.

Example: You *are going* to be a wonderful nurse.

A third person verb refers to an action of someone being discussed.

Example: They *are going* to become physical therapists.

Verb Number. Verbs should agree in number with related nouns and pronouns. Verbs connected with “I” should always be singular.

Example: I *am* studying.

Verbs related to “you” are always plural.

Example: You *are* studying.

Verbs in the third person should agree in number with the nouns or pronouns.

Example: John and Laura *study* every day.

Adjectives

An **adjective** is a word that modifies or describes a noun or pronoun. Examples of adjectives include *big*, *cold*, *blue*, and *silly*. Adjectives provide details about the noun or pronoun that give you a better understanding of the person, place, or thing. Adjectives can come before or after the words they modify.

adjective
a word that modifies or describes a noun or pronoun

Examples: Two students failed the science test.

After studying all night, Denise is *tired*.

Adverbs

An **adverb** is a word that tells “how,” “when,” “where,” or “how much.” Some examples of adverbs include *easily*, *carefully*, *slowly*, *mainly*, *freely*, *often*, and *unfortunately*.

adverb
any word that tells how, when, where, or how much

Examples: *Finally*, I finished my project.

Jennifer will have an interview *tomorrow*.

Sarah *quickly* finished the multiple choice section of her exam.

Conjunctions

A **conjunction** is a word that joins other words, phrases (two or more words acting as a unit in a sentence), clauses (a group of words that contains a noun and a verb), or sentences. Examples of common conjunctions are *and*, *as*, *because*, *but*, *or*, *since*, *so*, *until*, and *while*.

conjunction
a word that joins other words, phrases, clauses, or sentences

Example: *While* I could become a nurse, I might also want to be a physical therapist *or* an occupational therapist.

Prepositions

A **preposition** is a word that connects or relates its object to the rest of the sentence. Examples include *to*, *at*, *by*, *of*, *under*, *beside*, *over*, and *during*.

preposition
a word that connects or relates its object to the rest of the sentence

Example: *During* an internship, you will be working *beside* an experienced medical professional.

Prepositional Phrases. A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, its object, and related adjectives and adverbs.

Example: The patient is *in the examination room*.

Interjections

An **interjection** is a word, phrase, or clause that expresses emotion. An interjection often starts a sentence, but it can be contained within a sentence

interjection
a word, phrase, or clause that expresses emotion

or stand alone. Some interjections are *oh*, *wow*, *ugh*, *hurray*, *eh*, and *ah*. Interjections should be used infrequently in workplace communications.

Interjections can appear at the beginning of a sentence that expresses strong emotion. Depending on how much emotion is expressed, a sentence containing an interjection can end with a period or an exclamation point. Interjections can also appear alone with an exclamation point.

Examples: *No*, don't let the patient walk without help!

Oh, you surprised me.

Ouch!

Sentences

A sentence is a grammatical unit of one or more words that expresses an independent statement, question, request, command, or exclamation. A sentence typically has a noun (called the *subject*) as well as a verb (called the *predicate*). Sentences begin with a capital letter and end with the appropriate punctuation.

In this age of abbreviated messages in e-mails, text messages, and tweets, complete sentences are not often used to communicate (Figure 7.16). However, in the workplace, complete sentences must be used in order to present professional communication skills and communicate a complete thought.

There are three types of sentences—simple, compound, and complex. The type of sentence you should use depends on how simple or complex an idea you wish to express.



Figure 7.16 Slang used in texting is not appropriate for workplace communication.



Check Your Understanding

Consider the examples below. Are these sentences? Or are they sentence fragments that do not constitute a complete sentence?

1. Below the knee.
2. The calf is located below the knee.
3. The fact that Janice did not pass the anatomy test when she studied.
4. Janice studied a long time for the anatomy test and failed.
5. Because Larry is not comfortable with children, and he is assigned to work on the pediatric floor.
6. Larry worries that he will not be able to work on the pediatric floor because of his dislike for children.

Simple Sentences

A **simple sentence**, also called an *independent clause*, contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. A noun or pronoun is always used as the subject of the sentence. In the following simple sentences, subjects are in green, and verbs are in blue.

