

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS



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Communication is a natural element of being human, and it's something we all do without thinking much about it.

However, communication is also a skill we can develop to become more effective and create the outcomes we want – which can be very useful in the workplace.

This article takes a closer look at communication styles and processes that can help you develop better communication skills in your professional role.

Different Types of Communication

Although speech is the first thing that comes to mind when we think of communicating with others, it is only a small part of the communication process.

We can separate communication into four types:

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication involves any method of communicating using sound.

Speech is the most obvious method of verbal communication, but we send different messages depending upon our style of speech.

Tone of voice is an important part of verbal communication. You can change the meaning of a word or phrase simply by changing your tone.

If you were to say the same thing in a whisper or a shout, the listener would receive a very different message.

Verbal communication also depends on the way we are socialized and taught about the meaning of language.

For example, a phrase might mean something very different in one culture than it does in another.

Understanding the context and environment in which you are using language can influence your choice of words.

Nonverbal Communication

As humans, we constantly communicate without needing to talk or even make a sound.

We might do this intentionally, with a smile or a gesture to someone we know, for example; or unintentionally, perhaps by expressing anger through pacing or balling up our fists.

Nonverbal communication accounts for over 70% of our expression, so an awareness of these behaviors can help us communicate more clearly.

Types of nonverbal communication include:

- Tone of voice
- Eye contact
- **Body language**
- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Body posture

Visual Communication

Visual communication is all around us. It involves conveying information visually so that

other people can view it and extract meaning.

This style of communication can take the form of:

- Video
- Infographics
- Photographs
- Animations
- Television
- Graphs and charts

Visual communication is used extensively in many work environments.

Written Communication

Written communication involves sharing a message through writing.

It can take many forms, including:

- Newspapers
- Articles
- Webpages
- Reports
- **Emails**
- Memos
- **Letters**

Written communication is often used as a more formal method of sharing a message.

It relies heavily on the reader to understand and interpret the writing in the way it was intended. For this reason, good writing skills are fundamental to achieving clear, effective communication using this method, particularly in the workplace.

Formal and Informal Communication

All four styles of communication can be either formal or informal, although some lend themselves more to one than the other.

- **Informal communication** is casual and relaxed. It follows no set process or rules and can change depending on the participants.
- **Formal communication** uses predefined processes, routes and formats, and is often employed to provide structure to workplace communications. For example, emails, reports, meetings and **reviews** all follow a predefined structure and usually have accepted rules, such as no foul language or slang.

It is worth noting that we can unintentionally reveal our true thoughts or feelings through nonverbal communication, so it is worth being aware of your nonverbal cues, particularly in formal settings.

Why Is Effective Communication Important?

Effective communication is at the heart of every company and organization. It facilitates **professional relationships**, streamlines brand messaging, and ensures that individuals feel heard and respected.

Organizations find that effective communication:

- **Helps decision-making** – There needs to be open, clear communication between all parties for a manager to **make decisions** that support the team. When employees are allowed to voice their opinions and ideas, a manager can use all the relevant information to inform decisions.
- **Assists coordination** – Effective communication can help coordinate several members of a team or organization to generate the best outcomes and achieve targets.

- **Improves cooperation and collaboration** – Employees who feel listened to and heard are usually more cooperative and supportive of change brought about by management. An open communication process can prevent employees from feeling powerless or overlooked in the workplace, so they are more willing to **collaborate** with each other and with management.
- **Increases productivity** – When teams communicate effectively, they can work together to achieve more, ultimately saving the company time and money.

Ineffective communication can have the opposite effect. No matter how good you are at your job, you will struggle to be successful at work if you can't communicate effectively.

Poor communication creates barriers to understanding.

Most ineffective communicators do not recognize this trait in themselves, then wonder why they don't get the response they expect when trying to convey a message.

It is important to note that communication skills work both ways.

Besides learning to get your message across, you also need to use **listening skills** to accurately hear and interpret communication from others.

The Communication Process

The communication process is a structure that defines and describes the way people communicate a message. It looks at all aspects of communication and provides a step-by-step guide to communicating effectively.

It is important to be aware of the communication process so you can inspect your own communication practices and improve any areas in which you may be lacking.

No matter how good you are at your job, poor communication skills will hold you back and negatively impact your performance.

The communication process gives you a clear outline of the chain of communication. It can help you identify where to make improvements and where the process might be failing at work.



Communication Process: Everything You Need to Know

Any act of communication involves three main components:

- The sender
- The message
- The receiver

To help us understand in more depth, we can break the process down into eight parts:

1. **Sender** – The person who wants to communicate information to another person or group. The sender has an idea or message that they plan to share.
2. **Message** – The information that the sender wishes to share. Once the sender has

developed their message, they decide to communicate it to others by transmitting the information somehow.

