



# MIND TOOLS

Essential skills for an excellent career



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## Module 9

# Communication Skills

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## Communication Skills

by [James Manktelow](#) and Kellie Fowler

The articles in this chapter help you to understand effective communication and then show you how to communicate your message in the best possible way. After completing this section, you should have a better understanding of how to communicate effectively – to individuals and groups, via spoken communications, written communications, and even electronic communications.

The purpose of communication is to get your message across to others. This is a process that involves both the sender of the message and the receiver. This process leaves room for error, with messages often misinterpreted by one or more of the parties involved. This causes unnecessary confusion and counter productivity.

In fact, a message is successful only when both the sender and the receiver perceive it in the same way.

By successfully getting your message across, you convey your thoughts and ideas effectively. When not successful, the thoughts and ideas that you convey do not necessarily reflect your own, causing a communications breakdown and creating roadblocks that stand in the way of your goals – both personally and professionally.

In a recent survey of recruiters from companies with more than 50,000 employees, communication skills were cited as the single more important decisive factor in choosing managers. The survey, conducted by the University of Pittsburgh's Katz Business School, points out that communication skills, including written and oral presentations, as well as an ability to work with others, are the main factor contributing to job success.

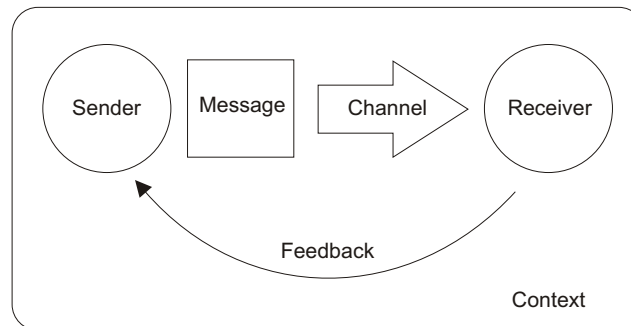
In spite of the increasing importance placed on communication skills, many individuals continue to struggle with these skills, unable to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively – whether in verbal or written format. This inability makes it nearly impossible for them to compete effectively in the workplace, and stands in the way of career progression.

Getting your message across is paramount to progressing. To do this, you must understand what your message is, what audience you are sending it to, and how it will be perceived. You must also weigh-in the circumstances surrounding your communications, such as situational and cultural context.

### Communications Skills - The Importance of Removing Barriers:

Communication barriers can pop-up at every stage of the communication process (which consists of sender, message, channel, receiver, feedback and context - see the diagram below) and have the potential to create misunderstanding and confusion.

### The Communications Process



To be an effective communicator and to get your point across without misunderstanding and confusion, your goal should be to lessen the frequency of these barriers at each stage of this process with clear, concise, accurate, well-planned communications. We follow the process through below:

#### Sender...

To establish yourself as an effective communicator, you must first establish credibility. In the business arena, this involves displaying knowledge of the subject, the audience and the context in which the message is delivered.

You must also know your audience (individuals or groups to which you are delivering your message). Failure to understand who you are communicating to will result in delivering messages that are misunderstood.

#### Message...

Next, consider the message itself. Written, oral and nonverbal communications are effected by the sender's tone, method of organization, validity of the argument, what is communicated and what is left out, as well as your individual style of communicating. Messages also have intellectual and emotional components, with intellect allowing us the ability to reason and emotion allowing us to present motivational appeals, ultimately changing minds and actions.

#### Channel...

Messages are conveyed through channels, with verbal including face-to-face meetings, telephone and videoconferencing; and written including letters, emails, memos and reports.

#### Receiver...

These messages are delivered to an audience. No doubt, you have in mind the actions or reactions you hope your message prompts from this audience. Keep in mind, your audience also enters into the

communication process with ideas and feelings that will undoubtedly influence their understanding of your message and their response. To be a successful communicator, you should consider these before delivering your message, acting appropriately.

### Feedback...

Your audience will provide you with feedback, verbal and nonverbal reactions to your communicated message. Pay close attention to this feedback as it is crucial to ensuring the audience understood your message.

### Context...

The situation in which your message is delivered is the context. This may include the surrounding environment or broader culture (i.e. corporate culture, international cultures, etc.).

## Removing Barriers At All These Stages

To deliver your messages effectively, you must commit to breaking down the barriers that exist in each of these stages of the communication process.

Let's begin with the message itself. If your message is too lengthy, disorganized or contains errors, you can expect it to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Use of poor verbal and body language can also confuse the message.

Barriers in context tend to stem from senders offering too much information too fast. When in doubt here, less is oftentimes more. It is best to be mindful of the demands on other people's time, especially in today's ultra-busy society. Once you understand this, you need to work to understand your audience's culture, making sure you can converse and deliver your message to people of different backgrounds and cultures within your own organization, in this country and even abroad. We look at communicating within your own organization in the next article.