Examples: The **nurse** **worked** all weekend.

The **patient** **began** to cough loudly.

The **phone** **rang** at the nurse's desk.

simple sentence
sentence that contains a subject and a verb, and which expresses a complete thought; independent clause

Compound Sentences

A **compound sentence** contains two independent clauses joined by a conjunction. Except for very short sentences, conjunctions are always preceded by a comma. In the following compound sentences, subjects are in green, verbs are in blue, and the conjunctions and preceding commas are in red.

Examples: **I** **tried** to speak French, **and** **my friend** **tried** to speak English.

Darryl **played** basketball, **so** **Maria** **went** shopping.

James **wants** to be a physical therapist, **but** **his mother** **wants** him to be a doctor.

compound sentence
sentence containing two independent clauses joined by a conjunction

Complex Sentences

A **complex sentence** has an independent clause (a group of words that can stand alone) joined by one or more dependent clauses. The dependent clause is in blue.

Examples: **When he handed in his homework**, the instructor smiled.

The instructor handed back the homework **after she noticed an error**.

The students are nervous **because they have a test tomorrow**.

complex sentence
sentence with an independent clause joined by one or more dependent clauses

paragraph
part of a written composition, which consists of a collection of sentences related to one topic

The Paragraph

A **paragraph** is a part of a written composition, which consists of a collection of sentences all related to one topic. Paragraphs express one idea or present the words of a single individual. Each paragraph can begin with an indented line. An indent is signified by hitting the Tab key, or inserting five spaces.

Example:
In our office, Tony is always the first one at work each morning. He was elected Employee of the Month three times because of how hard he works. Tony sets a good example for others.
I first met Tony when I was hired last year. He always has made me feel welcome in the office.

When writing a business letter, paragraphs are often not indented. Instead, the single-spaced paragraphs are separated by an extra line, or return, in between to clearly mark each paragraph.

Example:
Today there are many styles of writing paragraphs. Some styles include indenting paragraphs, and others do not.

Whichever style you choose, be consistent. Also, remember that a paragraph with more than six or seven sentences may be too long and will need to be broken up into a second paragraph. Chances are that there is more than one idea represented in that long paragraph.

Today, many instructors will tell you that they prefer you have at least two sentences in a paragraph. Be mindful of the length of your paragraphs. Paragraphs should be neither too short nor too long.

punctuation
the practice or system of using certain conventional marks or characters such as commas, question marks, and periods in writing

Punctuation

Punctuation is defined as the practice or system of using certain conventional marks or characters in writing. Proper punctuation guides the readers and helps them understand the meaning of sentences.

| Healthcare Abbreviations with Periods | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Term | Abbreviations |
| three times a day | t.i.d. |
| doctor | Dr. |
| company | co. |
| association | assoc. |
| orthopedics | ortho. |

Figure 7.17 Some medical abbreviations are created using periods.

End Punctuation

There are only three ways to end a sentence: a period (.), a question mark (?), and an exclamation point (!). The period is by far the most used mark of punctuation.

Periods. Paragraphs can contain several sentences, and the period is used to provide structure and separate thoughts by marking the end of each sentence. Periods are also used to divide parts of an abbreviation (p.m.) or signal the end of an abbreviation. An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or letters used to represent a word or term. Figure 7.17 provides a list of commonly used abbreviations in healthcare.

Many abbreviations formerly followed by a period have now dropped that punctuation. Examples of this include academic degrees (BA, MA, AA) and two-letter state abbreviations (CA, TX, SC).

Question Marks. The question mark is used after a word or sentence that asks a question.

Example: What? Are you kidding?

Exclamation Points. Another form of end punctuation is the exclamation point. Exclamation points are used to express strong emotions.

Example: I passed my exam!

Internal Punctuation

Punctuation marks within a sentence are called *internal punctuation*. Internal punctuation marks include commas, dashes, parentheses, semicolons, colons, hyphens, apostrophes, and quotation marks.

