



Your Passport to Professionalism:

## Communicating Face-to-Face

Steps in this module:

---

1. **Learn: Read the following concept document.**
2. **Make a video.**
3. **Go to Check Your Success and complete the reflection activity.**

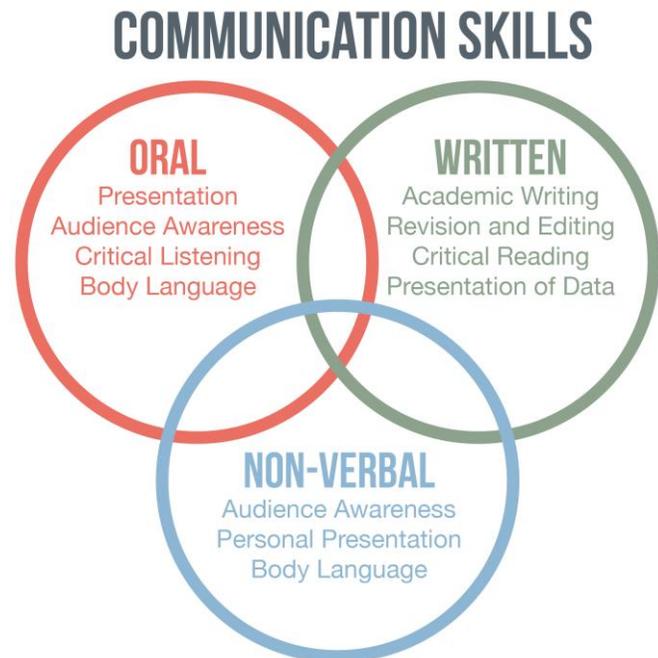
### Step 1—Learn

---

Introduction: putting on your game face

Have you seen this diagram before...or something like it?

Body language and tone are just as important as the words you speak. In a work setting, it's important that your words are congruent with your tone, face, and posture. Sometimes we have to think about how we come across to others so that our message is understood, free from distractions.



## What do the experts say?

To put it simply, communication is about the **sender** and **receiver**.



Experts talk about five basic communication issues:

1. **Encoding-Decoding:** A sender encodes the message based on the intended meaning; a receiver decodes the message based on his or her understanding. We have succeeded in communicating only when the message decoded is the same as the original idea.
2. **Intention:** The sender must craft the message so that the intended meaning is clear; the receiver needs to understand the intent.
3. **Perception:** What you know, believe, feel, and think are based on prior experiences. People experience the world differently.. Therefore, communicators must take into account each person's perspectives when they encode and decode messages. For example, the perception of a college student is quite different than a 5 year old, and so we adjust our language, tone and body language to fit the situation.
4. **Dialogue:** Communication is a collaborative process. You need to work together to achieve successful communication. If one person doesn't collaborate, communication breaks down. This happens in politics when we listen to only one side of an argument.
5. **Noise:** Did you ever try talking to someone while standing next to a jack-hammer? It's impossible. Noise is anything that distorts the message whether physical (like a jack-hammer) jargon (like slang), inappropriate body language (like not facing you) facial expression (like a frown), inattention (like texting while you're talking), disinterest (like yawning), and cultural differences (like accents or eye contact). Can you recall an incident where noise made understanding impossible?

## What About Content?

Words matter. It doesn't take much to offend someone (create noise). As an employee, indiscriminant words end up reflecting poorly on you and your work group. Think before you speak, and put yourself in the shoes of the listener before you talk. Have you ever heard someone at work use words or tell stories that offend you? An office discussion is different than one at home. Never use off-color humor, stereotyping, profanity, and criticism of others.

## Encoding (Word Choice)

The quick brown  
fox jumps over  
the lazy dog. The  
quick brown fox  
jumps over the

Remember that **noise** can subvert your message. Filling out the conversation with your opinions about topics that aren't pertinent to your work is taking the chance of being controversial and/or offensive. Using bad grammar may undermine how knowledgeable you come across. Employing slang, idioms, and social and historical references from your culture can hinder understanding when you communicate with a person from a different culture. Using abusive or off-color language is always unexpected and offensive.

## Non-Verbal Elements

Non-verbal elements include your tone and body language. Research claims that only about **7%** of the meaning that you communicate is contained in the **words**. The rest of the message comes from non-verbal signals or cues contained in your **tone (38%)** and your body **language (55%)**.

