

Trades Access Common Core

Line B: Employability Skills

Competency B-3: Use Interpersonal Communication Skills



Trades Access

COMMON CORE

Line B: Employability Skills
Competency B-3: Use Interpersonal
Communication Skills

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Foreword

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Preface

The concept of identifying and creating resources for skills that are common to many trades has a long history in the Province of British Columbia. This collection of Trades Access Common Core (TACC) resources was adapted from the 15 Trades Common Core line modules co-published by the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) and the Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology (C2T2) in 2000-2002. Those modules were revisions of the original Common Core portion of the TRAC modules prepared by the Province of British Columbia Ministry of Post-Secondary Education in 1986. The TACC resources are still in use by a number of trades programs today and, with the permission from the Industry Training Authority (ITA), have been utilized in this project.

These open resources have been updated and realigned to match many of the line and competency titles found in the Province of BC's trades apprenticeship program outlines. A review was carried out to analyze the provincial program outlines of a number of trades, with the intent of finding common entry-level learning tasks that could be assembled into this package. This analysis provided the template for the outline used to update the existing modules. Many images found in ITA apprentice training modules were also incorporated into these resources to create books that are similar to what students will see when they continue their chosen trades training. The project team has also taken many new photographs for this project, which are available for use in other trades training resources.

The following list of lines and competencies was generated with the goal of creating an entry-level trades training resource, while still offering the flexibility for lines to be used as stand-alone books. This flexibility—in addition to the textbook content being openly licensed—allows these resources to be used within other contexts as well. For example, instructors or institutions may incorporate these resources into foundation-level trades training programming or within an online learning management system (LMS).

Line A – Safe Work Practices

- A-1 Control Workplace Hazards
- A-2 Describe WorkSafeBC Regulations
- A-3 Handle Hazardous Materials Safely
- A-4 Describe Personal Safety Practices
- A-5 Describe Fire Safety

Line B – Employability Skills

- B-1 Apply Study and Learning Skills
- B-2 Describe Expectations and Responsibilities of Employers and Employees
- B-3 Use Interpersonal Communication Skills
- B-4 Describe the Apprenticeship System

Line C – Tools and Equipment

- C-1 Describe Common Hand Tools and Their Uses
- C-2 Describe Common Power Tools and Their Uses
- C-3 Describe Rigging and Hoisting Equipment
- C-4 Describe Ladders and Platforms

Line D – Organizational Skills

- D-1 Solve Trades Mathematical Problems
- D-2 Apply Science Concepts to Trades Applications
- D-3 Read Drawings and Specifications
- D-4 Use Codes, Regulations, and Standards
- D-5 Use Manufacturer and Supplier Documentation
- D-6 Plan Projects

Line E – Electrical Fundamentals

- E-1 Describe the Basic Principles of Electricity
- E-2 Identify Common Circuit Components and Their Symbols
- E-3 Explain Wiring Connections
- E-4 Use Multimeters

All of these textbooks are available in a variety of formats in addition to print:

- PDF—printable document with TOC and hyperlinks intact
- HTML—basic export of an HTML file and its assets, suitable for use in learning management systems
- Reflowable EPUB—format that is suitable for all screen sizes including phones

All of the self-test questions are also available from BCcampus as separate data, if instructors would like to use the questions for online quizzes or competency testing.

About This Book

In an effort to make this book a flexible resource for trainers and learners, the following features are included:

- An introduction outlining the high-level goal of the Competency, and a list of objectives reflecting the skills and knowledge a person would need to achieve to fulfill this goal.
- Discrete Learning Tasks designed to help a person achieve these objectives
- Self-tests at the end of each Learning Task, designed to informally test for understanding.
- A reminder at the end of each Competency to complete a Competency test. Individual trainers are expected to determine the requirements for this test, as required.
- Throughout the textbook, there may also be links and/or references to other resources that learners will need to access, some of which are only available online.
- Notes, cautions, and warnings are identified by special symbols. A list of those symbols is provided below.

Symbols Legend



Important: This icon highlights important information.



Poisonous: This icon is a reminder for a potentially toxic/poisonous situation.



Resources: The resource icon highlights any required or optional resources.



Flammable: This icon is a reminder for a potentially flammable situation.



Self-test: This icon reminds you to complete a self-test.



Explosive: This icon is a reminder for a possibly explosive situation.



Safety gear: The safety gear icon is an important reminder to use protective equipment.



Electric shock: This icon is a reminder for potential electric shock.

Safety Advisory

Be advised that references to the Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia safety regulations contained within these materials do not/may not reflect the most recent Occupational Health and Safety Regulation. The current Standards and Regulation in BC can be obtained at the following website: <http://www.worksafebc.com>.