Commas. Punctuation marks used to separate elements in a sentence are called *commas*. Commas provide breaks or pauses in a sentence, helping readers to more easily understand sentences. Commas are also used to separate items in a series.

Examples: Doctors, nurses, and physical therapists will be at the career fair.
Dorothy got the job by having an excellent résumé, an impressive application, and a great attitude.
Louis enjoyed his internship in Dr. Martin's office, but he was sorry he didn't choose an internship in a hospital setting.

Some styles (preferred by newspapers and written communication in England) eliminate the last comma when separating items in a series. For example: *I prefer to wear a lab coat, a name badge and comfortable shoes.* Here, the comma is eliminated after *name badge*. However, the *Chicago Manual of Style* and most other style manuals dictate that a final comma appear before the conjunction, as shown in the examples above.

Dashes. Also called *em dashes*, these punctuation marks separate elements in a sentence or signal an abrupt change of thought. The dash provides a stronger break than a comma.

Example: I need my anatomy book—I lost it again—before the quiz.

There are also *en dashes*, which are shorter than an em dash, but longer than a hyphen. The *en dash* is used to indicate a range of values, such as a span of time or a range of numbers.

Examples: 8 a.m.–4 p.m.
Monday–Friday
ages 5–9

Parentheses. Parentheses are used to enclose words or phrases that clarify meaning or give more information. When the entire sentence is enclosed by parentheses, the period should appear inside the closing parenthesis. If the parenthetical notation falls at the end of the sentence but only encloses a portion of it, the period should *follow* the closing parenthesis.

Examples: I'll see you at the meeting at noon (3rd floor lounge).
Please review the medical terminology abbreviations. (They are in Appendix A.)

Parentheses are also used to enclose numbers or letters in a list that is part of a sentence.

Example: Your essay has errors in (1) spelling, (2) punctuation, and (3) capitalization.

Semicolons. When a sentence requires a stronger break than a comma, a semicolon may be used. Semicolons are used to separate clauses or some items in a series. The two clauses separated must be independent, meaning they are stand-alone clauses.

Example: Our entire math class took the exam; everyone passed.

A semicolon can be used to separate a series when at least one item in the series already contains commas.

Example: I applied for an internship in Los Angeles, California; Seattle, Washington; and Las Vegas, Nevada.

Colons. When introducing elements in a sentence or paragraph, a colon may be used. The elements can be words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. The colon is a stronger break than a comma.

Example: We need to study three things for the medical terminology quiz: abbreviations, prefixes, and suffixes.

Hyphens. Hyphens are used to separate parts of a compound word. Hyphens are also used when spelling out numbers.

Examples: My mother-in-law is a nurse.
twenty-four

Apostrophes. When forming possessive words and contractions, an apostrophe should be used. Possessive words show ownership. An apostrophe and a letter “s” are added to many nouns to create the possessive form. If the possessive noun is plural, the apostrophe is placed after the pluralized noun.

Examples: Jennifer's test score was excellent.
The nurses' cars were parked in the hospital parking lot.

| Using Hyphens | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Rules for Use | Examples |
| Fractions shown in words | one-third, one-fourth |
| Numbers less than 100 with two words | thirty-one, fifty-three |
| Telephone numbers, Social Security numbers | 1-888-2346, 558-34-1678 |
| Between letters when a word is spelled out | Awkward is spelled a-w-k-w-a-r-d. |

Figure 7.18 Follow these guidelines when using hyphens in written communications.

A **contraction** is a shortened form of a word or term. To form a contraction, one or more words are omitted and replaced with an apostrophe. This creates a single word.

Example: Rock 'n' roll became popular in the '50s.
Dr. Hartman didn't know the patient had high blood pressure until the patient's test results were returned.

Quotation Marks. Quotation marks enclose short, direct quotes and some titles (such as chapter titles or article titles). A direct quote is a restatement of someone's exact words. A quote does not have to be a complete sentence. Rather, it can be a word or phrase *within* a sentence that was said or written by another person. If you have a long quote (several sentences in length or greater), it should be set apart from the paragraph. Long quotes that are set apart should not be enclosed in quotation marks.

