

# *Life Skills for Success*

## *Communication Skills*

### Instructor's Guide

#### **Overview**

It is estimated that we spend three quarters of our waking hours communicating—on the phone or in person, texting and tweeting, chatting, and posting. In addition, the National Association of Colleges and Employers consistently rank effective communication skills (both written and verbal) as two of the most desirable for new employees. This alone suggests that communication is a crucial skill, one that is highly privileged in the working world, but is just as valuable in all facets of daily life.

And yet, many people struggle to communicate effectively, in part because they lack an understanding of the strategies and techniques involved. From active listening to interpreting nonverbal cues to understanding how to adjust a written message to match its intended audience, there are many ways to improve communication skills.

This video provides an overview of those skills and strategies and offers suggestions for how to apply them on and off the job. By the end of the video, viewers should have a better grasp of how to convey their ideas through speaking and writing, as well as use their communication skills to foster productive relationships and advance their careers.

#### **Presentation Suggestions**

Ask participants to think about all the ways they have communicated since they woke up this morning, including face-to-face conversations, phone calls, text exchanges, emails, and posts to social media. Have them estimate how much of their time has been spent communicating in some form or another. Then ask them if all of those exchanges went as planned? Was there an instance when communication fell flat? When they didn't quite get their message across? Or when they didn't really understand or pay attention to the message that was being sent?

Truthfully, because we spend so much of our time communicating, breakdowns are bound to occur. But when do those miscommunications become a real problem? Consider asking participants to share an example of when a miscommunication became an even bigger problem. Use this as a segue to emphasize the importance of good communication skills.

Alternatively (or additionally), you may ask your students to complete the *Life Skills Inventory* (available from JIST Career Solutions), focusing on the communications segment in conjunction with considering the previous questions. When you feel participants are

ready to think about how to improve their communication skills, give them the **Anticipation Quiz** to complete prior to watching the video. If you wish, allow the students to state their answers and discuss them.

Show the **video**. Encourage students to make changes to the answers they put down for the Anticipation Quiz while watching the video. If you wish, allow students to do this section-by-section whenever the video suggests a pause.

At the conclusion of the video, ask students to discuss any changes they made to their answers on the Anticipation Quiz as a result of information in the video. Follow up the discussion with the **Activities**.

Use the **Discussion Questions** to request oral or written responses from students or assign the questions as homework essays.

Give the **Quick Quiz** at the conclusion of class and correct the quizzes as a group.

Assign the **Homework Option**, if desired.

## Anticipation Quiz

**Directions:** Answer these questions as completely as possible. You will be allowed to revise your answers as you watch the video.

1. List three strategies for effective verbal communication in the workplace.
2. What is active listening and how is it different from just hearing?
3. When is an email not an appropriate form of workplace communication?
4. What all is included in nonverbal communication?
5. List three strategies for writing and sending effective emails at work.

## Answer Key

1. Answers will vary but might include: use small talk to develop rapport, give credit to others, acknowledge other points of view, offer constructive criticism, don't interrupt or dominate the conversation, use language appropriate to your audience.
2. Active listening involves not only hearing the speaker's words, but processing what those words mean to fully understand and appreciate the speaker's intended message and providing feedback to ensure comprehension.
3. When the matter is time sensitive or of a personal or highly important nature.
4. Answers will vary but might include: facial expressions, hand gestures, posture, proxemics (personal space), and touch.
5. Answers will vary but might include: Watch whom you send your messages to.

Never send inappropriate content. Avoid slang and profanity. Reply in a timely manner. Include a topic in the subject line. Avoid texting shorthand.