Please note that it is always the responsibility of any person using these materials to inform him/herself about the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation pertaining to his/her area of work.

BCcampus
January 2015

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Introduction

No matter what your job is, you will need to communicate with other people. Your communication skills determine how successfully you receive and transmit information. Communication is arguably the most important of all life skills and plays a significant role in all aspects of work and home life. Communication is verbal, written, and non-verbal, and every gesture, voice inflection, or facial movement speaks volumes and conveys information to others.

An effective communicator is also an active listener. Employers actively seek out Individuals who are good communicators.

Objectives

When you have completed the Learning Tasks in this Competency, you will be able to:

- describe the principles of communication
- describe effective listening techniques
- describe the procedures for giving and receiving feedback
- describe assertive communication
- describe conflict resolution techniques
- describe effective problem solving and decision making

Resources



You will be required to reference publications and videos available online.

LEARNING TASK 1

Describe the principles of communication

Communication is the act of transferring information from one person or place to another. It can be verbal, non-verbal, written, or visual (e.g., photographs, diagrams, symbols). The purpose of communication is to understand and to be understood, and it involves expressing thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

Interpersonal communication is a process by which we exchange information, feelings, and meaning with others through verbal and non-verbal messages. It is face-to-face communication.

It is impossible for humans not to communicate. Even when we are not speaking, we are still communicating through our body language. We spend about 75% of our days communicating in some way: about 9% is spent writing, 16% reading, 30% talking, and 45% listening. Effective communication is one of the most important skills that people need in their personal lives and in their work lives.

LISTENING	NON-VERBAL
WRITTEN	VERBAL

Figure 1 — All aspects of communication are integral to building good working relationships.

Verbal communication

Verbal communication is how we express ourselves in words, both spoken and written. Spoken language includes enunciation, pauses, stutters, emphasis, and word choice. Spoken language can occur in face-to-face encounters, by telephone, by voice mail, on television, by Web conferencing, or on radio.

Written communication

Written communication can be in the form of letters, handwritten notes, emails, text or instant messages, faxes, books, newspapers, magazines, and signs. Increasingly, daily written communication takes the form of emails and text messages. While these messages may be brief, the potential for miscommunication is significant.

In general, people are better at communicating and interpreting tone in vocal messages than in text-based messages. In emails and text messages, where there is a tendency to reduce the

number of words in a message and use abbreviations or slang, the recipient may miss the full meaning or tone intended.

To reduce miscommunication:

- Determine how the information should best be communicated.
- If the subject of your communication is sensitive, consider talking by phone or meeting in person to convey your message rather than sending an email or text message.
- Take your time to compose your message.
- Think about the words you're writing from the recipient's perspective.
- Use the KISS principle and "keep it super simple." The more simply something is stated, the less opportunity there is for confusion or misunderstanding. In the absence of body language and voice tone, the receiver can only rely on the written word.
- Never use email or social networking tools when you are angry or upset. Always wait until you are calm and composed before addressing an issue.

Non-verbal communication

In 1967, a University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) study found that more than 90% of face-to-face communication between people is non-verbal (Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967). Non-verbal communication is communication without words. That's why it's often referred to as "body language." It includes facial expressions, gestures, body movements, posture, and eye contact.

Often a person's body language reveals his or her thoughts and feelings more directly than spoken words. Generally, when people are feeling confident, their stance is strong and they easily make contact with others. When people are flirting, they can be seen playing with their hair, arching their bodies, and standing close to another person. How you use body language can attract or detract from the message that you want to communicate.

Some elements of body language are discussed below.

Facial expressions

The most obvious indicator of emotions is facial expressions. By observing a smile, laughter, tears, a frown, or even the level of eye contact, you can tell much about how a person is feeling.