Examples: "Why do you think you would be a good choice for this job?" asked the interviewer.
What did the administrator mean by "charitable giving"?

contraction
a shortened form of a word or term; one or more letters are omitted and replaced with an apostrophe to create one word

capitalization
the use of an uppercase letter for the first letter of a word, and lowercase for the remaining letters; used for proper nouns

Capitalization Rules

The following rules relate to **capitalization**. Capitalization is the use of an uppercase letter for the first letter of a word and lowercase for the remaining letters.

- A sentence always begins with a capital letter.
- Capital letters are used for headings in reports, articles, newsletters, and other documents. Capital letters are used for titles of books, magazines, and movies.

Examples: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,
National Geographic

- Capitalize the first word, and all other important words in a heading or title (conjunctions and prepositions are normally not capitalized).

Example: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

- Proper nouns must always be capitalized.

Examples: Dr. Lang is my physician. I love Japanese food.

- Capitalize the name of months, days, cities, states, and countries (Figure 7.19).

Examples: January, Monday, New York, Great Britain

- Some abbreviations use capital letters (Figure 7.20).

Examples: HIPAA, UCLA, HTML, WI



Olinchuk/Shutterstock.com

Figure 7.19 The names of states and cities are proper nouns and must be capitalized.

| State Abbreviations | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|-----------|----|---------------|----|----------------|----|---------------|----|
| Alabama | AL | Hawaii | HI | Massachusetts | MA | New Mexico | NM | South Dakota | SD |
| Alaska | AK | Idaho | ID | Michigan | MI | New York | NY | Tennessee | TN |
| Arizona | AZ | Illinois | IL | Minnesota | MN | North Carolina | NC | Texas | TX |
| Arkansas | AR | Indiana | IN | Mississippi | MS | North Dakota | ND | Utah | UT |
| California | CA | Iowa | IA | Missouri | MO | Ohio | OH | Vermont | VT |
| Colorado | CO | Kansas | KS | Montana | MT | Oklahoma | OK | Virginia | VA |
| Connecticut | CT | Kentucky | KY | Nebraska | NE | Oregon | OR | Washington | WA |
| Delaware | DE | Louisiana | LA | Nevada | NV | Pennsylvania | PA | West Virginia | WV |
| Florida | FL | Maine | ME | New Hampshire | NH | Rhode Island | RI | Wisconsin | WI |
| Georgia | GA | Maryland | MD | New Jersey | NJ | South Carolina | SC | Wyoming | WY |

Figure 7.20 State abbreviations are composed of two capital letters without periods.

- Capitalize titles that come before personal names.
Examples: Ms., Dr., Officer Johnson
- Capitalize abbreviations for academic degrees and other professional designations that follow names.
Examples: Jacob White, LPN; Jessie Parks, RN, BSN, MSN
- Do not capitalize seasons.
Examples: fall, winter, spring, summer

Writing Numbers

As in all aspects of grammar, there are rules for expressing numbers as figures or words. Number guidelines are not as widely agreed upon as rules for punctuation and capitalization. The guidelines listed below should be used for general writing. If you are writing a research paper or an article for publication, find out if there are written number guidelines you must follow.

General guidelines for writing numbers include

- Numbers one through nine should be spelled out with words. Numerals should be used for the number ten and anything greater.
Examples: One supervisor and three workers were needed to solve the problem.
The health unit coordinator ordered 25 black ink pens.
- Use words for numbers that are indefinite or approximate.
Examples: About twenty people applied for the job.
There were approximately ten thousand new cases of tuberculosis last year.

- When a number begins a sentence, it should be spelled out.
Example: Thirty copies of the report should be made.
- When two numbers come together in a sentence, use words for one of the numbers.
Example: There are 11 twenty-year-old students in my class.
- Use words to express fractions. A hyphen comes between each word.
Example: The patient is to receive one-half of the dosage she previously had taken.
- When expressing time, use numerals followed by a.m. and p.m. designations. Always spell out the number that appears before the term “o’clock”. A colon is used between numerals expressing hours and minutes, but is omitted when using military time (a 24-hour system).
Examples: 2:30 p.m.; eight o’clock; 16:00 hrs.; 1345
- Use numerals for days and years in dates. Do not write “th”, “nd”, “rd”, or “st” after a number.
Examples: I started my job on February 10, 2014.
I handed in my resignation at my last job on January 2, 2014.

