



11136CH07

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter the learner is able to —

- explain the meaning of communication skills.
- discuss the importance of communication.
- describe various communication skills.
- develop one's own communication skills further.

Every individual needs to be well equipped with the tools to communicate effectively, whether it is on the personal front or at work. According to experts, being a good communicator is half the battle won towards a successful personal and professional life. After all, if one speaks and listens well, then there is little or no scope for misunderstanding. Thus, the primary reasons for misunderstanding are the inability to express well, or listen effectively.

In the communication process we receive or send information using various skills, and effectiveness of the communication process depends on use of appropriate communication skills. Initiation of the communication process does not ensure that the intended receiver has received the message with common mutual understanding of the content as delivered by the sender. This is because distortions might occur at different sequential steps of the communication process. To minimise gaps in communication, one's communication skills need to be sharpened so that the communication process is more effective.

7.1 MEANING OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Communication skills are the abilities to use language (receptive) and express (expressive) information. Thus, communication skills are the abilities that help us send and receive information effectively. These can be natural or acquired.
- Communication skills refer to the range of behaviours that serve to convey information to another individual. This process requires one or more of the skills of thinking, speaking, listening, reading, writing, visualising and body language. This set of skills enables us to express and receive information under different situations in different ways.
- Psychologically speaking, the set of behaviours that serve to transmit and share common information to create a mutual understanding of the content being shared are termed as communication skills.

Communication skills are thus the ability that enables a person to share information consistently and effectively with a variety of audiences to create mutual understanding of the content being shared. These include the art or technique of persuasion through the use of spoken and written words, code and content sequence, treatment to content and body language used, visualisation and thinking towards configuring the contents according to the audience and the situation.

Communication skills are needed both for sending and receiving information. The one who sends the message needs to have the skills to think, visualise and design the intended message considering the type of audience, their needs and interests. The five Ws and one H need to be taken care of by the sender: What? Where? Why? When? Whom? and How? Similarly, the one who receives the message needs to receive the message without assumptions, placing biases aside and actively listening, viewing or reading the contents, often in-between the lines. It is said that nature has provided us with two ears and one mouth just so that we listen more and talk less. But do we follow that? The receiver needs to use one ear for words and the other ear to feel what is being said. This will help the receiver to have better understanding of the message.

Do you know that 70 per cent of all communication is misunderstood, misinterpreted, rejected, distorted and not heard? Effective communication skills will enable us to minimise these limitations.

7.2 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The way in which one communicates is as important or even more important, than what one is saying. Body language is equally or may even be more important than words. How effectively we are able to send or

receive information depends on how effectively we use one or more than one of these communication skills—

- Thinking
- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking
- Non-verbal communication

Thinking

This is an intra-personal communication skill. It implies individual reflection, contemplation and meditation. Thinking enables a person to select and organise one's thoughts, opinions, judgments and feelings. In a way, it is abstract as one cannot see the thinking process until it is expressed through words or feelings or writings. This is the fundamental step in communication. Your actions and expressions depend on what and how you think.

How can you develop the skill of thinking?

- Concentrate on what you are thinking during.
- Do not be distracted during your thought process.
- Strengthen thinking by developing skills in creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, criticality and flexibility.
- Be positive, always.

Reading

This is the ability to acquire meaning from print or written matter. Recreation, gaining information and knowledge are some of the motivating factors for reading. In order to read proficiently one requires knowledge of language, reading fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension, cognition and decoding. Typically one gains familiarity with language and its sounds by the age of 6 years. By 7 years of age, one is in the initial reading stage or decoding stage. Decoding skills continue to improve, and children develop speed in addition to accuracy in word recognition by the age of 8 years. One learns to read fluently around the age of 9 and develops liking for reading. By the ages 14 to 19 the reader begins to be able to analyse what one reads, understand different points of view, and react critically to what she/he reads.

How can you develop the skill of reading?

- Develop a liking for this skill, for example, by beginning with topics that interest you.
- Follow a kind of rhythm from left to right first and then from row to row while reading.

- Physical conditions such as adequate light from the left side, appropriate size of letters, and peaceful and quiet atmosphere are desirable.

ACTIVITY 1

List the following to know your reading habits—

- Note down how many pages of a textbook, magazine or novel do you read on an average every week.
- Compare with five of your friends the type of literature you and your friends read.

Writing

There are times when writing is the best way to communicate, and often the only way to get one's message across. In writing, one needs to be aware of the fact that once something is in the written form, it cannot be taken back. Communicating in this way is more concrete than verbal communication, with less room for error and even lesser room for mistakes. This presents written communicators with new challenges, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, writing style and wording. Today's technology (e.g., computers) provides reliable tools which make formal writing such as memos, letters or proposals much easier. There are spell-checks and grammar-checks. As students these skills are useful in writing essays, assignments, formal letters, and descriptive answers in exams.

