

# Improving Your Communication Skills



**Benevolent and  
Protective Order of  
Elks of the U.S.A.**

# What are communication skills?

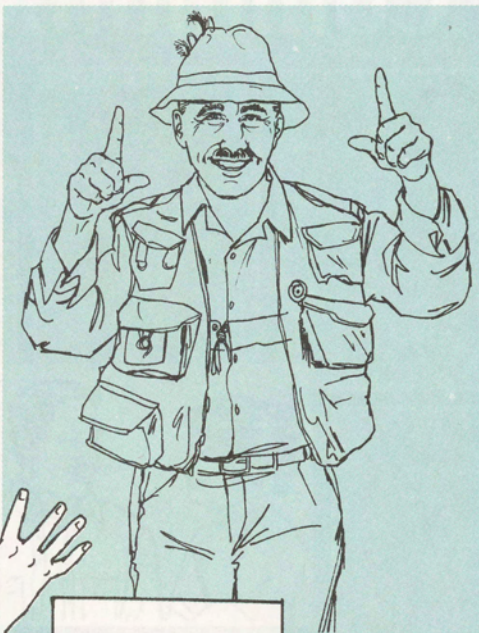
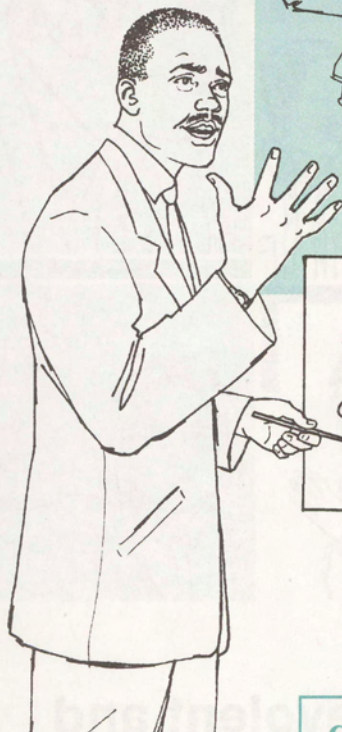
They're important life skills that involve:

## Words

Words are often the foundation of effective communication.

## Delivery

This includes tone of voice, timing and pacing.



## Gestures

"Body language" is an important part of sending and receiving messages.

## Symbols

A picture is often worth a thousand words!

**Communication skills also involve the ability to listen.**



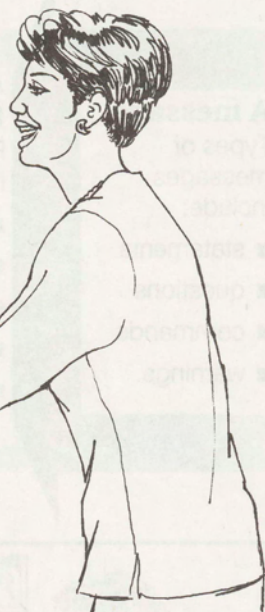
# Why learn about communication skills?

Because they're directly related to your:



## Success

Happiness at work, in your friendships and in your family relationships all depend on effective communication.



## Growth

Communication skills allow you to:

- make discoveries
- learn about yourself and others
- solve problems
- develop new skills
- have fun!

**Improving your communication skills can help you get what you want out of life.**

# Communication is a complex activity.

It involves:

## A message

Types of messages include:

- statements
- questions
- commands
- warnings.

## A way to send the message

For example, messages may be sent by:

- voice
- touch
- silence
- gestures
- writing (including books and electronic mail).

## Language

Words, symbols and gestures make up language.



## A sender

This is the person who begins the communication.



## A receiver

This is the person who receives and interprets the message.

## Context

This includes people's emotions, their physical surroundings and their past experiences. It affects how the message is received.



# Delivery matters.

How you say something is just as important as what you say. Delivery involves:

## Expressions

Smiles, frowns, rolling of the eyes, etc., all play a part in communication.

## Timing and pacing

For example, communication is affected by whether people:

- speak quickly or slowly
- cut one another off or wait to speak
- talk out of turn or wait too long to bring up an issue.

## Body language

For example, clenched fists may indicate anger. Frequent eye contact may indicate caring.