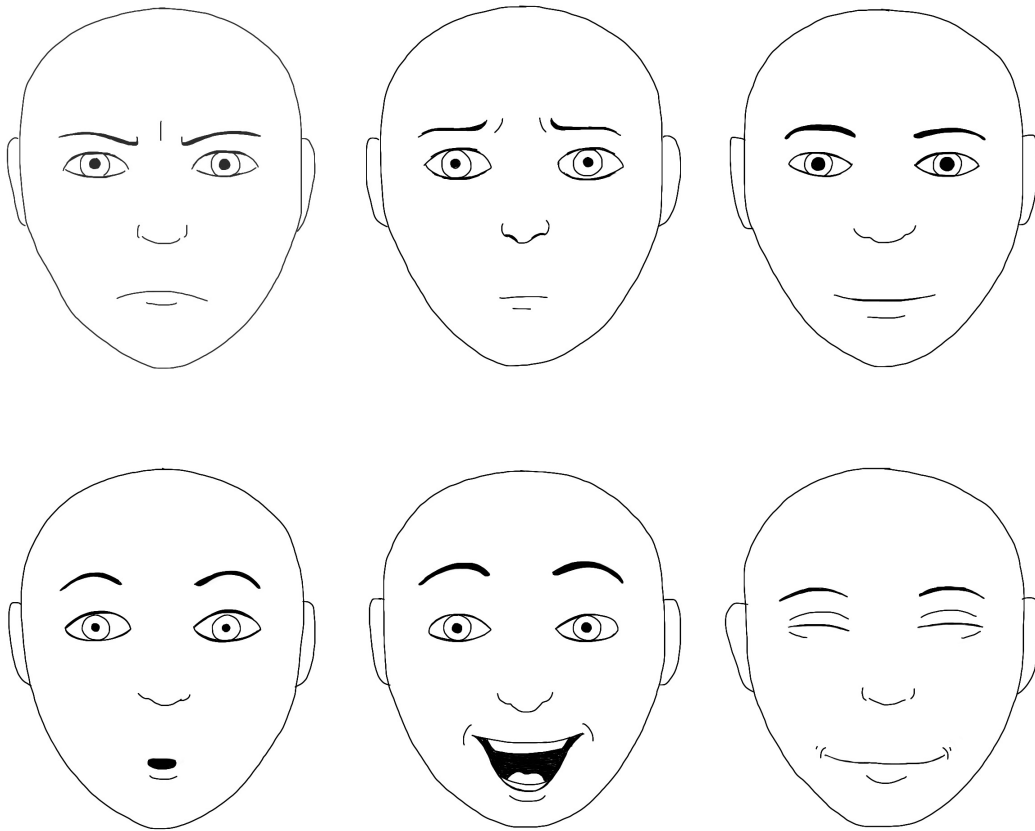


Figure 2—Your facial expressions can often convey more than your words.

Appearance

Your personal appearance also communicates an impression. The clothes and accessories you wear, the colours and styles you choose, as well as the piercings and/or tattoos you have all communicate a message about who you are and what you value.

Personal space

The distance you maintain between yourself and others will vary with the nature of the activity and the emotion involved. For example, people tend to communicate in close proximity if they are affectionate or angry, but at a distance if they are afraid or have a dislike.

Culture also plays a role in determining personal space. In North America, people tend to keep each other at arm's length. In some other cultures, individuals stand very close to one another; in others they put significantly more distance between them.

Misinterpreting body language

Body language, like verbal communication, can be misinterpreted. You might see a woman stomping her foot and think she must be angry. But maybe she's just trying to get mud off her shoe! Or perhaps you think a co-worker you are talking to is upset with you because his arms are crossed, but maybe he's just cold.

You shouldn't focus on just one non-verbal signal and think you're interpreting effectively. You need to look at the whole package of both verbal and non-verbal cues to better understand what's being communicated.

Cultural differences

Body language also varies from culture to culture and even from region to region in some countries. The smile may be the one and only gesture that can be understood worldwide.

On large job sites or in other countries, you may be working with individuals from several different cultures, and body language displayed by your supervisors and co-workers may differ from your own. As already noted, North Americans usually converse about an arm's length apart, but people from other cultures may keep more or less space between them. As well, while maintaining direct eye contact is considered positive for most North Americans, people from other cultures may view it as being confrontational or a sign of disrespect, and therefore they avoid eye contact, particularly with persons of authority.

An understanding of body language is something you will need to acquire when working with others. If your work or travels take you to other countries, understanding the differences between cultures can greatly improve your working relationships and reduce conflict on the job site.

Effective listening

To ensure that you are an effective listener, make sure you provide signals that indicate you're engaged. Make eye contact and use verbal cues or nodding to show that you're following the conversation. To indicate that you understand what's been communicated, ask questions or paraphrase what you've heard. Try to use "open" body language; that is, don't cross your arms or slouch. Good posture is a way of conveying alertness, and it indicates that you're paying attention.

Working in groups

Working in the trades usually includes working with others. Whether you are communicating with only one other person or you are in a group setting, effective communication skills are equally important.

As you have learned, effective communication spans a variety of different forms, including spoken, written, and non-verbal communication. When working in groups, respecting the principles of effective communication is especially important, as the possibility of interrupting, misinterpreting, or being interrupted or misinterpreted is even greater when more people are involved.

Effective communication is the cornerstone of strong relationships and is one of the factors that helps people work well in groups, whether at home, in school, or in the workplace. Figure 3 lists some of the factors that constitute both effective and ineffective communication when working with others.