Common Grammatical Mistakes

The purpose of using proper grammar is to ensure that what you write is easy to read and comprehend. Many employers are immediately put off when they receive a poorly written cover letter. Such cover letters will often cause the entire application to be tossed into the wastebasket without the employer even looking at the rest of the application.

Following grammar rules when you speak conveys to others that you are an intelligent and educated person, and someone who recognizes that clear and concise language is easily understood.

Extend Your Knowledge

Referencing Grammar

Because the correct use of grammar is so important, there are many reference books and multiple sites on the Internet that focus on the correct use of grammar. It may be helpful to have a grammar reference book at hand when you are composing a letter, a school assignment, or putting together an oral presentation.

The following list includes common grammar errors in the English language. Do you frequently make any of the errors listed below?

1. **don’t vs doesn’t**
Incorrect: She *don’t* answer questions in class.
Rule: *Doesn’t*, *does not*, or *does* are used for the third person singular (words like *he*, *she*, and *it* are third person singular words).
Correct: She *doesn’t* answer questions in class.

2. double negatives

Incorrect: She *does not* dislike *no one* in her class.

Rule: Double negatives can confuse the meaning of a sentence. Since *not* is negative, you cannot use *no one* in this sentence.

Correct: She *does not* dislike *anyone* in her class.

Incorrect: She *don't* do *nothing* right.

Correct: She *doesn't* do *anything* right.

3. gone vs went

Incorrect: I should have *went* to the lecture.

Rule: *Gone* should be used with a helping verb.

Correct: I should *have gone* to the lecture.

Incorrect: I *gone* to the game.

Rule: *Went* is used without a helping verb.

Correct: I *went* to the game.

4. pronoun abuse

Incorrect: *Me* and *my lab partner* did a great job on the assignment.

Correction: Rephrase the sentence without one of the subjects. Does it still make sense? Would you say “*Me* did a great job on the assignment”?

Correct: My lab partner and *I* did a great job on the assignment.

5. its vs it's

Incorrect: *Its* going to be hard to study with the beautiful weather today.

Rule: The contraction *it's* is used here because it stands for *it is*.

Correct: *It's* going to be hard to study with the beautiful weather today.

6. good vs well

Incorrect: You really spell *good*.

Rule: When an activity is being described, use *well*. When it is a condition or a state being described, use *good*.

Correct: You really spell *well*.

Another example: Lisa spelled *well* at the spelling bee; she looked *good* on stage wearing her new purple outfit.

7. anxious vs eager

Incorrect: Jenny was *anxious* to go to the graduation party in her honor.

Rule: In this case, Jenny was looking forward to her party but was not worried or uneasy, as the word *anxious* suggests.

Correct: Jenny was *eager* to go to the graduation party in her honor.

Another example: Jenny is *eager* to go to medical school after graduation, but her parents are *anxious* about the expense.

8. affect vs effect

Incorrect: Leonard's terrible cold *effected* his performance on the science test.

Rule: When you are referring to a thing (noun), you mean *effect* in almost all cases. When you are meaning an action (verb), you use *affect*.

Correct: Leonard's terrible cold *affected* his performance on the science test.

Another example: The *effect* of Leonard's terrible cold was that his grade on the test was negatively *affected*.

9. lay vs lie

Incorrect: I asked the patient to *lay* down on the bed.

Rule: To *lay* is to place something (there always is a noun or a “something” that is being placed). To *lie* is to recline.

Correct: I asked the patient to *lie* down on the bed.

Another example: *Lay* your book on the table and *lie* down on the couch.

10. lose vs loose

Incorrect: I always *loose* my car keys.

Rule: *Loose* and *lose* are spelled similarly, but have very different definitions. *Loose* means something is not fastened, tied up, or confined; able to move freely. To *lose* something means you no longer have it or cannot find it.