Some guidelines for writing well—

- Avoid the use of slang words (e.g., 'kids' for children).
- Try not to use abbreviations (e.g., 'apt.' for apartment).
- Try not to use symbols unless it is writing for science, maths or technical subjects, or widely known and use symbols (e.g., '&' for 'and').
- Use clichés with caution (e.g., is middle class).
- Spell the names of people, companies and words correctly.
- Numbers should be expressed as words when the number is less than 10 or is used to start a sentence (example: Ten years ago, my sister and I...) The number 10, or anything greater than 10, should be expressed as a figure (example: My brother has 13 matchbox cars).
- Appropriate punctuation should be used.
- Keep your sentences short.

ACTIVITY 2

Collect samples of the following —

- Scientific writing (e.g., journal or textbook)
- Nursery school stories
- Magazine story
- Editorial in a newspaper

Study the difference in styles used in writing each of the above.

Listening

In the communication process we either send or receive information. Effective listening is the key to receiving information. Everyday we all listen to a variety of messages from morning to evening. But we remember certain things more easily and forget other things. Listening is a combination of skills pertaining to hearing, the attitude towards the person sharing the message and the content of the message, along with our psychological connection with the sender and the message. Listening requires more than hearing words. It requires a desire to understand, an attitude of respect and acceptance of the message and speaker, and a willing tendency to judge and evaluate others' perception about the message. Listening requires a high level of concentration and energy. Listening skill can be natural or acquired. It can be acquired by using some basic principles.

Students spend 20 per cent of all school related hours in listening. If television watching and one-half of conversations are included, students spend approximately 50 per cent of their waking hours just listening. For those hours spent in the classroom, the amount of listening time can be almost 100 per cent.

How can you develop the skill of listening?

- Pay attention to the speaker with alertness and relaxation.
- Stop talking while listening.
- Listening requires setting aside the listener's thoughts and perception of the message with a feel of empathy. The listener needs to have the desire and willingness to try and see things from another's perspective.
- Listen to the words and feelings to understand the message and try to read between the lines.
- Be aware of the non-verbal messages such as the motive, expressions and attitude of the speaker.

"To listen is to move. To listen is to be moved by the talker – physically and psychologically . . . The non-moving, unblinking person can reliably be said to be a non-listener . . . When other visible moving has ceased and the eye blink rate has fallen to less than once in six seconds, listening, for practical purposes, has stopped."

– Franklin Ernst, Jr.

Speaking

Speaking is one of the most basic communication skills. Speech refers to the processes of production, comprehension and use of sounds in a spoken language. In our day-to-day life we speak with family members, friends, and others for business and work to inform, share feelings and for many other reasons.

Speaking before a group and public speaking are the two types of important speaking skills. Public speaking is the process of talking to a group of people in a structured, deliberate manner with the intention to inform, influence, persuade, motivate, or entertain the listeners.



Most great speakers have a natural ability to display the skills and effectiveness that can help to engage and move an audience for a special purpose. Language and oratory are among the two most important aspects of public speaking and interpersonal communication. There are four obvious and simple actions to ensure that your verbal messages are understood and remembered. These are to —

- understand the purpose of the presentation.
- keep the message clear and concise.
- be prepared, rehearse well before speaking.
- be clear when delivering the message.

How can you make your talk or presentation effective?

Before you start working on your talk or presentation, it is vital that you understand—

Who are you speaking to? What are their interests, pre-suppositions and values? What do they share in common with others? How are they unique?

What do you wish to communicate? Adequate knowledge of the subject matter is crucial to your success. One way of answering this question is to

ask about the 'success criteria'. How do you know if and when you have successfully communicated what you have in mind?

How can you best convey your message? Choose your words and your nonverbal cues with your audience in mind. Plan a beginning, middle and end. If time and place allow, consider and prepare audio-visual aids.

When? Timing is important here. Develop a sense of timing, so that your contributions are seen and heard as relevant to the issue or matter at hand. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Remember *'It is better to be silent than to sing a bad tune.'*

Where? What is the physical context of the communication you have in mind? You may have time to visit the room, for example, and rearrange the furniture. Check for availability and visibility if you are using audio or visual aids.

Why? In order to convert hearers into listeners, you need to know why they should listen to you and tell them if necessary. What disposes them to listen? That implies that you know why you are seeking to communicate – the value or worth or interest of what you are going to say.

ACTIVITY 3

Recall the best speaker that you have heard. Write down why she/he was good.

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Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal skills, sometimes also known as visual skills, convey the unsaid. They become a part of the communication process along with the written and typed modes of communication.

Non-verbal clues include–

- Body language (e.g., arms crossed, standing, sitting, relaxed, tense gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture).
- Emotion of the sender and receiver (e.g., shouting, speaking provocatively, enthusiasm).
- Other connections between the people (e.g., friends, enemies, professional similarities or differences, personal similarities or differences, age similarities or differences, philosophical similarities or differences, attitudes, expectations).