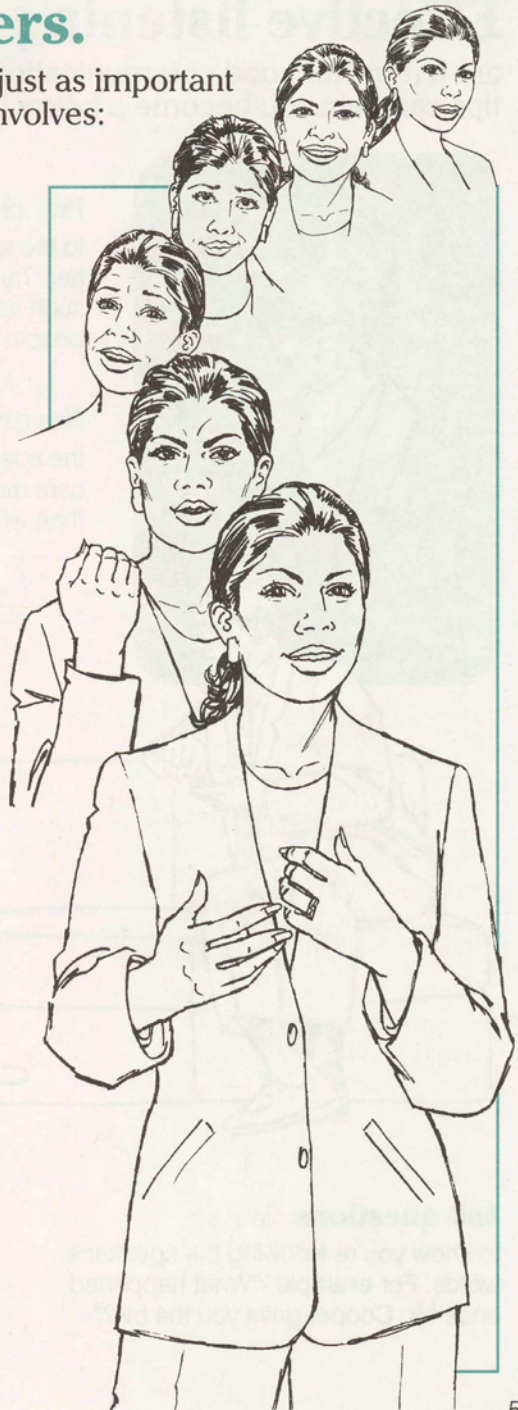
## Word choice

This often tells whether a situation is:

- formal or informal
- public or private
- serious or relaxed
- doubtful or hopeful.

## Tone of voice

Feelings such as pride, anger, impatience, joy and sorrow can all be expressed through tone of voice.



# Effective listening skills

are a must for good communication. These tips can help you become a better listener.



## Pay close attention

to the speaker. Focus on him or her. Try to tune out distractions, such as other conversations and people moving about.

## Never interrupt

the speaker. Interrupting shows you care more about what you're saying than what you're hearing.



## Ask questions

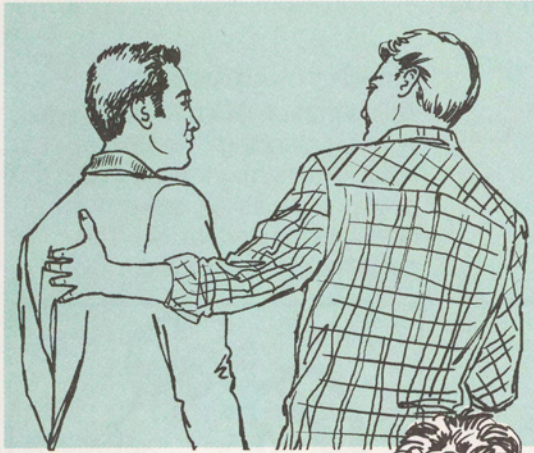
to show you're following the speaker's words. For example, "What happened once Mr. Cooper gave you the bill?"

## Show you understand

-- one way to do this is to rephrase the speaker's main points in your own words.

# Skillful responses

can often improve communication. Depending on the situation, you may need to give:



## Positive feedback

Make use of opportunities to express your approval. This helps encourage the other person and promote further communication.

## Negative feedback

Disagreeing with someone may not be easy. But hiding how you feel can block communication. When you need to disagree:

- Focus on the problem or issue -- not the person.
- Explain your thoughts or feelings. Give clear reasons.



**Keep in mind that overly positive or overly negative responses usually hurt communication.**

# Good face-to-face communication

can make a difference at home, at work and in social situations. Try to:

## Be clear and precise.

- Think about what you really want to say.
- Cover one idea at a time.
- Focus on being specific.



## Watch your posture.

This is part of your body language. Work on standing -- or sitting -- tall. Others may interpret your poor posture as low self-esteem, disrespect, boredom, etc. This can affect communication.



## Use appropriate eye contact.

Eye contact can aid understanding. But using it too intensely can make the other person uncomfortable.