Effective Communication	Ineffective Communication
• providing unconditional acceptance	• criticizing
• treating all persons with respect	• using words such as “always,” “never,” or “should”
• validating each person’s feelings and experiences using “I” statements	• blaming, dismissing, threatening, or exaggerating
• being an active listener	• being silent as a form of punishment
• having reasonable expectations of people according to age and abilities	• not validating another person’s feelings or experiences
• encouraging	• not apologizing
• empathizing	• entering into power struggles
• using open-ended questions	• name-calling
• not entering into power struggles	• having unreasonable expectations
• apologizing	• trying to change another person
• thinking before responding to an emotional situation	• conditional acceptance
• accepting that each person in a group or workplace environment is different and allowing each person to be who he or she is	• using “you” statements

Figure 3 — Examples of effective and ineffective communication

At times we all communicate effectively, and at other times we fall short of perfection. As with any skill, some people are innately better at communicating than others. As you learn to develop or hone your communication skills, think about those people who have the strongest impact on your ability to express your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. These people are generally parents, siblings, teachers, coaches, team members, co-workers, and other role models in your life.

When working in groups it is also important to use formal or information communication appropriately, depending on the individuals involved.

Formal communication has conventions that govern spoken and written words and body language.

Informal communication is much more relaxed, with fewer rules and conventions. Figure 4 illustrates some of the differences between formal and informal communication.

Informal Communication	Formal Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usually used with friends and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> used in a work or possibly a school setting or a social situation with people you don't know
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contains shortened words, expressions, or phrases rather than sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proper way of speaking and writing (full words and sentences)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> may have more relaxed manners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good manners ("please," "thank you," "excuse me")
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contains slang words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no slang
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> few or no restrictions on tone or volume of speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more formal tone and moderate volume of speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> informal appearance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uniforms or rules about clothing and jewellery at work or school can be used to communicate standards related to physical appearance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relaxed body language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more formal body language (posture, proximity, gestures)

Figure 4 — Informal and formal communication

You may use more than one type of communication with the same individual. For example, you may use formal communication with a family member or friend in a working context when you are both part of a team. Informal communication may be limited to when you are alone with the individual or strictly outside of the office or work site.

Misunderstandings can have a negative impact on the work environment if they are not corrected quickly and constructively. A negative group environment can affect individuals' motivation, which in turn can affect productivity. When people are not feeling good about what they're doing, their ability to remain on task and do good work is often compromised.

Having discussions in a quiet setting without distractions can go a long way toward communicating effectively. While word choice determines factual information, voice quality or tone of voice expresses how a person truly feels. Just by listening to the way words are spoken, you can distinguish between boredom, sarcasm, annoyance, humour, fear, and excitement. Voice quality includes the rate of speech (how quickly or slowly you speak), pitch (how high or low your voice sounds), and volume (how loud we speak).

When you are listening to someone speak, make sure you are paying careful attention to what is being said. Hearing is just as important as being heard!

Here are some basic guidelines that may prove useful to you when working in groups:

- Avoid interrupting while someone else is talking.
- Before either accepting or rejecting the ideas of others, take some time to reflect on them. Always try to put yourself into others' shoes and understand their point of view.
- If you must disagree with the ideas of others, do so without being condescending or rude.
- When working in a group setting, try to withhold your personal values, opinions, or prejudices if they are not relevant to your work.
- Try to build on the ideas of others during meetings. This creates a constructive, collaborative atmosphere. Staying positive is also an important feature of effective communication. Complaining and talking behind people's backs at work (or even when you're not at work) is disrespectful and can lead to a negative working atmosphere.



Now complete the Learning Task Self-Test.

Self-Test 1

1. Communication is the act of transferring information from one person to another.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. Which of the following are forms of communication?
 - a. Visual and written
 - b. Verbal and non-verbal
 - c. All of the above
 - d. None of the above

3. Interpersonal communication is the exchange of information, feelings, and meanings through verbal and non-verbal messages.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. If you are a good talker, you are a good communicator.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Approximately what percentage of our day is spent communicating?
 - a. 25%
 - b. 50%
 - c. 75%
 - d. 90%

6. What is the most widely used form of communication?
 - a. Talking
 - b. Writing
 - c. Reading
 - d. Listening

7. Verbal communication is how we express ourselves in words and includes enunciation, pauses, and stutters.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. The potential for miscommunication through short communication by email or text is insignificant.
 - a. True
 - b. False
9. In what format do people best communicate and interpret tone?
 - a. Texts
 - b. Letters
 - c. Emails
 - d. Vocal messages
10. Why is the KISS principle used?
 - a. People are simple.
 - b. Not everyone is able to understand complex communications.
 - c. The more simply something is stated, the less opportunity there is for confusion.
 - d. The more complexly something is stated, the less opportunity there is for confusion.
11. Which of the following is considered non-verbal communication?
 - a. Facial expressions and body language
 - b. Personal space and personal appearance.
 - c. All of the above
 - d. None of the above
12. Body language is the same regardless of where you come from or what your culture is.
 - a. True
 - b. False