If you want to communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings, you need to understand the importance of nonverbal signals. Whether tone or body language, *nonverbal signals* can affect your message in these ways:

Non-verbal signals:

- can **repeat** your verbal message as when you yell, "Don't!"
- can **contradict** your verbal message like when you frown and say everything is fine.
- can **substitute** for your message. Your eyes and eyebrows can often convey a far more vivid message than words do.

- may add to or **complement** your message, such as patting a person on the back in addition to saying “congratulations.”
- They may **accent or underline** your message. Pounding the table, for example, can reinforce an emphatic message.



Friendly people make us feel good. Grouchy people upset us. The difference between the two is tone. Tone includes volume, emotion, and emphasis. Just listen to people talk in a language you don't speak. You can tell if they are friends or competitors simply by tone. When you are at work always, adopt a friendly tone.

If you think the customer is upset, check your perception. For example, you can simply ask,

**“Is there something I’ve said that is making you feel uncomfortable?”**

If the answer is “yes,” you have a chance to fix the problem. If it is “no,” you can proceed with the conversation free of concern. One thing that supervisors comment on are the **speech habits of some millennial students**.

### **Speech Habits in American Youth Culture**

There are four typical habits that supervisors usually don't like:

1. **Uptalk**
2. Overuse of **“like”** or **“you know”**
3. The **Growl/Vocal Fry**
4. Overuse of **“umms”**

**“Uptalk”** is a common speech pattern when the student ends a sentence with a rise in the voice that sounds like a question. Young people use it often. Older listeners think the student lacks confidence when they use uptalk voice patterns. It's as if they question their own statements.

Saying **“like”** or **“you know”** several times in a sentence can be very distracting. The listener can lose the speaker's train of thought, and they sometimes conclude that the speaker is unsure of themselves and uncertain about their statements.

The **growl/vocal fry** is when students end their sentence in a gravely tone that pops or growls. To some bosses it creates an impression of insincerity or shallowness.

Almost everyone uses an **umm** when they talk now and then. But when it is overused the listener gets impatient and it leads to interrupting.

These speech habits are not right or wrong, they simply reflect the culture you were raised in. However, some studies indicate that bosses and managers deny leadership roles to people with these habits, especially where they represent the organization to clients. It is similar to a strong accent that makes communication difficult. Ask your boss about the speech habits they notice.



## Body Language

Body language cues include **eye contact, facial expressions, posture, gestures, and touch.**

It's especially important to remember that **cultural differences** influence body language signals and their interpretation. What may be obvious in one culture can mean something different in another culture. Eye contact is a common example. In American majority culture, we are taught that looking people in the eye is a form of respect. In some eastern cultures, the opposite is true: looking at a person full in the face can be considered rude and disrespectful.

## Context

Eliminate distractions that will get in the way of listening. If warranted, provide a private setting.

**TIP:** If your attention is drawn away during an interaction, it's okay to let the speaker know that you were distracted for a moment. If you admit that you checked out for a bit and ask for clarification, the speaker will know that you were trying to listen and just may appreciate your admitting to your brief lapse.

The social context heavily influences communication. Your job title, age, gender, etc. all impact the message between sender and receiver. The key is to accept that and work within the context to serve your customer as best you can. Some things about the context you simply can't change. But the more you understand it, the better you can negotiate it successfully.

## **In Closing**

In short, your goal is to:

1. Convey your part of the **content** clearly
2. with well-defined **intentions**
3. while taking into account the **perspective** of your fellow participant(s)
4. and considering the **context**

Verbal communication is just as important in your personal life as in your professional life. By improving your verbal communication skills you will connect, build rapport, earn respect, gain influence, and your message is likely to be better understood.

**Continue on the following page below...**

## Step 2—Make a video

---

### Introduction: Tell a story

The best way to know how you sound to others is to listen to yourself talking. This activity is meant to be simple. Just be yourself and listen to what you hear in terms of voice, tone, expressions, speech habits, etc. Then stand back and analyze it a little bit to see if you are communicating in ways that reduce noise and help the listener understand your message.

### Instructions:

Step 1. Get a laptop with a camera on it.

Step 2. Set it on a desk so you can record yourself talking to the laptop. It's recommended that you put the laptop on a box or stack of books so that the camera is at eye level, rather than down below your chin. Place yourself about 3 feet away from the screen to give a more natural appearance.

