

# Effective Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

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# Importance of effective communication

Effective communication skills can help others to understand and respond to what you are saying. If you have poor communication skills, people won't know what you're working on or appreciate what you're doing. You need to be able to communicate your thoughts and ideas.

Communicating effectively provides you with an opportunity to:

- Make a good impression on your supervisor and coworkers, or when interviewing.
- Help others to understand what you are saying.
- Be viewed as a team player.
- Feel comfortable asking questions in the workplace.
- Provide better service to customers.

Spoken communication includes:

- Verbal — saying and listening to the spoken word
- Non-verbal — expressions, gestures and body language



# Verbal communication — using your voice

Your voice is an essential tool that can be used to inform, instruct, motivate and persuade. The following are several elements of your voice that can be changed to fit the purpose of your communication and your audience:

- **Volume** — how loudly or quietly you speak
- **Speed** — how quickly or slowly you speak
- **Pitch** — how high or low your voice is
- **Expression** — the tone you use when you speak
- **Emphasis** — how you stress particular words



# Improve your sound

The following tips will help you improve how you sound when speaking to people, which will in turn increase the effectiveness of the message you are sharing:

- People tend to prefer lower pitch voices; opening your mouth wider when you speak will add depth.
- Avoid eating, smoking or chewing gum while talking because it makes it difficult for you to open your mouth and can be distracting.
- Taking deep breaths helps you slow down if you talk too quickly.
- Calm down when you speak. Stress can cause your throat muscles to tighten, raising the pitch.
- Pauses make your voice sound more attractive and gain listeners' attention, thus helping people understand and remember your message.

# Active listening — why it is important

Listening is as much a part of communication as speaking — there is no communication if no one is listening.

Good listening is important because it:

- Allows you to take in information.
- Improves professional and personal relationships.
- Saves time.
- Improves decision making.
- Speeds up the identification of problems.
- Increases your memory.



# Good listening skills

You can develop skills to combat the many barriers to effective listening:

**Prepare to listen.**

Stop doing other things that could distract you from listening and make sure you can clearly hear the speaker.

**Listen actively.**

Listen with a specific purpose or goal. Are you trying to learn something, understand a problem or help someone?

**Pay attention to the speaker.**

Show the speaker you are giving him or her your full attention by making eye contact and using appropriate body language.

**Repeat and reflect.**

Without interrupting the speaker, you can repeat some portions of what a speaker tells you and then comment on that portion to make sure you understand.

**Ask questions.**

Asking questions shows you are listening, interested and trying to understand. It also provides an opportunity for clarification and two-way communication.

# Non-verbal communication — types of body language

Body language is an essential part of communication, as it helps you learn clues to the true emotions and attitudes of the person you are communicating with and respond more appropriately.

## Eye contact

Try to hold eye contact with a person while you are speaking.



## Gestures

Move your hands naturally and avoid waving or clenching them.

## Stance

Your feet should be naturally shoulder width apart.

## Posture

Stand or sit straight and avoid slouching.

# Open versus closed body positions

Posture / body position can make a difference in how people view you and interact with you. For example:

- People tend to talk more to individuals who lean towards them than those who lean back.
- People who display open body positions are viewed as more positive than those with closed body positions.

The following are examples of open and closed body positions:

## Open

- ✓ Sitting with legs outstretched and uncrossed or with knees apart
- ✓ Elbows away from the body
- ✓ Hands open and not tightly clasped
- ✓ Head up

## Closed

- ✗ Legs crossed
- ✗ Hands folded on lap or arms folded across chest
- ✗ Hands closed or clenched
- ✗ Hands in pockets
- ✗ Head down



# Final tips

Effectively communicating your thoughts and ideas is vital to your success in the workplace. Remember the following tips when communicating at work:

- Communication is a two-way street — understanding what another person is conveying is just as important as sharing your perspective.
- You can and should change your volume, speed, pitch, expressions and emphasis to fit the purpose of your communication and your audience.
- Speaking slowly and pausing for emphasis will help people understand and remember your message.
- Non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, gestures, stance and posture offer valuable clues to understanding the speaker's true feelings and perspectives.
- Displaying an open body position will result in your message being received more favorably than a closed body position.

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