

SEC – SKILL – ENG I

THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is both an art and a science. It often involves acts of speaking and listening, reading and writing, but it also goes beyond these and incorporates the transmission of non-verbal language, sign language, codes transmitted electronically (e.g., Morse code), and physically (touch; hormones; muscles, tendons, nerves), and messages communicated through music, and by other means.

Although you communicate simply by being in the world, developing good verbal and body language skills involves learning and consciously using your skills to improve.

The act of communicating verbally serves to convey how we feel and how we think to others. It is also the basis of how we relate with others, using language as its medium. Increasing knowledge and awareness of some of the components involved in effective communication can serve to improve how we use those components personally.

To explain all the features required of good communicators, you need to delve into the nature of verbal communication in its various modes. Basic questions are: How can you put yourself on a path that would make you into a better communicator? How can you develop skills to overcome some fears or limitations?

Effective communication may be said to involve the transfer of values, beliefs and thoughts from one person to another.

- To transfer a spoken message, it is obvious that speakers and listeners are involved, with timing used for speedy transmission. Speakers use verbal and body language to convey messages, looking towards listeners. Listeners respond by glancing towards speakers, with words and movements and attention to timing and turn-taking.
- What can you do to become a more effective speaker? Look around and observe some good exchanges between people and check out their body language. It's good to start with body language, because it is powerful, and often the beginning of good exchanges.
- It may be useful to know more about what your attitudes are regarding communicating and your communication skills.

Tools of Communication

There are many tools available to you as you communicate; you just have to be aware of them and then use them purposefully. The better you become at using these tools, the better you'll be at communicating.

The two primary categories these tools fall into are ***verbal and non-verbal***. Let's look at the different ways you can use each to improve your ability to communicate.

Verbal Communication

1. Your words

It's been said that people judge you by the words you use, and this is true. Choose your words wisely. Words have power. They have the power to move nations and they have the power to destroy as well. When you speak, use your words carefully.

Here are a few things to consider in regard to your words:

- Avoid using words that will cause the other person to think poorly of you. Slang is one example. Another is, of course, slurs of any type. Use words that communicate positive values. Use optimistic words, words of strength. Make sure they are understandable.
- Use words that are colorful and rich with meaning, as long as they can be understood by the listener.

2. Your Vocabulary

An expanded vocabulary will set you apart. It enhances the communication process and draws others in. Your vocabulary can reveal to others how educated you are, and others may make judgments about you that can affect your opportunities with them. The best communicators will use an expanded vocabulary with more educated groups and a more basic vocabulary with less-educated groups.

Just as important as what you say is how you say it. What tone are you using? When you speak, are you monotone? Or do you move the tone of your voice, changing it up? This will naturally help people follow what you're saying. Changing the tone of your voice is a very effective way to draw people into your message. Imagine if a painter only used one color. We want lots of color and lots of tone.

Along with the words you use and your tone, consider your pace. Sometimes when you speak you may need to go slowly, and sometimes you may need to go very fast. The speed with which you speak will tell others certain things. A fast pace will communicate that you're excited about something. A slow pace usually communicates thoughtfulness or that you really want them to hear your point.

Choosing your pace is also like using your volume in an effective way. Master communicators will draw their audience in by fluctuating their voice from very loud to a near whisper. The audience doesn't even know that the speaker is taking them on a roller coaster ride of communication. There are lessons to be learned here. Even in a one-on-one conversation, we can shift and change volume, keeping our communication more effective.

3. Emotion

The emotions you communicate while speaking are vital. The key here is to show emotion without "getting emotional." Emotions can be a very effective communicator. For example, showing anger can communicate that you are very serious about something (as long as you don't get angry often). Allowing yourself to cry can show a side of you to others that communicates that you are a person of passion who, while being a hard-charging person who desires success, also has a tender side. Allowing yourself to laugh will communicate that you have a fun side and do not take yourself too seriously. Emotion, if controlled, is a powerful communicator.

4. Enunciation

Do you speak clearly so people can understand you? Enunciation is an often-overlooked key to effective communication. It's imperative to clearly enunciate our words so that people understand us. Clear enunciation gives us a little "punch" to our communication. Work on enunciating your words clearly. The key is to get it just right—enunciating so that your words don't run together but not over-enunciating so that you sound unnatural.

In all of these principles, the idea is variety. Anytime we communicate in a single way, we become predictable and people stop listening. Think of yourself. Do you like to listen to people who speak at one speed, in one tone, with a boring vocabulary and without emotion? Of course not! Then we should make every effort to be colorful and effective communicators. And we can be—if we work at it and practice, practice, practice!

Non-verbal Communication

What you say affects how you communicate, certainly, but just as important is what you don't say. Yes, your nonverbal communication has a major impact on how well you communicate.

Have you ever given much thought to how you communicate nonverbally? Here are some thoughts on ways to use nonverbal communication to support what you're saying verbally.

5. Your Hands

Keeping your hands by your side will make you seem stiff and uncomfortable. Instead, use your hands to communicate. Now, don't get too demonstrative to the point where people are wondering where your hands are going next. One way to see what you do nonverbally is to record yourself speaking. Watch what you do with your hands.

6. Your Eyes

The eyes can be a very powerful tool in communication. You know the old saying, "the eyes are the window to your soul"? It's true. Think of what a mother communicates to her newborn when she gazes into their eyes, or what a couple says without words when they look into each other's eyes. The eyes speak volumes.