Step 3. Off the top of your head with no preparation, tell a story about one of the best discussions you were a part of. It could have been a late night discussion with a group of friends or a discussion in a classroom with a mentor or teacher, a coach or team members, an individual, etc.

a) Switch on the camera to record, and just describe the good discussion you had for 3 minutes:

- who was there
- what the topic was
- how people interacted
- where were you
- why you felt it was a good discussion
- how did the discussion change you, or make you see things differently
- how did the discussion impact other people afterward

b) Stop the recording after 3 minutes.

Step 4. Analyze your recording. The purpose of this activity is to hear yourself talking. We often don't realize our own speech patterns and voice. As you playback the recording make some notations in the following worksheet to identify areas where your verbal communication is strong or needs improvement.

---

<b>Eye contact</b>	As you look in the camera, are you making eye contact? If so, is it overly intense or just right?
<b>Facial expression</b>	What is your face showing? Is it masklike and unexpressive, or emotionally present and filled with interest? Are there parts of your presentation where your facial expression needs to change? (For example, if you have to warn the listener about a particular behavior.)
<b>Tone of voice</b>	Does your voice project warmth, confidence, and interest, or is it strained and blocked?
<b>Posture and gesture</b>	Is your body relaxed or stiff and immobile? Are your shoulders tense and raised, or slightly sloped?
<b>Intensity</b>	Does your presentation style seem flat, cool, and disinterested, or are you in danger of being over-the-top and melodramatic?
<b>Timing and pace</b>	Is there an easy flow of information? How would you change your pace if you were talking to someone who does not speak English well?

---

**Continue on the following page below...**

<b>Analysis of the Presentation</b>						
<b>HIGHLIGHT</b> the appropriate rating (5 is highest, 1 is lowest)						
<b>1. Content</b>	1	2	3	4	5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story was clear?</li> <li>• Easy to follow the story to end?</li> <li>• Motivated the audience to listen?</li> </ul>						
<b>2. Body Language</b>	1	2	3	4	5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintained eye contact?</li> <li>• Shoulders straight, face forward?</li> <li>• Smiled or connected with viewer?</li> <li>• Fidgeting, ticks, habits?</li> <li>• Hands, gestures?</li> </ul>						
<b>3. Voice</b>	1	2	3	4	5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used varied expressions such as declarations, questions, changes?</li> <li>• Monotone?</li> <li>• Volume too soft or loud?</li> </ul>						
<b>4. Tone</b>	1	2	3	4	5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used "uptone"?</li> <li>• Used voice fry/growl?</li> <li>• Communicated emotion?</li> <li>• Enthusiasm or humor?</li> </ul>						
<b>5. Presentation</b>	1	2	3	4	5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stammering?</li> <li>• Pauses?</li> <li>• Said "ummm" or "like"?</li> </ul>						
<b>6. Delivery</b>	1	2	3	4	5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintained eye contact.</li> <li>• Free of distracting verbal/physical mannerisms.</li> <li>• Well-paced.</li> </ul>						

**Overall Comments:** What did you do well? What can you do to improve your verbal communication?

## Step 3—Earn Your Checkmark



**Check Your Success**

### **Application**

1. Think of information you provide or deliver to a typical customer or co-worker. Maybe it's explaining a policy or a process or procedure. Pick something that takes at least a minute to get across.
2. Encode your message (write out the content). Use clear language and organize it for understanding. Come up with a closing remark that requires your customers to indicate their level of understanding or invites them to ask questions.
3. Record yourself on your laptop camera - practice imparting the content you outlined above. Keep adjusting your tone and body language until you get an approach that:
  - 1) helps you communicate expertise, respect, and interest
  - 2) supports the real meaning behind your words.

If you simply cannot find a camera to record yourself, talk to a mirror.

**Complete the reflection exercise on the following page and review with your supervisor or mentor for feedback and guidance.**

## Passport to Professionalism

**Reflection**

**Date:**

**Name:**

Communicating Face-to-Face	
A. What are some of the most common messages you have to communicate verbally in your job?	B. Which of these messages are the most difficult or challenging? Or, which ones do customers tend to misunderstand most often?
C. What changes did you make in your non-verbal presentation?  1.  2.  3.	D. List 3 things you practiced in front of the mirror or video recording that actually improved the message communicated.  1.  2.  3.