Correct: I always *lose* my car keys.

Another example: I *lose* my lecture notes when they are *loose* in my binder.

11. among vs between

Incorrect: *Among* the two of us, I don't like to work with people.

Rule: *Among* refers to three or more individuals. *Between* refers to two individuals.

Correct: *Between* the two of us, I don't like to work with people.

Another example: *Among* the four of us, three want to be nurses.

12. is vs are

Incorrect: *Is* those two going to interview for the same job?

Rule: *Is* must be used with a singular noun. *Are* is used with a plural noun.

Correct: *Are* those two going to interview for the same job.

Another example: She *is* going to the interview, but Paul and Don *are not* going to interview for that job.

Extend Your Knowledge

Media Mistakes

What grammar mistakes do you often hear in the media? Of the examples listed previously, which mistakes do you commonly make? How can you avoid them in the future? Is it important to you that you use good grammar?

Spelling

In the classroom as well as in the workplace, writing containing spelling mistakes will detract from the message being delivered. Errors can take away from the sentence’s meaning. If combined with a limited vocabulary and poor sentence structure, these mistakes will most likely earn you a poor grade, or you may be asked to redo your assignment.

Today, poor spellers may rely on the spell-check programs built into their word processors, but the automatic spell-check does not catch every misspelling. Your spell-check program may not recognize many medical terms which may have complicated spellings. Additionally, the program cannot help you if you substitute the wrong word, spelled correctly, for a word you intended to use.

The following are some basic English language spelling rules that should be followed closely:

- The letter *q* is followed by the letter *u*, with few exceptions.
- The letter *s* never follows *x*.
- The letter *y*, not *i*, is used at the end of English words.

Examples: *my*, *by*, *why*, and *shy*

- In spelling a short vowel sound, only one letter is needed.

Examples: *bed*, *it*, *lot*, and *up*

- If a word ends with a silent and final *e*, drop the *e* when adding an ending that begins with a vowel.

Example: *rope* becomes *roping*; *come* becomes *coming*

- One of the most common spelling rules taught to elementary school children is: *i* before *e*, except after *c*, unless it says *a* (pronounced with a long *a*) as in *neighbor* and *weigh*.

Examples: receipt, brief, or thief

- When adding an ending to a word that ends with *y*, simply change the *y* to *i* if it is preceded by a consonant.

Example: *try* becomes *tries*; *fly* becomes *flies*

One of the most frustrating aspects of the English language is the number of exceptions to spelling rules. Memorization of spellings may be necessary, especially in the case of medical terminology when you may

have never before encountered the terms. Chapter 8 reviews many rules for learning to spell medical terms. Of course, when in doubt, look up the word in a standard or a medical dictionary.

Figures 7.21 and 7.22 contain some of the most commonly misspelled and misused words in the English language. Do you have trouble spelling any of these words? Add your own problem words to this list.

Putting It All Together

Now that you understand how to use all the elements of grammar effectively, keep in mind these additional tips to ensure your written communications are as clear as possible.

1. **Use precise language.** Resist the urge to use vague words like “stuff” and “thing” in your writing. Do not use jargon, or specialized language that your listener may not know.
2. **Keep your sentences short.** A very important rule to remember is that the longer the sentence, the more likely it will be for the reader to lose interest. Instead, use short, to-the-point sentences.

| Commonly Misused Words | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Word | Definition | Example |
| your | a possessive form | Your new scrubs are cute. |
| you're | a contraction form of <i>you are</i> | You're going to like the new doctor. |
| their | a possessive form | Their positive attitude made the patients more at ease. |
| they're | a contraction form of <i>they are</i> | They're going to take a small sample of blood. |
| there | a place or idea | I want to go there someday. |
| it's | a contraction form for <i>it is</i> or <i>it has</i> | It's almost time for Mr. Warner's medication. |
| its | indicates possession | The hospital room could not be used because its call button was broken. |
| then | expresses time | First we must distribute medication and then we will give the patient a bath. |
| than | used for comparison | Science is easier than English. |
| ensure | to make sure or certain | Safety education will help ensure safety in the workplace. |
| insure | refers to the provision of insurance; coverage against a specified loss | My new car is not yet insured. |