## Control your voice.

For example:

- Talking too loudly can threaten listeners.
- Talking too softly can bother listeners and lead to misunderstanding.





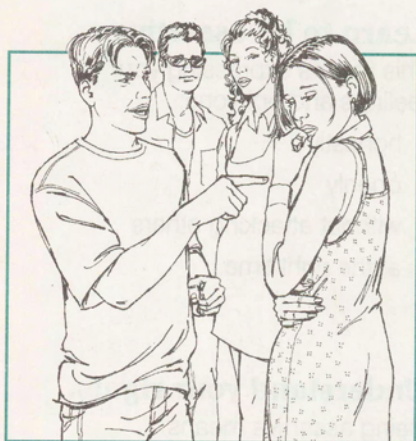
# Work to overcome communication “roadblocks.”

## Avoid habits that hurt communication.

For example, avoid:

- making fun of others
- lecturing
- taking others' problems lightly
- thinking of a response while the other person is talking
- giving orders
- giving too much advice.

Be especially aware of these pitfalls in personal relationships.



## Use “I” statements.

Talk in terms of yourself -- not the other person. For example, rather than saying “You’re so inconsiderate. You’re always late,” you could say “I’m really angry that I had to wait again.”



## “Reflect” feelings.

Show the speaker you care -- and that you’re really tuned in. For example, you could say “Sounds like you’re feeling sad” or “You must feel pretty angry.”

# Use a winning communication style.

## Learn to be assertive.

This means expressing your feelings and opinions:

- honestly
- openly
- without attacking others
- at the right time.



## Understand your rights.

Being assertive means understanding your right to:

- say no
- state your needs (along with changes you would like to occur)
- feel angry and upset, or happy and satisfied.



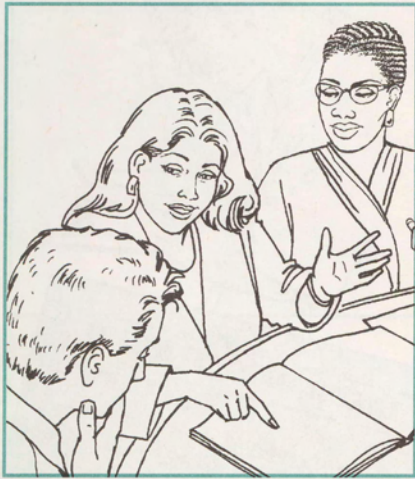
## Steer clear of styles that hurt communication.

Avoid being:

- passive -- avoiding conflicts and never speaking up
- aggressive -- being verbally or physically pushy
- passive-aggressive -- trying to control others in sneaky ways.

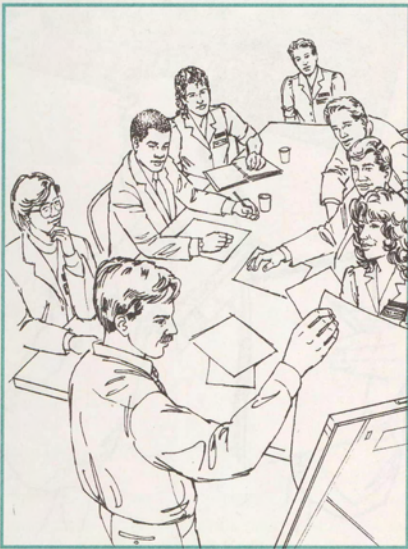
# Communication in the workplace

Here are some tips that can help improve:



## Meetings

- Share your agenda in advance. Plan on covering a few main points -- avoid overload.
- Invite only key people.
- Choose an appropriate space. For example, try not to meet with a small group in a large room.
- Consider comfort. Good lighting, comfortable seating, etc., can help communication.
- Take minutes. Distribute them as soon as possible after the meeting.



## Presentations

- Research and organize your topics in advance.
- Learn as much as you can about your audience.
- Use video or audio aids to increase understanding and hold attention.
- Prepare notes. But don't read the entire time.
- Rehearse your presentation -- especially if you're covering material that's new to you.
- Think about possible questions from the audience. Prepare your answers.

# Written communication

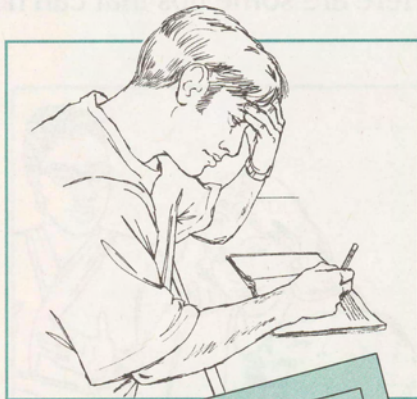
Here are some ways to write more effectively.

