

Communication Skills, Part 1 – Verbal Communication

Where do we use verbal communication skills?

Each venue may call for different verbal communication skills.

- Phone calls
- Interviews
- Networking
- Presentations
- Meetings
- Informal conversation

Do any of these items apply to you?

You have a soft voice and speak at low volume?	You have a long, non-common, or unique name?
You talk to fast and others have a hard time keeping up with you?	You talk to much, ramble, and cannot put the brakes on your side of the conversation?
You have a tendency for one way conversations?	Your speech is filled with “Ummm” s !!!
Been in a noisy room and others cannot hear you?	You or someone else is short on time and you know the conversation will remain unfinished?
Do you tend to crack jokes or be casual with people you hardly know?	Do you tend to use acronyms that others may not know?
Are your hands doing all the talking?	Do you have poor eye contact with others?

Elements of Speaking (<http://www.itstime.com/aug97.htm#speaking>)

Body language	Eye contact	Energy	Rapport
Voice quality	Emotional content, energy, strength	Setting, time, place, timing	Agenda
Intention	Self-concept	How the messenger holds the message	Purpose of communication - knowing what you want to communicate
Manner: directness, sincerity	Concept of others	Sensitivity	Clarity
Dress and clothing (style)	Listening, hearing the underlying message	Rhythm and pacing	Silence, centering, looking
Visual aids	Speaking from the heart	Attitude and confidence	

The mechanics of speech: (www.dictionary.com)

- **Volume** - The degree of sound intensity or audibility
- **Speed** – How fast or slow do you speak?
- **Inflection** - Modulation of the voice; change in pitch or tone of voice
- **Intonation** - The pattern or melody of pitch changes in connected speech, esp. the pitch pattern of a sentence, which distinguishes kinds of sentences or speakers of different language cultures.
- **Pronunciation** - The act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation, often with reference to some standard of correctness or acceptability.
- **Enunciation** - To pronounce; articulate
- **Expression** - The act of expressing or setting forth in words: *the free expression of political opinions*. Indication of feeling, spirit, character, etc., as on the face, in the voice, or in artistic execution: *the lyric expression embodied in his poetry*.

Ten Ways To Improve Your Communication Skills

(http://hwebbjr.typepad.com/openloops/2005/05/ten_ways_to_imp.html)

1. **Develop your voice** – A high whiney voice is not perceived to be one of authority. In fact, a high soft voice can make you sound like prey to an aggressive co-worker who is out to make his/her career at the expense of anyone else. Begin doing exercises to lower the pitch of your voice. Here is one to start: Sing — but do it an octave lower on all your favorite songs. Practice this and, after a period of time, your voice will begin to lower.
2. **Slow down** – People will perceive you as nervous and unsure of yourself if you talk fast. However, be careful not to slow down to the point where people begin to finish your sentences just to help you finish.
3. **Animate your voice** – Avoid a monotone. Use dynamics. Your pitch should raise and lower. Your volume should be soft and loud. Listen to your local TV news anchor; take notes.
4. **Enunciate your words** – Speak clearly. Don't mumble. If people are always saying, "huh," to you, you are mumbling.
5. **Use appropriate volume** – Use a volume that is appropriate for the setting. Speak more softly when you are alone and close. Speak louder when you are speaking to larger groups or across larger spaces.
6. **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.
7. **Use the right words** – If you're not sure of the meaning of a word, don't use it. Start a program of learning a new word a day. Use it sometime in your conversations during the day.
8. **Make eye contact** – I know a person who is very competent in her job. However, when she speaks to individuals or groups, she does so with her eyes shut. When she opens them periodically, she stares off in a direction away from the listener. She is perceived as incompetent by those with whom she consults. One technique to help with this is to consciously look into one of the listener's eyes and then move to the other. Going back and forth between the two (and I hope they only have two) makes your eyes appear to sparkle. Another trick is to imagine a letter "T" on the listener's face with the cross bar being an imaginary line across the eye brows and the vertical line coming down the center of the nose. Keep your eyes scanning that "T" zone.
9. **Use gestures** – Make your whole body talk. Use smaller gestures for individuals and small groups. The gestures should get larger as the group that one is addressing increases in size.
10. **Don't send mixed messages** – Make your words, gestures, facial expressions, tone, and message match. Disciplining an employee while smiling sends a mixed message and, therefore, is ineffective. If you have to deliver a negative message, make your words, facial expressions, and tone match the message.

Other tips for improvement:

- Record your conversations (one way taping)
- Practice and feedback from others (use your buddies and ask for help)
- Do some presentations
- Break your bad habits by utilizing professional sounding dialog
- Join Toastmaster, Take a speech class