Figure 7.21 Use this guide to check your written communications.

| Commonly Misspelled Words | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| absence | cemetery | familiar | mysterious | precedence | ridiculous |
| accommodate | changeable | February | necessary | preference | sacrifice |
| accumulate | committee | fiery | ninety | preferred | schedule |
| achievement | conceivable | foreign | noticeable | prejudice | seize |
| acquaintance | conscience | forty | occasionally | prevalent | separate |
| acquire | criticize | fourth | occurred | principal | separation |
| advice | definitely | government | occurrence | principle | severely |
| advise | desperate | grammar | omitted | privilege | similar |
| amateur | dictionary | height | opportunity | probably | sophomore |
| analysis | disappearance | immediately | parallel | procedure | specifically |
| analyze | disappoint | independence | paralysis | proceed | specimen |
| apparatus | disastrous | inevitable | paralyze | profession | studying |
| apparent | discipline | intellectual | particular | professor | succeed |
| arctic | dissatisfied | intelligence | pastime | prominent | succession |
| arithmetic | effect | knowledge | performance | pronunciation | technique |
| ascend | eligible | laboratory | permissible | pursue | temperamental |
| athletic | encouragement | laid | personnel | quantity | tragedy |
| belief | environment | led | perspiration | quizzes | unanimous |
| believe | equipped | lightning | physical | recede | undoubtedly |
| boundaries | especially | loneliness | possession | receive | unnecessary |
| business | exaggerate | lose | possibility | recommend | villain |
| candidate | excellence | maintenance | practically | rhyme | weird |
| category | experience | mathematics | precede | rhythm | writing |

Figure 7.22 This reference guide can be used to double-check spellings in your written communications.

- 3. **Reread what you have written.** Spell-check is not perfect. It is helpful to read what you have written out loud to do your own spell-check. You may hear certain words repeated, or something that seemed fine when written may sound unclear when read out loud.
- 4. **Seek feedback.** Your writing may not be as clear you think. Ask someone to review your writing for clarity and grammatical errors (Figure 7.23).

The ability to write clearly is becoming increasingly important. Excellent written communication skills will give you a significant advantage both when applying for a position, and in your chosen profession.



Figure 7.23 A good proofreader will identify spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, and passages needing clarification.

Real Life Scenario
Testing Communication Skills in Interviews

Jason is a 23-year-old college graduate. Since graduating a year ago, he has not been able to find a job related to his field of study and has taken several low-paying jobs to make ends meet. Jason is delighted when a friend tells him about a perfect position open in a well-paying company that offers benefits. After reading the job posting and description, Jason feels he is a great fit for this job.

Jason is surprised when he is scheduled for a lengthy interview. The process includes a writing exercise as well as a verbal interview. He feels confident after the verbal interview, and he sails through the writing portion. Jason is told he will hear about the job in two weeks.

Three weeks go by, and Jason has not heard anything. Jason decides to call the human resources representative at the company to ask if he got the job. Jason is told that his spelling and grammar are not up to the standard required for the position.

How could Jason improve his writing skills? Why do you think correct spelling and grammar usage are important to a healthcare worker?

Chapter Review and Assessment

Summary

To be a competent communicator, you must understand and practice English language usage rules. Your ability to communicate successfully is dependent upon your understanding of language. This is true in speaking and listening, as well as written communication through letters, reports, essays, and e-mails. Communicating clearly while giving a presentation and holding a meeting is critical for succeeding in both endeavors. If you use incorrect English in your written and verbal communications, you may be misunderstood.

Another way to communicate is through the use of body language. Reading others' body language and being aware of your own body language does much to enhance your communication skills. If you are unaware of the message your body language is sending, you may be sending a message to a patient, a coworker, supervisor, or visitors that is not what you intended at all. You must also be aware of cultural differences regarding gestures, touch, and proxemics.