13. There are cultural differences in how people communicate and what is considered acceptable.
 - a. True
 - b. False

14. Which of the following is not an example of open body language?
 - a. Staying alert
 - b. Sitting and facing the speaker
 - c. Closing your eyes while an individual is speaking
 - d. Nodding to acknowledge you've heard what was said

15. A negative group environment can harmfully impact the motivation of co-workers and reduce productivity.
 - a. True
 - b. False

16. Which of the following does not constitute effective communication?
 - a. Being an active listener
 - b. Accepting people's differences
 - c. Treating all people with respect
 - d. Providing conditional acceptance

17. Effective communication promotes understanding.
 - a. True
 - b. False

18. In general, with whom is a more formal communication style used?
 - a. Suppliers
 - b. Friends and colleagues
 - c. Employers, supervisors, and clients
 - d. Colleagues, friends, suppliers, and clients

19. An informal communication style is used more with employers than with friends.
 - a. True
 - b. False

LEARNING TASK 2

Describe effective listening techniques

Listening is critical to learning and an important part of the communication process. In a training institution some of the course material may be delivered through lectures, through audio, and through verbal instructions. Even with practical demonstrations and instructional videos, much of the content is delivered through the spoken word. If you are not fully involved in listening, you will miss some important information and can easily be distracted. On a job site, effective listening can be critical in ensuring the safety of you and your co-workers, and ensuring that a job is completed accurately and on time.

Active listening

Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person so that the message is fully understood. The following are several techniques that you can use to demonstrate active listening. The techniques you use will vary depending on the situation. For example, active listening during a lecture will require different techniques than active listening about a personnel matter at the job.

Concentrate

Eliminate distractions. Shut off shop equipment, radios, or other competing sounds. Try to put personal problems aside. Limit engagement in other activities such as texting or working on other assignments. If you are having difficulty concentrating, use techniques to keep your mind from wandering. This may include taking very brief notes or jotting down questions you might want to ask at the appropriate time.

Empathize

Put yourself inside the speaker's thoughts and feelings to better understand what he or she is saying to you. Suspend your own judgment and position until you clearly understand the other person's perspective.

Listen for feelings

Try to "listen between the lines" to understand the attitudes, needs, and motives behind the words. Changes in volume and tone, as well as non-verbal clues such as facial expressions and gestures, can help you determine how the speaker is feeling.

Connect

Use “listener-friendly” body language: make eye contact with the speaker or focus on the audio or visual presentation at hand. Try to connect the information you are hearing with what you may have previously learned or already know. Pay attention to any visuals that may accompany the audio, such as, an instructor writing on a board or asking you to look at a visual in your textbook or online while they continue speaking.

Validate

Even if you don’t agree with what the speaker is saying, it is important that the person knows you are listening and that you understand what they have said. Use nods and “uh-huhs” and respectful comments that show you have heard what was said.

Paraphrase

When the speaker has finished talking, repeat in your own words what the speaker said so they know they have been understood.

Clarify

Ask questions to get more information, especially if you’re not clear on what was said. It is important to take your cues from the presenter on when to ask questions. While some instructors may ask you to interrupt and ask questions at any time, others may ask you to hold questions until the appropriate time.

Participate

Participate in discussions and respond to questions.



Now complete the Learning Task Self-Test.

Self-Test 2

1. Listening is not part of the communication process.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person so that the message is fully understood.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. You are in a meeting with your colleagues. What is required in order to send effective messages?
 - a. Listening and non-verbal communication
 - b. Both verbal and non-verbal communication
 - c. Verbal communication and facial expressions
 - d. Listening, non-verbal, and verbal communication

LEARNING TASK 3

Describe the procedures for giving and receiving feedback

The ability to give and receive feedback is integral to a healthy working relationship. Feedback is intended to provide information and observations about an individual's work behaviour or performance and can be positive and/or negative. All too often feedback is perceived as negative and associated with criticism. However, if given in the right way and at the right time, feedback can be highly beneficial for both the giver and the receiver.

Sending messages

If half of communication is listening, the other half is speaking and expressing thoughts and feelings in a clear way. Sending effective messages includes both verbal communication (the words you use) and non-verbal communication (body language).



Figure 1 — Giving and receiving feedback includes being aware of body language and facial expressions

Effective feedback should let the receiver know which behaviour or performance is desired and which is not. It should allow both the giver and the receiver the opportunity to ask questions and get further clarification, and it can result in discussions that can benefit both parties. Effective feedback can also lead to advice or recommendations on how to handle an issue or situation better in the future.