Eye contact: Eye contact, an important channel of interpersonal communication, helps regulate the flow of communication. It signals interest in others. Furthermore, eye contact with audiences increases the speaker's credibility. A speaker who makes eye contact opens the flow of communication and conveys interest, concern, warmth and credibility.



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INAPPROPRIATE EYE CONTACT WITH THE AUDIENCE

Facial expressions: Smiling is a powerful cue that transmits —

- Happiness
- Friendliness
- Warmth
- Liking
- Affiliation

Thus, if you smile frequently you will be perceived as more likable, friendly, warm and approachable. Smiling is often contagious and the listener will react favourably and learn more.

Gestures: If you fail to gesture while speaking, you may be perceived as boring, stiff and unanimated. A lively and animated teaching style captures attention, makes the material more interesting, facilitates learning and provides a bit of entertainment. Head nod, a form of gesture, communicates positive reinforcement and indicate that you are listening.

Posture and body orientation: You communicate numerous messages by the way you walk, talk, stand and sit. Standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning slightly forward communicates that you are approachable, receptive and friendly. Furthermore, interpersonal closeness results when you and your audience face each other. Speaking with your back turned or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided; it communicates disinterest.

Proximity: Cultural norms dictate a comfortable distance for interaction with others. You should look for signals of discomfort caused by invading others' space. Some of these are—

- Rocking
- Leg swinging
- Tapping
- Gaze aversion

Typically, in large college classes or in a large meeting room or a presentation room space invasion is not a problem. In fact, there is usually too much distance. To counteract this, move around the room to increase interaction with your listeners. Increasing proximity enables you to make better eye contact and makes it possible for the listeners to speak or to communicate.

Paralinguistic: This facet of nonverbal communication includes six vocal elements – tone, pitch, rhythm, timbre, loudness and inflection.

For maximum effectiveness in your speech, learn to vary these six elements of your voice. One of the common criticisms of instructors or communicators is that they speak in a monotone. Listeners perceive these instructors or communicators as boring and dull. In a formal setting students report that they learn less and lose interest more quickly when listening to teachers who have not learned to modulate their voices.

ACTIVITY 4

Find out the definitions of tone, pitch, rhythm, timbre, loudness and inflection. Practise with variations of each of these elements.

ACTIVITY 5

To improve your verbal and nonverbal skills, record a segment of your speaking or presentation on a video/audio tape. Then ask a colleague or friend to suggest refinements.

Humour: Humour is often overlooked as a tool to create a more pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. It is too often not encouraged in a classroom setting. Laughter releases stress and tension for

Let us recapitulate

- Every individual needs to be well equipped with the tools to communicate effectively, whether it is on the personal front or at work.
- Communication skills are the abilities that help us send and receive information effectively. They can be natural or acquired.
- Communication skills refer to a range of behaviours that serve to convey information to others. The process requires one or more of the skills of thinking, speaking, listening, reading, writing, visualising and body language.

both the communicator and the listener. One should develop the ability to laugh at oneself and encourage the listeners to do the same. It fosters a friendly environment that facilitates better communication.

The Chapter X on Living and Working in a Global Society, which is the last in this unit, highlights the different interrelated contexts of family, community and global society with which an individual interacts in the course of development.

Key Terms

Communication skills, Thinking, Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Non-verbal skills

■ REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the importance of communication skills.
2. Enumerate and describe each communication skill.
3. “Non-verbal skills are not as important as verbal communication skills”. Comment.
4. Write an effective dialogue between two strangers who have met on a train.
5. According to you, which three communication skills are most important? and Why?

■ PRACTICAL 7

Effective Communication Skills

Theme Understanding Communication Styles and Skills

Task Analysis of own communication styles and skills

Purpose of the practical: Students will be able to analyse their own skills, i.e., personal strengths and limitations and practice to overcome these.

Conduct of the practical—

- You have understood in the chapter that our communication skills have two equally important components, i.e., verbal and non-verbal. Therefore, while analysing communication skills one must observe both the components.
- Observe each of your classmates when they speak to study their body language, proximity, and paralinguistic procedure.

Step 1: Ask students to think of one topic on which they can speak after putting their thoughts together for five minutes.

Step 2: Ask students to start presenting in the order they would like, either alphabetically by their names or they may volunteer their turns.

Step 3: Now analyse each speaker's style on the following checklist using one for each person.

Characteristics	Description	Rating		
		3	2	1
Content	Appropriate for young student like you			
Posture	- Erect - Erect but rigid - Leaning slightly			
Eye-contact	- Frequency - Movement of head from corner to the one other			
Facial expression	- Happiness - Friendliness - Warmth			
Proximity	- Rockery - Tapping - Leg swinging			
Paralinguistic	- Tone - Pitch - Rhythm - Timbre - Loudness			
Total score				

Step 4: After a group of students have presented, total the score and match it with the impression you made of the speaker.

Step 5: Make conclusions about each of the speakers and identify the characteristics for which each one needs to practise in order to improve one's communication skills.