Unfortunately, when you speak or write poorly, you may be judged as unprofessional or uneducated. Correct spelling, sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation are essential to your success as an employee. It is critical when working within the healthcare world that you learn and use proper English.

Review Questions

Answer the following questions using what you have learned in this chapter.

Short Answer

1. List three barriers to communication that you might encounter while working in healthcare.
2. Explain the term *proxemics*.
3. Describe three errors you could make while holding a meeting.

4. Explain what is meant by *active listening*.
5. Discuss your responsibilities as a good employee when attending a meeting.

True or False

6. *True or False?* Meetings should start and end promptly.
7. *True or False?* It is important to read your presentation to the audience.
8. *True or False?* A healthcare worker must be respectful of a patient's personal territory.
9. *True or False?* If you are a new employee, you should not speak up in meetings.
10. *True or False?* It is permissible to leave a caller on hold for up to 5 minutes.
11. *True or False?* HIPPA stands for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.
12. *True or False?* Pet names for patients make them feel welcome.
13. *True or False?* You should never tell a child that a procedure could be painful.
14. *True or False?* Personal space requirements are universal in all cultures.
15. *True or False?* In general, men seek more personal space than women.

Multiple Choice

16. Semicolons are used in which of the following ways?
 - A. They are the same as colons.
 - B. They are used to separate clauses or some items in a series.
 - C. Semicolons come before dashes.
 - D. They are seldom used in formal writing.
17. Which of the following words is correctly capitalized?
 - A. Summer
 - B. wednesday
 - C. october
 - D. English language

Critical Thinking Exercises

18. All the items below are complete sentences *except* _____.
 - A. Jimmy studies.
 - B. Although Marie studied for the exam and hired a tutor.
 - C. Jeffrey did not want to study but instead wanted to go surfing.
 - D. Do not speak harshly to the patient.
 19. What punctuation marks the end of a sentence?
 - A. a period, comma, and dash
 - B. a semicolon, a colon, and a question mark
 - C. a period, a question mark, and an exclamation point
 - D. a dash, a period, and a hyphen
 20. Which of the following words is spelled correctly?
 - A. beleive
 - B. cemetary
 - C. accomodate
 - D. mathematics
- ### Grammar Review
- Correct the grammar, punctuation, or spelling in the following sentences if necessary.
21. Its time for a coffee break.
 22. Laura's supervisor asked her to separate the clean towels and washcloths from the dirty ones.
 23. Your going to give an injection to the patient in Room 206B.
 24. Do not loose your application.
 25. They're coats are over their.
 26. The pharmacist told me not to loose my reciept.
 27. the luncheon is at noon first floor conference room.
 28. I want to work in one of three cities, Atlanta, New York City, or Austin.
 29. Dr. Evans said that I had three major problems in my essay spelling, punctuation, and passive verbs.
 30. My sister in law is an occupational therapist.
31. On a scale of one to ten, one being a poor communicator and ten being a successful communicator, how would you rate your communication skills? If you did not give yourself a 10 in communication skills, what can you do to improve your verbal, nonverbal, and written communication skills?
 32. Public speaking is the number one fear reported by people in the United States. Do you fear getting up in front of people to deliver a speech or presentation? Think about the public speakers you have heard—for example, your instructor might speak in front of many people in a lecture hall. When were you excited about a lecture or presentation you observed? What was it about the speaker that interested you? When were you bored and restless during a presentation? Why?
 33. If you are a poor speller, what can you do to ensure that your professional writing is free of spelling errors?
 34. List at least five mistakes in grammar that you hear from your friends and the media on a regular basis.
 35. Have you ever had the experience of calling a business or a healthcare facility and being treated rudely by the person who takes your call? Have you been put on hold for a long time? If you were answering the phone at that business or facility, how would your telephone etiquette differ from the person who took your call?
 36. What were some of the things that caused you to be bored, inattentive, or annoyed in past meetings you have attended at work or for school activities? What can you do to counteract these feelings?
 37. Are you bothered when someone approaches you and stands too close? Do you prefer to keep a large distance between yourself and others? How might these preferences affect your future healthcare career?