As an apprentice, you should receive a lot of feedback from your employer, supervisor, co-workers, and even clients. You'll get feedback on the job site, and if you work for a larger company you may also have a performance review that will provide you with feedback. Should you not be receiving any feedback, take the initiative to ask your employer or co-workers to comment on your performance.

Constructive criticism

Constructive criticism is feedback aimed at collaboratively improving the overall performance of an individual or quality of a service. It often includes suggestions for positive change or improvement.

Guidelines for giving and taking feedback

The following are general guidelines on how to give feedback:

- Relax and take a few deep breaths if you are anxious.
- Remain respectful and calm at all times. If you are angry or unable to control your emotions, wait until you have calmed down.
- Remember that feedback is both positive and negative. Make sure the information you convey does not focus only on only one or the other.
- Provide the feedback in an appropriate location. Negative feedback should be given in private space without interruption.
- Put your feedback into context, particularly if it is negative. This will help the receiver understand the points you are making.
- If you notice that the receiver is distressed, slow down, take a short break, or reschedule the discussion if necessary.
- Allow the receiver the opportunity to answer or ask questions and provide their own input. This will require active listening on the part of the giver.
- Focus on the issues and not the person.
- Provide feedback at the appropriate time so that an employee or co-worker can address the issues. Don't stockpile the feedback or criticism and unload it void of context.
- Make sure that it is within your purview to provide the feedback.

The following are general guidelines on how to receive feedback:

- Relax and take a few deep breaths if you are anxious.
- Actively listen to what is being said. Ask questions or for clarification if required at the appropriate time.
- Remain respectful at all times. If you are angry or unable to control your emotions, wait until you are calm to respond or ask questions.
- Remember that feedback is both positive and negative. Acknowledge the feedback by paraphrasing it and asking for clarification on any points if necessary.
- Take responsibility for your role. Acknowledge any errors you have made or situations that could have been handled better. Ask for advice on how to handle these situations better in the future.
- If you disagree with the assessment, be assertive, not aggressive. Clearly address the issues.



Now complete the Learning Task Self-Test.

Self-Test 3

1. Which of the following is essential for giving and receiving feedback?
 - a. Effective listening
 - b. Healthy working and personal relationships
 - c. All of the above
 - d. None of the above

2. What does effective feedback help the receiver of the information do?
 - a. Know what behaviour or performance is acceptable or not acceptable.
 - b. Know about their work performance and have the ability to ask questions for further clarification
 - c. All of the above
 - d. None of the above

3. As an apprentice, from whom will you receive feedback?
 - a. Your direct supervisor only
 - b. Your employer, supervisor, and co-workers
 - c. Your employer, supervisor, co-workers, and clients
 - d. Your direct supervisor and his or her superior or human resources

4. What is the purpose of constructive criticism?
 - a. To let you down easily when you make a mistake
 - b. To improve your performance or the quality of service
 - c. To keep track of what you have done well and advise your supervisor
 - d. To keep track of the problems you've had and go through them with you at a meeting

5. Most people find it easy to give and receive effective feedback or constructive criticism.
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. Which of the following is not a step used in giving effective feedback?
- Remain calm at all times.
 - Put the feedback into context.
 - Focus on the person and not the issue.
 - Remember to give both positive and negative feedback.
7. Which of the following is not a step used for receiving feedback or constructive criticism?
- Listen to what is being said.
 - Keep your emotions in check and remain respectful at all times.
 - Ask questions or for advice on how the issue can be handled better in the future.
 - Be prepared and challenge the speaker on everything that you do not believe is correct.

LEARNING TASK 4

Describe assertive communication

Communication can be assertive, non-assertive, or aggressive.

Assertive communication is asking what you want and expressing yourself clearly, firmly, and honestly. When you communicate assertively, you take responsibility for your thoughts and feelings and state your position with confidence.

Assertive communication is respectful—even when you are expressing negative emotions, you don't hurt others. When you communicate assertively, you express your needs, wants, thoughts, and feelings without guilt.



Figure 1 — Being assertive does not mean being aggressive

Non-assertive communication is failing to stand up for yourself and express personal feelings, needs, ideas, or opinions in the workplace. Individuals who use this form of communication can easily be ignored or have their rights violated. Non-assertive communication is viewed as emotionally dishonest, indirect, and inhibiting. It can lead to hurt and anger on the part of the individual, and pity and irritation by others.

Aggressive communication is rude, hostile, and destructive. An individual who is acting aggressively has little respect for the rights and needs of others and achieves a goal at the expense of others. Aggressive communication may include shouting, threatening behaviour, and humiliating others. It is inappropriate for the workplace and can lead to negative consequences with both supervisors and colleagues.

