



Developing your skills



Communication Skills

Good communication skills require a high level of self-awareness. By understanding your personal style of communicating, you will go a long way towards creating good and lasting impressions with potential students. The following notes aim to help you understand what communication skills are necessary when establishing a relationship with potential students and how to develop them.

HOW TO GET YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS?

Effective communication is all about conveying your messages to other people clearly and unambiguously. It's also about receiving information that others are sending to you, with as little distortion as possible. This involves effort and it's a process fraught with error, with messages muddled by the sender, or misinterpreted by the recipient. When this isn't detected, it can cause tremendous confusion, wasted effort and missed opportunity. In fact, communication is only successful when both the sender and the receiver understand the same information.

By successfully getting your message across, you convey your thoughts and ideas effectively. When not successful, the thoughts and ideas that you actually send do not necessarily reflect what you think, causing a communications breakdown and creating roadblocks that stand in the way of your goals.

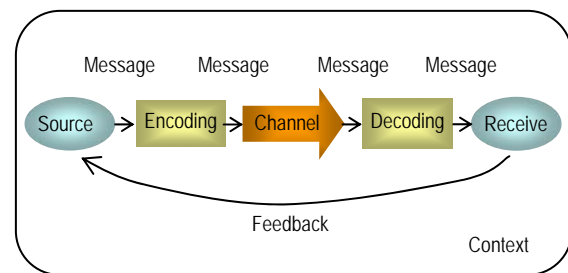
In spite of the increasing importance placed on communication skills, many individuals continue to struggle, unable to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively. Being able to communicate effectively is therefore essential if you want to build a successful relationship with potential students. To do this, you must understand what your

message is, what audience you are sending it to, and how it will be perceived. You must also weigh-in the circumstances surrounding your communications, such as situational and cultural context.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Problems with communication can pop-up at every stage of the communication process (which consists of the **sender**, **encoding**, the **channel**, **decoding**, the **receiver**, **feedback** and the **context** – see diagram below). At each stage, there is the potential for misunderstanding and confusion.

To be an effective communicator and to get your point across without misunderstanding and confusion, your goal should be to lessen the frequency of problems at each stage of this process, with clear, concise, accurate, well-planned communications.



Source

As the source of the message, you need to be clear about why you're communicating, and what you want to communicate. You also need to be confident that the information you're communicating is useful and accurate.

Message

The message is the information that you want to communicate.



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Encoding

This is the process of transferring the information you want to communicate into a form that can be sent and correctly decoded at the other end. Your success in encoding depends partly on your ability to convey information clearly and simply, but also on your ability to anticipate and eliminate sources of confusion (for example, cultural issues, mistaken assumptions, and missing information). A key part of this is knowing your audience: Failure to understand who you are communicating with will result in delivering messages that are misunderstood.

Channel

Messages are conveyed through channels, with verbal channels including face-to-face meetings, telephone and videoconferencing; and written channels including letters, emails, memos and reports. Different channels have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, it's not particularly effective to give a long list of directions verbally, while you'll quickly cause problems if you give someone negative feedback using email.

Decoding

Just as successful encoding is a skill, so is successful decoding (involving, for example, taking the time to read a message carefully, or listen actively to it). Just as confusion can arise from errors in encoding, it can also arise from decoding mistakes. For example, if the decoder doesn't have enough knowledge to understand the message.

Receiver

Your message is delivered to individual members of your audience. No doubt, you have in mind a reaction you hope your message will get from this audience. Keep in mind, though, that each of these individuals enters into the communication process with ideas and feelings that will influence their understanding of your message, and their response. To be a successful communicator, you should consider these before delivering your message, and act appropriately.

Feedback

Your audience will provide you with feedback, as verbal and nonverbal reactions, to your communicated message. Pay close attention to this feedback, as it can give you confidence that your audience has understood your message. If you find that there has been a misunderstanding, at least you have the opportunity to send the message a second time.

Context

The situation in which your message is delivered is the context. This will depend of your student's particular circumstances (e.g. culture and ethnic background, local issues).

IMPROVING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

To deliver your messages effectively, you must commit to breaking down the barriers that exist within each of these stages of the communication process. Let's begin with the message itself. If your message is too lengthy, disorganized, or contains errors, you can expect the message to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Use of poor verbal and body language can also confuse the message.

Barriers in context tend to stem from senders offering too much information too fast. When in doubt, less is often more. It is best to be mindful of the demands on other people's time, especially in today's ultra-busy society. Once you understand this, you need to work to understand your audience's culture, making sure you can converse and deliver your message to students of different backgrounds and cultures.

Your ability to communicate with students can enhance your effectiveness or sabotage you. Many times, your verbal skills make the difference. Ways to increase your verbal efficacy include:

Slow down – People will perceive you as nervous and unsure of yourself if you talk fast. However, be careful not to slow down to



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the point where people begin to finish your sentences just to help you finish.

Animate your voice – Avoid a monotone. Use dynamics. Your pitch should raise and lower. Your volume should be soft and loud.

Enunciate your words – Speak clearly. Don't mumble. If people are always saying, "huh," to you, you are mumbling.

Use appropriate volume – Use a volume that is appropriate for the setting. Speak more softly when you are alone and close and louder when you are speaking to larger groups or across larger spaces.

Pronounce your words correctly – People will judge your competency through your vocabulary. If you aren't sure how to say a word, don't use it.

Use the right words – If you're not sure of the meaning of a word, don't use it.

Make eye contact – Consciously look into the listener's eyes.

Use gestures – Make your whole body talk. Use smaller gestures for individuals and small groups. The gestures should get larger as the group increases in size.

Don't send mixed messages – Make your words, gestures, facial expressions, tone, and message match.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Learn Direct](#)
- [Mind Tools](#)
- [Tools for Communication](#)
- [Conversation as communication](#)