

Why are communication skills important?

Communication is the most basic thing that binds all living beings together and is essential for our personal and professional growth. Although, over the ages, we have come up with various ways to communicate, including speaking, writing, listening, signalling, and even observing non-verbal cues that the person in front of us may not even be portraying intentionally. Communication is an exchange of information between two or more parties. This exchange may be verbal or non-verbal, and it helps us gain knowledge and perspective with the help of those around us. We use our communication skills in a variety of ways in our professional lives: in conversations, emails and written documents, presentations, and visuals like graphics or charts. Communication skills are essential, especially in the workplace, because they can:

- Improve your relationships with your manager and co-workers
- Build connections with customers
- Help you convey your point quickly and clearly
- Enhance your professional image
- Encourage active listening and open-mindedness
- Help advance your career

17 ways to improve your communications skills in the workplace

Communicating effectively in the workplace is a practiced skill. That means, there are steps you can take to strengthen your abilities. We've gathered 17 tips to provide actionable steps you can take to improve all areas of workplace communication.

1. Put away distractions.

Improving your overall communication abilities means being fully present. Put away anything that can distract you, like your phone. It shows others that you're respectfully listening and helps you respond thoughtfully to the conversation.

2. Be respectful.

Be aware of others' time and space when communicating with them. Thank them for their time, keep presentations to within their set time limits, and deliver written communications, like email, during reasonable hours.

3. Be receptive to feedback.

As you're working to improve your communication skills, ask your colleagues for feedback about areas you can further develop. Try incorporating their feedback into your next chat, brainstorming session, or video conference.

4. Prioritize interpersonal skills.

Improving interpersonal skills or your ability to work with others—will feed into the way you communicate with your colleagues, managers, and more. Interpersonal skills have to do with teamwork, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution, and often go hand-in-hand with communicating.

Written and visual communication tips

Writing and imagery share a lot in common in that you're using external mediums to share information with an audience. Use the tips below to help improve both of these communication types.

5. Be concise and specific.

Staying on message is key. Use the acronym BRIEF (background, reason, information, end, follow-up) to help guide your written or visual communication. It's important to keep your message clear and concise so your audience understands your point, and doesn't get lost in unnecessary details.

6. Tailor your message to your audience.

Your communication should change based on your audience, similar to how you personalize an email based on who you're addressing it to. In that way, your writing or visuals should reflect your intended audience. Think about what they need to know and the best way to present the information.

7. Tell a story.

When you can, include stories in your written or visual materials. A story helps keep your audience engaged and makes it easier for people to relate to and grasp the topic.

8. Simplify and stay on message.

Proofread and eliminate anything that strays from your message. One of the best ways to improve communication is to work on creating concise and clear conversations, emails, and presentations that are error-free.

Verbal communication tips

Remember that verbal communication goes beyond just what you say to someone else. Use the tips below to improve your speaking and listening abilities.

9. Prepare what you're going to say.

If you're presenting an idea or having a meaningful talk with your supervisor, take some time to prepare what you'll say. By organizing your thoughts, your conversation should be clearer and lead to a more productive interaction.

10. Get rid of conversation fillers.

To aid in your conversational improvement, work to eliminate fillers like "um," and "ah." Start listening for these fillers so you can use them less and convey more confidence when you speak. Often these phrases are used to fill the silence, which is a natural part of conversation, so try to embrace the silence rather than fill it.

11. Record yourself communicating.

If you need to deliver a presentation, practice it in advance and record yourself. Review the recording and look for places to improve, such as catching the conversational fillers we mentioned above or making better eye contact with your audience.

12. Ask questions and summarize the other person's main points.

Part of being an active listener is asking relevant questions and repeating pieces of the conversation to show that you understand a point. Listening makes communication a two-way street, and asking questions is a big part of that.

13. Be ready for different answers.

Listen without judgment. That's the goal of every conversation, but especially if you hear responses that are unexpected or different than you anticipate. Listen to the person openly, be mindful of your body language, and don't interrupt.

14. Make sure you understand.

Before ending a conversation, take a moment to ask a few follow-up questions and then recap the conversation. You can finish by repeating what you've heard them say and confirming that you understand the next actionable steps.

Non-verbal communication

Lastly, your body communicates *a lot*. Use the tips below to become more mindful about your body language and other important aspects of non-verbal communication.

15. Work on your body language.

Body language comes up in a range of scenarios. When you're listening, try to avoid slouching, nod to show you hear the person, and think about your facial expressions. If you're speaking, make eye contact and use natural hand gestures.

16. Be aware of your emotions.

How you're feeling can arise non-verbally. During a conversation, meeting, or presentation, stay present with your emotions and reflect on whether your body language—and even the loudness of your voice—are conveying what you want them to.

17. Use empathy.

Consider the feelings of others as you communicate with them. Part of having a meaningful conversation or developing a meaningful presentation is being aware of others—being empathetic, in other words. If you try to put yourself in their shoes, you can better understand what they need and communicate more effectively.