One of the best tools for ensuring that you use assertive communication is to use “I” statements. “You” statements in general create defensiveness and emotional resistance and shut down communication. They can promote conflict. “I” statements, on the other hand, avoid destructive blaming, criticizing, ridiculing, and name-calling. The speaker just makes a statement expressing his or her feelings. “I” statements can help prevent conflict.

Figure 2 shows examples of assertive behaviour and aggressive or passive behaviour.

Effective Communication – Assertive Behaviour	Ineffective Communication – Aggressive or Passive Behaviour
<i>I have completed my assigned tasks.</i>	<i>You didn't do your work.</i>
<i>I feel angry when you interrupt me because it makes me feel what I have to say isn't important.</i>	<i>Would you just listen to me and stop interrupting. Whatever – it's not like you'd listen to what I was saying anyways.</i>
<i>I need more clarification to complete the task.</i>	<i>You are not being fair. You didn't give me the information I needed in order to complete the job.</i>

Figure 2 — Examples of assertive and aggressive or passive behaviours

Remember that you can only accurately speak about your own intentions. In addition to offering accurate information, the use of “I” statements allows the other person to be receptive rather than defensive. Effective communication needs a sender of accurate information and a willing, open receiver.

Remember, too, that you communicate in ways other than words. For example, assertive communication includes the following non-verbal behaviours:

- making eye contact and looking directly at a person when you are speaking. This shows that you are sincere, interested in the conversation, and confident about what you are saying.
- standing or sitting in an erect posture and maintaining an appropriate personal distance
- leaving your hands by your sides and making appropriate non-threatening gestures
- keeping your voice pleasant, steady, and strong and accompanied by appropriate facial expressions



Now complete the Learning Task Self-Test.

Self-Test 4

1. Which of the following are considered three ways of communicating?
 - a. Passive, aggressive, and normal
 - b. Passive, effective, and ineffective
 - c. Assertive, aggressive, and passive
 - d. Assertive, non-assertive, and aggressive
2. Which of the following is an example of assertive communication?
 - a. Expressing yourself clearly and firmly
 - b. Conveying your feelings and ideas honestly
 - c. All of the above
 - d. None of the above
3. Which of the following is an example of non-assertive communication?
 - a. Standing up for yourself
 - b. Failing to stand up for yourself
 - c. Speaking through body language
 - d. Being easygoing and not taking offence
4. Which of the following applies to people who don't speak up in the workplace?
 - a. They aren't good employees.
 - b. They aren't good team members.
 - c. They deserve what happens to them.
 - d. They are easily ignored and can have their rights violated.
5. Which of the following most applies to aggressive behaviour?
 - a. It shows a lack of respect for supervisors and co-workers.
 - b. It should not be tolerated in the workplace and is considered rude, hostile, and/or destructive.
 - c. All of the above
 - d. None of the above
6. Using "you" at the beginning of each sentence is key to assertive communication.
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. Only you can speak accurately about your own intentions.
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. Ninety percent of all communication is non-verbal.
 - a. True
 - b. False

LEARNING TASK 5

Describe conflict resolution techniques

Conflict can be defined as disagreement between two or more individuals or groups arising from differences of opinions, beliefs, or actions. It is a normal part of everyday life, given that individuals have different experiences, values, and beliefs that shape their perception of the world.

Conflict in the workplace can usually be associated with resource allocation, perceptions, and/or values. In general, conflicts over resource allocation are the easiest to solve, since they can be looked at objectively and separated from personal opinions. Both parties may decide on an equitable solution or agree to let a superior make a decision and live with the consequences.

Conflicts that involve perceptions and values are often personal, and if left to fester it can take significant time and effort to determine the actual source of the problem and come to a decision that is satisfactory to both parties. They can also spread and create a toxic work environment for individuals on all sides of the conflict.

The following are some easy steps you can take to reduce conflict in the workplace:

- Remember that conflict is inevitable and does not reflect badly on you and that there are no winners and losers. The goal of conflict resolution is to come to an agreement that is of mutual benefit to both parties.
- Be proactive. If you feel that you have annoyed or made someone angry, ask to discuss it with them at the onset. Likewise, if you feel that you have been unfairly treated, use an assertive communication style and discuss it with your colleagues to resolve the issue. In this way, simple misunderstandings can be cleared up.
- The sooner you handle the conflict, the better. The longer a conflict goes unresolved, the larger it becomes and the more difficult it is to find the root of the problem.
- Take responsibility for your part in the conflict. If you've intentionally or unintentionally offended someone through your actions, acknowledge your part and move on.
- Once the conflict has been resolved, agree to move forward with a positive working relationship.