## Letters

Organize your thoughts before you begin. Write a first draft, then make necessary revisions.

Pay attention to:

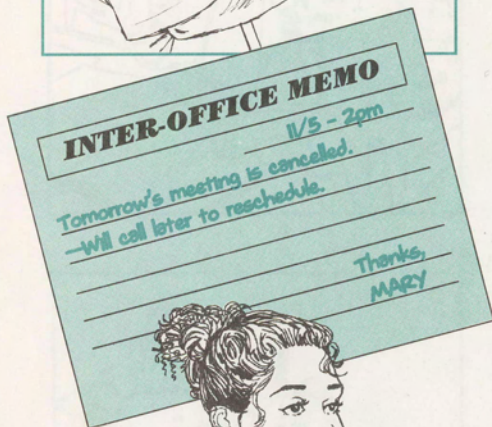
- tone -- should it be formal or informal?
- organization -- do you use a new paragraph for each new idea?
- spelling and punctuation -- these reflect on you!



## Memos

This is a kind of letter to people in the same organization. In general:

- Be polite and direct.
- Explain points clearly. (It's often OK to use abbreviations and office jargon.)
- Follow your organization's guidelines on format.



## Reports

Understand the report's purpose before researching and writing drafts. Structure the report so it will be easy to read. Include a:

- title (and title page)
- table of contents (for long reports)
- brief introduction
- summary.



**Be sure to proofread all written work. Have someone else proofread it, too, when possible.**

# Using technology

to communicate can bring positive results. But it's important to use technology wisely.

## Practice good telephone habits.

For example:

- Pick up after 2 or 3 rings.
- Identify yourself and your organization. Find out the name of the caller.
- Take notes. Avoid making the caller repeat him- or herself.
- Ask for permission to place the caller on hold.
- If you're the caller, always call back if you get disconnected.



## Make the most of voice mail.

Leave clear, concise messages. Include:

- your name and organization
- the day and time
- the purpose of your call
- a number where you can be reached.

## Keep up with trends.

Take time to learn about new phone systems, electronic mail, etc. Improving your skills with these communication tools can benefit your professional and personal life.



# Questions and answers

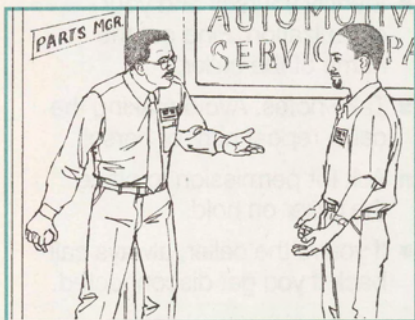
## Can humor help communication?

Yes. But take care not to offend others or use too much humor. Pointing humor at yourself is usually safe.



## How do I respond when someone is angry?

Stay calm. Talk in a quiet voice. Show you are aware of how the person feels. For example, say "It sounds like you're pretty frustrated." Do not get pulled into an argument.



## How do I deal with my fear of public speaking?

Good preparation is important. It also helps to:

- Look at individuals in the audience when you talk.
- Go slowly.
- Realize that anxiety usually fades shortly after you start talking.



## What about cultural differences?

Words, gestures and symbols have different meanings among different cultures. Never assume others will understand or accept your communication style. Learn about effective communication with people of different cultures. Your library is a good place to start.

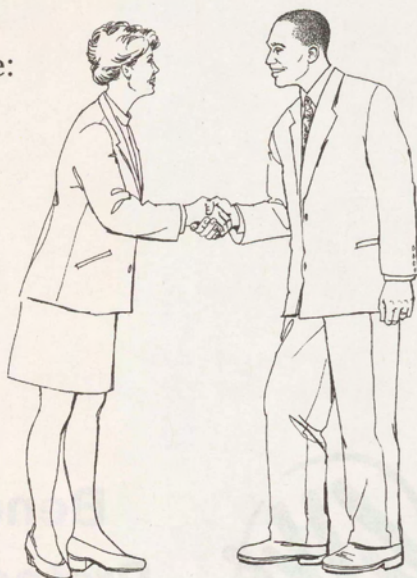


# Good communication skills pay off!

They can help you be more:

## Successful

Your ability to grow and get ahead depends on how well you communicate.



## Appreciated

Your honesty, clarity and ability to listen will go a long way.



## Happy

Good communication is one of life's great joys!



**There's nothing like understanding  
-- and being understood!**



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