

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills

COMMUNICATION is the exchange of information. It requires a message to be sent and received. In other words, it requires at least two people. In this unit, you will learn more about the types of communication. In addition, you will learn how you can become a better communicator by improving your verbal, nonverbal, and listening skills.



Objective:



Describe verbal and nonverbal communication.

Key Terms:



active listening
body language
nonverbal communication
paralanguage
verbal communication

Understanding Communication Skills

Communication skills are extremely important in your professional and your personal life. These skills help you express yourself, share information, and understand what others are saying to you. Sometimes words alone do not paint the whole picture. In many cases, you must combine words with other clues to understand what someone is trying to tell you.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal communication is the exchange of information using words. There are different types of verbal communication, including spoken words (oral communication) and written

words. Oral communication includes conversations with other people, speeches or presentations, and webcasts. Written communication includes letters, emails, memos, and publications—books, newspapers, magazines, and Internet blogs.

Verbal communication is important for several reasons. You can use it to share information or to express your opinions and feelings. Strong communication skills make a good impression when you are speaking to others.

The key to excellent verbal skills is clarity. For instance, choose your words carefully to avoid misunderstandings. Also, use proper terminology, especially if you are speaking in a professional capacity. Consider your audience to make sure the audience understands what you are saying. In addition, keep explanations simple when speaking to a child, but provide many details when giving a technical presentation. Yet express your emotions when appropriate.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is the exchange of information without words. There are many types of nonverbal communication that allow you to convey your message. **Body language** is a set of nonverbal signs, such as physical movements, used to convey a message. Examples of body language include posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. **Paralanguage** is the tone, rate, and volume of a voice. It is not *what* you say, but rather *how* you say it that often may give a different meaning to your words. Also, your appearance is a form of nonverbal communication. A neat and professional appearance on a job interview communicates that you are serious about the job.

It is important to send and interpret nonverbal communication because it helps determine the meanings or feelings behind words. For example, you may use words to say, “I’m fine,” when someone asks if you are okay. But if you say it through clenched teeth, while crossing your arms over your chest and avoiding eye contact, the listener would have clues that you actually are upset about something. Nonverbal communication, such as rolling your eyes or using a certain tone of voice, helps people detect sarcasm.

You can use nonverbal communication to gauge the interest of the audience when you are making a speech or a presentation. If the audience is sitting up in their chairs, looking directly at you, nodding or commenting as you make points, they likely are interested in what you are saying. If they are slumped in their chairs, looking down or around the room, or sighing heavily, you probably are losing their interest. Use those cues to change your tone, or use another attention-grabbing technique to regain their interest.

Communication is most effective when verbal and nonverbal methods are combined.



FIGURE 1. Your body language may reveal your true meaning or feelings.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Evaluate Communication Skills

Most careers require good communication skills. Even if you do not deal directly with customers or vendors, you have to interact with co-workers. Communication skills help you understand the goals of the businesses as well as the feelings of others at the company. Visit the following website to read more about communication skills. Take the brief quiz provided on the site to evaluate your current skills. Then make a list of a few steps you could take to improve your communication skills in the future.

<http://www.mindtools.com/page8.html>

ACTIVE LISTENING

Communication involves more than speaking. For communication to take place, someone must listen to the message. **Active listening** is the process in which the listener offers feedback to ensure he or she understood the message. It is an important part of communication, as it makes the speaker feel that his or her message was heard. In addition, it helps the listener feel confident that he or she understands the message. In addition, active listening encourages additional communication.

There are several keys to active listening. Give the speaker your full attention, which includes making eye contact. Consider the verbal and nonverbal cues from the speaker to determine his or her true meaning. Then restate the message in your own words to demonstrate understanding. Ask relevant questions. Restating the message and asking relevant questions gives the speaker a chance to clarify any points that you do not understand. The final step is to provide feedback when appropriate.

Summary:



Verbal communication is the exchange of information using words. It includes oral communication and written communication. The key to strong verbal skills is clarity, so choose your words carefully to avoid misunderstandings. Nonverbal communication is the exchange of information without words. Many types of nonverbal communication allow you to convey your message, body language (e.g., posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact); paralanguage; and appearance. Communication is most effective when verbal and nonverbal methods are combined.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are some examples of verbal communication?
2. What are some examples of nonverbal communication?
3. What is paralanguage?
4. Why is active listening important?
5. What are the keys to active listening?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Practice your active listening skills by talking to a classmate. When it is your turn to listen, focus on the keys to active listening. Give the speaker your full attention, make eye contact, restate the message in your own words, ask questions, and provide feedback. When it is your turn to be the speaker, practice your verbal and nonverbal communication skills to make sure the listener understands your message. The topic is not as important as the process, so talk about anything that interests you.

Web Links:



Body Language

<http://www.businessballs.com/body-language.htm>

Verbal Communication Skills

<http://wannareadyou.com/a-wide-knowledge-about-verbal-communication-skills.html>

Nonverbal Language

http://humanresources.about.com/od/interpersonalcommunication/a/nonverbal_com.htm

Interviews and Nonverbal Communication

<http://career-advice.monster.com/job-interview/interview-preparation/nonverbal-communications-interview/article.aspx>