Ineffective ways to reduce conflict at work include being passive and thinking that a problem will go away if it is left unchecked. This only leads to resentment and further issues.



Now complete the Learning Task Self-Test.

Self-Test 5

1. Conflict is a disagreement between two or more people based on differences concerning which of the following?
 - a. Beliefs
 - b. Actions
 - c. Opinions
 - d. All of the above
2. What do the most common workplace conflicts result from?
 - a. Personal problems between staff members
 - b. Jealousy and mistrust of other staff members
 - c. Problems between employers and employees
 - d. Resource allocations (e.g., differences in department budgets), perceptions, and values
3. What is the best way for two individuals to settle a resource allocation-related conflict?
 - a. Limit interactions with the other individual.
 - b. Complain formally in writing to his or her superior.
 - c. Agree to disagree and let someone else come up with the solution.
 - d. Remove personal opinions, be objective, look at the issue, and try and find a solution that works.
4. Conflict is inevitable and does not reflect badly on you.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. There is always a winner and a loser in a workplace conflict.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. It is always best to wait until you are calm before discussing a workplace conflict.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. The longer a conflict goes unresolved, the more difficult it becomes to find the source of the problem.
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. Being passive or non-assertive is a good strategy when dealing with a conflict.
- a. True
 - b. False

LEARNING TASK 6

Describe effective problem solving and decision making

Key to communicating effectively is the development of skills related to problem solving and decision making. These skills are highly regarded by employers and required if you aspire to move into a position of management or intend on starting your own business.

The following are steps to take into account when solving problems related to communication:

- Approach the issue from a neutral or objective position.
- Treat all individuals involved with respect.
- Let the individuals involved provide their information without interruption.
- Make sure that you understand the problem. If you need more information or clarification, ask questions in a non-threatening manner.



Now complete the Learning Task Self-Test.

Self-Test 6

1. The key to effective communication is the development of problem-solving and decision-making skills.
 - a. True
 - b. False

Summary

Success in finding and maintaining a job is primarily about communication, since work involves being in relationships with other people. The principles of effective communication apply equally to all relationships throughout a person's life. You and the people around you all stand to benefit from practising attentive and engaged listening, providing constructive feedback, communicating assertively as required, applying effective communication skills to conflict management, and using strong problem-solving and decision-making skills in your interactions with others.

References

Mehrabian, A., & Ferris S. R. (1967). Inference of attitudes from nonverbal communication in two channels. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 31, 248.

Appendix: Essential Skills Resources

Essential skills videos

Oral communication

http://hebergement-hosting.ca/hosting/edsc-esdc/dgce-seb/videos/04-eng/job_interview_full.mp4

Oral communication – conflict

http://hebergement-hosting.ca/hosting/edsc-esdc/dgce-seb/videos/04-eng/workplace_conflict_full.mp4

Answer Key

Self-Test 1

1. a. True
2. c. All of the above
3. a. True
4. b. False
5. c. 75%
6. d. Listening
7. a. True
8. b. False
9. d. Vocal messages
10. c. The more simply something is stated, the less opportunity there is for confusion.
11. c. All of the above
12. b. False
13. a. True
14. c. Closing your eyes while an individual is speaking
15. a. True
16. d. Providing conditional acceptance
17. a. True
18. c. Employers, supervisors, and clients
19. b. False

Self-Test 2

1. b. False
2. a. True
3. d. Listening, non-verbal, and verbal communication

Self-Test 3

1. c. All of the above
2. c. All of the above
3. c. Your employer, supervisor, co-workers, and clients

4. b. To improve your performance or the quality of service
5. b. False
6. c. Focus on the person and not the issue.
7. d. Be prepared and challenge the speaker on everything that you do not believe is correct.

Self-Test 4

1. d. Assertive, non-assertive, and aggressive
2. c. All of the above
3. b. Failing to stand up for yourself
4. d. They are easily ignored and can have their rights violated.
5. c. All of the above
6. b. False
7. a. True
8. a. True

Self-Test 5

1. d. All of the above
2. d. Resource allocations (e.g., differences in department budgets), perceptions, and values
3. d. Remove personal opinions, be objective, look at the issue, and try and find a solution that works.
4. a. True
5. b. False
6. a. True
7. a. True
8. b. False

Self-Test 6

1. a. True

The British Columbia Open Textbook Project

The British Columbia Open Textbook Project is funded by the B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education, and managed by BCcampus, a publicly-funded organization that uses information technology to connect B.C. post-secondary institutions under a collaborative service delivery framework. The Open Textbook Project aims to make available openly-licensed textbooks in the province's high-impact subject areas. Visit open.bccampus.ca for more information.



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