3. **Encoding** – The sender chooses the most appropriate and effective communication style for that information (written, visual or verbal).
4. **Channel** – The precise method of transmitting the message (for example, email, telephone conversation, video). The channel of communication has a significant impact on how the message is received. Some channels are more suited to informal communication or formal communication.
5. **Receiver** – The person receiving the communication.
6. **Decoding** – The way the receiver interprets and understands the information. The person receiving the message decodes it in their brain to understand and analyze it. The ideal outcome of this stage is that the receiver understands the message in the way that the sender intended. From this step, the sender no longer has control over the process.
7. **Feedback** – The receiver communicates back to the sender to acknowledge or act upon the information received, allowing the sender to gauge whether the message has been understood. Sometimes, no response is required, and this stage of the process is omitted.
8. **Noise** – Any outside influence that may affect the communication process at any stage. Noise can include poor internet connection, external distractions, prejudices, thoughts and prior experiences of the receiver, and the existing relationship between sender and receiver.

How to Use the Communication Process

Working through the communication process can improve the way you communicate and how your communication is received.

1. Consider What You Want to Communicate

Being clear in your own mind about both the meaning and intended outcome of your message will go a long way to ensuring your message is communicated effectively.

Before you start, ask yourself, *“What exactly do I want to communicate?”*

Having a clear idea of what you want to say can help you work out how you want it to be received and how best to transmit your message.

For example, if you're going to alert your team members to an upcoming meeting for which they need to prepare, you might decide to include the date and time of the meeting, and an overview of the presentation they will need to deliver.

2. Compose Your Message

Once you are clear on what you want to say, decide on the most appropriate method of communication.

If your message is a formal work instruction, you may decide it is best suited to email, for example.

Before composing your message, ask yourself:

- How might the recipient understand and interpret this information?
- Is there anything they need to know before receiving this message?

Anticipating and addressing any barriers to effective communication at this stage can help the process run smoothly.

Continuing our example, you might decide to send a calendar invite to your team for the

meeting, attached to an email reminding them of the focus and content of the presentation and what is expected of them during the meeting.

3. Message Delivery

Once you have decided upon the method of communication and the information you want to send, you need to plan the delivery of the message.

At this stage, you could ask yourself:

"How can I improve the chances of the recipients opening and focusing on this information?"

You could send it at a quiet time of day, or when you know there is less chance of the recipient being distracted.

In our meeting-invite example, you would need to communicate far enough in advance that your team has time to prepare. You could also schedule the email to send first thing in the morning so they can read it before they start their work.

4. Receive and Analyze Feedback

Expect to hear a response from the recipient and prepare to learn from the feedback.

At this stage, ask yourself:

- *"Was my message received and understood as intended?"*
- *"Has the recipient responded positively in the way I expected?"*

In our example, you would hope to receive confirmation that your team has the date in their diaries.

In the meeting, you will see whether they have prepared, confirming whether you gave them enough time and communicated effectively about what they needed to do.

Tips for Improving the Communication Process

- **Make notes** – Keep a notebook for writing down key information that you need to communicate when it arises. This will help you with the second stage of the communication process as you formulate a plan of what you want to say.
- **Know your audience** – To meet the needs of the recipient and demonstrate that you respect their time, you need to understand their position in the situation. The better you know your audience, the higher the chances that your message will be received as intended.
- **Pay attention to your body language and eye contact** – **Nonverbal communication** is a vital aspect of effective communication, and it can be easily overlooked. Your nonverbal behavior reveals a lot about your true thoughts and feelings, so raising your awareness of it can help you communicate more effectively.
- **Be structured and concise** – The recipient is probably very busy with their work, so simplify your message wherever you can to make it easier for them to digest it quickly and respond accordingly.
- **Develop your listening skills** – **Effective communication** includes listening carefully to your colleagues. Think about how you receive communications in the workplace and whether you listen to feedback and input from your team.
- **Be available** – Keep an open line of communication between yourself and your team. Your colleagues will be more likely to communicate effectively if they know their efforts are welcome and appreciated.

- **Be prepared to add more clarity to your message** – We don't always get it right the first time, so be ready to take feedback and correct your original messaging if it wasn't clearly understood. See every point of communication as an opportunity to improve your communication skills.

Final Thoughts

Communication is a skill we draw upon every day. If we take time to review our communication style, we can make vast improvements to improve relationships and output in the workplace.

The eight-step communication process gives structure to all communications and allows us to analyze how we communicate, identifying any areas in which we can improve.

Awareness of verbal and nonverbal communication, along with the different methods of communication, including written and visual, can help us determine the most effective ways to communicate our message in the workplace.