

# Maximizing Communications

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Communication skills are the abilities that allow us to exchange information, ideas, and emotions in ways that other people can understand and respond to. They include what we say, how we say it, how we listen, and how we interpret the signals others send back.

Effective communication rests on three main components: verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal behavior. Verbal communication is the content of our message - the words we choose and how we structure them. Nonverbal communication includes posture, facial expression, gestures, and eye contact, all of which strongly influence how our words are interpreted. Paraverbal communication is how we use our voice - tone, pitch, volume, and pacing - which can change the emotional impact of the exact same sentence. When these three elements align, people tend to find us clear and trustworthy; when they clash, others may feel confused or doubt our sincerity.

Another core skill is active listening. Many people think of communication as primarily expressing themselves, but the quality of any interaction depends just as much on how well we receive and understand others. Active listening involves focusing your attention on the speaker, noticing both their words and their nonverbal cues, and then checking your understanding by paraphrasing, summarizing, or asking clarifying questions. It also means holding back the urge to interrupt, mentally argue, or prepare your response while the other person is still talking. When people feel genuinely heard, they are more likely to be open, honest, and cooperative, which makes every other communication skill more effective.

Clarity and conciseness are also fundamental. A clear message is organized, uses straightforward language, and signals its main point early rather than burying it in unnecessary detail. Being concise doesn't mean being abrupt; it means stripping away jargon, filler, and tangents so that what remains is easy to follow and act on. Clarity is especially important in written communication, where tone and body language are absent and misunderstandings are easier. In

speech and writing alike, a useful test is whether someone outside the situation could summarize your point after hearing or reading it once.

Equally important are empathy and emotional awareness. Communication is not just about transmitting facts; it is about navigating emotions - our own and other people's. Empathy means deliberately considering how your message might sound from the listener's point of view and adjusting your language, timing, and medium accordingly. Emotional awareness adds a self-reflective layer: noticing when you are angry, anxious, or defensive, and deciding whether you should pause, cool down, or rephrase before speaking. These skills help reduce unnecessary conflict and create interactions that feel respectful even when you disagree.

Context and audience awareness shape how you use all of these abilities. The way you explain a complex topic to a colleague who shares your background will differ from how you explain it to a friend with no technical knowledge. Professional contexts, cross-cultural settings, and online interactions each carry their own norms and expectations. Skilled communicators implicitly ask themselves: Who is my audience? What do they care about? What constraints or sensitivities might be present? They then choose words, examples, and channels (email, meeting, text, call) that fit the situation rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all style.

Building communication skills is a long-term process, but it can be approached systematically. A useful starting point is self-assessment and feedback. You might reflect on recent interactions that went poorly or felt awkward and ask what part of the exchange you controlled: Were you unclear about your main point? Did you interrupt? Did your tone sound harsher than you intended? Inviting feedback from trusted colleagues, friends, or mentors can reveal blind spots - habits that are obvious to others but invisible to you. Even a simple question like "Was that explanation clear?" can yield helpful information over time.

From there, targeted practice makes improvement tangible. If you want to strengthen active listening, you can intentionally practice in low-stakes conversations by fully focusing on the other person, summarizing what they said, and asking one follow-up question before offering your own perspective. If your goal is clearer speaking, you might outline your main point and two or three supporting ideas before meetings, then practice stating them briefly. For written communication, drafting a message and then revising it once specifically for clarity and brevity can gradually reshape your style.

Nonverbal and paraverbal skills also develop through conscious attention and small experiments. You can practice maintaining comfortable eye contact, keeping an open posture

(uncrossed arms, body oriented toward the speaker), and nodding or using small verbal acknowledgments to show engagement. Recording yourself during a short presentation or even a practice explanation and then watching it is often instructive. You may notice a habit - peaking too quickly, trailing off, filling pauses with “um” or “like” - that you can then work on in the next few conversations.

Another powerful way to build communication skills is to expand your comfort with constructive conflict and difficult conversations. Many people avoid hard topics, or approach them with blame and defensiveness. You can practice framing disagreements around shared goals (“We both want this project to succeed”) and specific behaviors (“When X happens, Y result follows”), rather than attacking motives or character. Preparing key sentences in advance, such as “Help me understand how you’re seeing this” or “Here’s what I’m worried will happen if we don’t address this” can make it easier to stay calm and focused during emotionally charged discussions.

Reading and observing can also accelerate growth. Good communicators often pay attention to how effective speakers, teachers, or leaders structure their messages and handle questions. You can analyze a talk, a meeting, or even a conversation in a movie or interview: How did the speaker open? How did they signal transitions? How did they respond when challenged? Which phrases helped clarify, and which created confusion? Turning communication into something you actively study, rather than just something you “do,” sharpens your sense of what works.

Finally, consistency and patience are essential. Communication habits are deeply ingrained and tied to personality, culture, and past experiences. You won’t transform them overnight. But steady, deliberate practice—choosing one or two skills to focus on for a few weeks at a time—creates cumulative change. Over months and years, you may notice that misunderstandings decrease, collaboration becomes smoother, and people increasingly describe you as clear, empathetic, or persuasive. Those external results are the visible signs of internal skills that you have gradually built.

In essence, communication skills are not a fixed trait but a set of learnable behaviors and attitudes. By becoming more aware of how you speak, listen, and respond; by seeking feedback; and by practicing in everyday situations, you can steadily grow into a communicator who not only conveys information, but also builds trust, understanding, and connection.