## Activities

### Activity #1

Title: Guess My Mood

Format: Group

Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: List of words, hat/bowl

Procedure:

1. It is estimated that 90 percent of our communication is conveyed through our nonverbal cues. If so, then it should be easy to show how you feel without saying a word. Using the following list of moods/feelings, call on students to choose one at random and act it out using only nonverbal cues, allowing the rest of the group to guess. Feel free to add some words of your own.
2. When you've gone through the list, discuss which nonverbal cues seem to be the most meaningful. Facial expressions? Body posture? Hand gestures? Discuss how participants can be more mindful, not only of the nonverbal cues they read from others, but the kinds of cues they give themselves.

happy	sad	angry	surprised	afraid
jealous	bored	disgusted	annoyed	nervous
excited	relaxed	tired	confused	suspicious

### Activity #2

Title: Adapting to Your Audience

Format: Individual

Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Paper and pen

Procedure:

1. Every piece of writing has both a goal and an intended audience, and those two will

have a tremendous impact on the approach a writer takes—formal or informal, serious or funny, persuasive or informative.

2. Break students into groups of four and have them each write one of the following messages.
  - An email to your boss requesting a meeting to discuss a possible promotion.
  - An email to a customer requesting payment on an overdue bill.
  - An email to a coworker asking if he or she would cover your next shift.
  - An email to a good friend asking if they want to do something this weekend.
3. Allow students 10-15 minutes to compose their email, then have students go around their groups reading their emails aloud, noting differences in tone, word choice, sentence length, formality, and so on.
4. Come back together as a whole group and discuss the impact that audience has on written communication styles. What are the primary differences between business/professional writing and personal writing?

## Discussion Questions

1. Three major means of communication in the workplace are face-to-face, over the phone, and through email. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Think of two or three instances where one form of communication would be much preferable to the other two.
2. How has technology changed the way we communicate with each other? Specifically, what impact has email, texting, and social media had on the way we send and receive messages? Are these new forms of communication always better or more efficient? When do they become problematic, especially in the workplace?

## Quick Quiz

**Note:** You may read these questions out loud, allowing time for students to respond, or copy and hand this out as a written exercise. If you read the quiz, write or project responses for the group to see.

1. When writing at work you should
  - A) avoid repetition and wordiness.
  - B) consider your audience and goal.
  - C) proofread carefully.
  - D) all of the these.
2. Which of these is *not* an indicator that someone is *actively* listening?
  - A) nodding
  - B) asking the speaker to repeat themselves
  - C) paraphrasing
  - D) asking questions for clarification
3. Which of the following is a disadvantage of written communication?
  - A) It leaves a paper trail.
  - B) It provides more opportunity to craft and revise message.
  - C) It does not require personal contact.
  - D) It does not allow for interpreting nonverbal cues.
4. Facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture are all examples of
  - A) verbal communication.
  - B) nonverbal communication.
  - C) written communication.
  - D) telepathic communication.

5. When communicating by phone it is important to
- A) answer promptly.
  - B) identify yourself at the start.
  - C) avoid distractions and interruptions.
  - D) do all of the these.
6. In a conversation, our meaning is mainly conveyed through our
- A) choice of words.
  - B) tone of voice.
  - C) nonverbal cues.
  - D) none of these.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is the physical distance you keep between you and others.
- A) Proxemics
  - B) Body posture
  - C) Nonverbal spacing
  - D) Conversational orientation
8. True or False: When writing it is important to always include as many details as you can think of.
- A) True
  - B) False

## Answer Key

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. D | 5. D |
| 2. B | 6. C |
| 3. D | 7. A |
| 4. B | 8. B |

## Homework Option

When we think of the most effective communicators, we often think of world leaders and advocates for change and their memorable speeches. While participants may not have to address large crowds as part of their daily communications, they can still learn a great deal about effective verbal communication by watching great orators at work. For homework, have participants pick one memorable speech from modern times and watch it online. Here is a good place to get started: <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/entertainment/people/25-ionic-speeches-you-ll-want-to-watch-on-repeat-108315>. Alternatively, you can find speeches at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/best-motivational-speeches>.

As they watch, have students write down what they liked about the speech, namely with regards to the speaker's method of delivery: word choice, inflection, gestures, expressions, rhythm, volume, and so on. They should come to the next class prepared to discuss their findings. For fun, you can have them copy down one quote from the speech that they felt was most powerful and have them try to recite that line for the class.

## References

The following sources have been referenced in creating the *Life Skills: Communication Skills* video. Instructors may choose to use this resource for research purposes or extend it to students for additional and/or advanced reading.

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