Have you spoken with someone who is constantly looking around? What does that communicate? A lack of interest in what you have to say.

When you speak to someone, look at them. Give them your attention with your eyes. Listen to them with your eyes. Communicate with them that they are important.

7. Your Arms

Some people don't even realize when they're "closed off" to someone else by crossing their arms when the other person is speaking. Those who study this tell us that crossing the arms is a surefire way to close yourself off from the other person. It communicates closure, fear and opposition.

8. Speaking Position

When you're communicating, especially in a presentation situation, your speaking position, whether you are standing, sitting, kneeling, etc., can communicate a lot.

For example, my good friend Zig Ziglar, a master of the stage, will frequently move to the front of the stage and kneel. What is he nonverbally communicating? He is saying, "Listen closely to this. This is really important." He is bringing the audience in for an intimate moment. Even in a room with 1,000 people, this way of communicating can make every individual feel like Zig is speaking closely to just them.

Sitting communicates casualness. I know many speakers will give a considerable part of their presentation this way. John C. Maxwell, another friend of mine, and a world-class leadership expert, gives quite a bit of his speeches while sitting. His style is informative and casual—and it is effective.

[Reference: <https://www.tcd.ie/equality/listen-speak-heard/effective-comm/intro/>
<https://www.success.com/rohn-8-ways-to-master-the-art-of-communication/>
Access date: 16/04/2020.]

Conversational Skill

Conversations are supposed to be fun. They involve personal interactions between two or more people about something of interest. But many people worry about having conversations. They are concerned that they won't be able to keep the conversation going, or about what they will say.

Keeping a conversation going is something of an art, and one which many of us now seem to lack. This page explains how you can learn this 'dying art', and have constructive and enjoyable conversations with others.

What is Conversation?

So why is it considered difficult? It certainly wasn't for our grandparents' generation. Some commentators have put the problem down to the growth of social media, with its emphasis on 'broadcasting' and its 'me' focus, and this certainly doesn't make it any easier.

But all is not lost. Not only can conversational skills be learned and developed, but it is surprisingly easy to do so, especially if you follow some simple rules.

The Rules of Conversation

1. Conversation is a Two-Way Street

The first and most important rule of conversation is that it is not all about you, but it's not all about the other person either.

A monologue, in either direction, is not conversation. Try to achieve a balance between talking and listening in any conversation.

This is where social media makes life difficult. We're used to broadcasting our views, and then responding if others comment. That can feel like the start of a conversation but, when you're face to face, it's not polite to start by broadcasting your views.

Instead, try asking a question to establish common ground. For example: "*What do you do?*", or even "*Isn't the weather beautiful?*"

This signals your intention to share the conversation.

2. Be Friendly and Polite

Smiling, and being nice, will take you a long way in conversational terms. Everyone would rather chat to someone friendly and pleasant. But what are the practical elements of this?

1. Build rapport.

You can build rapport by establishing some common ground and by simply smiling and using positive and reinforcing body language. This is actually your **non-verbal** form of communication.

2. Be nice.

Don't say unpleasant things about anyone. After all, the person you're talking about could be your new acquaintance's best friend. And even if they're not, your new acquaintance may not relish discussion about someone behind their back (and neither should you). See our page on **Friendliness** for some ideas.

3. Try to avoid contentious topics on first acquaintance.

It's fine to talk politics once you know someone a bit better. When you first meet someone, though, it's better to stick to neutral ground, which is why so many people talk about the weather. This is where 'small talk' comes in.

Just bring the conversation to a polite close, perhaps by saying something like "*I must just go and catch so-and-so before they go. It's been really nice to chat to you*", or "*Please excuse me, I promised to help with x and I see they need me now*".

3. Respond to What They are Saying

To respond genuinely to what someone has just said means that you have to listen. You can't just switch off, and think about what you're going to say next. However, if we're honest, most of us would admit that we often do just that.

It's important to focus on the other person, and what they're saying. You also need to take into account their body language.

If you find it difficult to think of something to say in response, try using some 'filler' sentences, such as:

"That's just so interesting, you're really making me think hard!"

or

"Goodness, that's challenging, I need to think about this. I've never thought about it that way."

Not only does that give you a bit of time to think about the subject under discussion, but it's a compliment to the person you're speaking with, which is always good.

4. Use Signaling to Help the Other Person

When a conversation is flowing well, it moves naturally from one person to the other. However, if one or both are finding it more of a struggle to 'chat', you may find it helpful to use 'signals' to show the other person that it is their turn to talk.

The most common type of signal is questions. These may be either open or closed.

- **Closed questions invite a yes/no answer.**

In conversation, they might include "Don't you agree?", and "Are you enjoying the party?" They are not really inviting the other person to do more than nod and agree, rather than to share the conversation.

- **Open questions invite more information.**

They open up the conversation to the other person, and invite them to participate. For this reason, in conversation, they are often called ‘invitations’. Open questions often start ‘How...?’ or ‘Why....?’

4. Creating Emotional Connections

Of course, it is perfectly possible to conduct a conversation entirely at the level of small talk, with nothing important being said.

But conversation is also a way to explore whether you wish to know someone better and build a relationship with them. It can therefore be useful to understand how to use conversation to create and build emotional connections.

The key is sharing appropriate information.

That means being prepared to be open about what interests you, what makes you into *you* as a person, and inspiring the other person to share too.

[Reference: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/conversational-skills.html>. Access date: 16/04/2020]