## Communicating In Your Organization (9.1)

**How to use tool:** To ensure successful communications within your organization, it is best to start with the very basics: your knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communications. In the workplace, these types of communications are continually exchanged, oftentimes without much planning or even the thought that such communications are taking place.

### **The Importance of Non-Verbal Communication**

For instance, it's not always just what you say. It's also how you "say" it – taking into account your eyes, your posture, your overall body language, even your appearance at the time the communication is exchanged, and the voice in which you offer the exchange.

In verbal communication, an active dialogue is engaged with the use of words. At the same time, however, non-verbal communication takes place, relying on nonverbal cues, such as gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, even clothing and personal space.

Nonverbal cues are very powerful, making it crucial that you pay attention to your actions, as well as the nonverbal cues of those around you. If, during your meeting, participants begin to doodle or chat amongst themselves, they are no longer paying attention to you: Your message has become boring or your delivery is no longer engaging.

Once again, you need to be mindful of cultural differences when using or interpreting nonverbal cues. For instance, the handshake that is so widely accepted in Western cultures as a greeting or confirmation of a business deal is not accepted in other cultures, and can cause confusion.

While eye contact, facial expressions, posture, gestures, clothing and space are obvious nonverbal communication cues, others strongly influence interpretation of messages, including how the message is delivered. This means paying close attention to your tone of voice, even your voice's overall loudness and its pitch.

Be mindful of your own nonverbal cues, as well as the nonverbal cues of those around you. Keep your messages short and concise. This means preparing in advance whenever possible. And for the impromptu meeting, it means thinking before you speak.

### **Giving People Time...**

Setting aside a specific time for meetings and regular communications is a great idea. This allows time for everyone involved to prepare. Also, keep in mind that listening is oftentimes much more productive when working to communicate effectively, and can very well be more important than talking. Allow everyone involved the time they need to communicate effectively.

### **Enhancing your communications:**

- Because gestures can both compliment and contradict your message, be mindful of these.
- Eye contact is an important step in sending and receiving messages. Eye contact can be a signal of interest, a signal of recognition, even a sign of honesty and credibility.
- Closely linked to eye contact are facial expressions, which can reflect attitudes and emotions.
- Posture can also be used to more effectively communicate your message.
- Clothing is important. By dressing for your job, you show respect for the values and conventions of your organization.
- Be mindful of people's personal space when communicating. Do not invade their personal space by getting too close and do not confuse communications by trying to exchange messages from too far away.

In the next article, find out how to make sure that your spoken communications are always understood.

## Spoken Communications (9.2)

Function: Ensuring your words are *always* understood

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How to use tool: While we discussed many of the cues used to ensure your spoken words are understood in the previous section (Communicating in Your Organization), there are many other things you should do to ensure that your verbal messages are understood time and time again.

Although somewhat obvious and deceptively simple, these include:

- Keep the message clear
- Be prepared
- Keep the message simple
- Be vivid when delivering the message
- Be natural
- Keep the message concise

Preparation is underrated. In fact, it is one of the most important factors in determining your communication successes. When possible, set meeting times and presentation times well in advance, allowing yourself the time you need to prepare your communications. As you prepare, be mindful of the entire communication process (sender, message, channel, receiver, feedback and context). By paying close attention to each of these stages and preparing accordingly, you ensure your communications will be more effective and better understood.

Of course, not all communications can be scheduled. In this case, preparation may mean having a good, thorough understanding of the office going-ons, enabling you to communicate with the knowledge you need to be effective, both through verbal and written communications.

### **Being prepared: Guidelines for Thinking Ahead:**

#### **Ask yourself: Who? What? How? When? Where? Why?**

Who are you communicating to? What are their interests, presuppositions and values? What do they share in common with others; how are they unique?

What do you wish to communicate? One way of answering this question is to ask yourself about the 'success criteria'. How do you know if and when you have successfully communicated what you have in mind?

How can you best convey your message? Language is important here, as are the nonverbal cues discussed earlier. Choose your words and your nonverbal cues with your audience in mind. Plan a beginning, middle and end. If time and place allow, consider and prepare audio-visual aids.

When? Timing is important here. Develop a sense of timing, so that your contributions are seen and heard as relevant to the issue or matter at hand. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. 'It's better to be silent than sing a bad tune.'

Where? What is the physical context of the communication in mind? You may have time to visit the room, for example, and rearrange the furniture. Check for availability and visibility if you are using audio or visual aids.

Why? In order to convert hearers into listeners, you need to know why they should listen to you – and tell them if necessary. What disposes them to listen? That implies that you know yourself why you are seeking to communicate – the value or worth or interest of what you are going to say.

Be concise. Be brief. Use short words and sentences. Support these with short, easy-to-understand examples, which help demonstrate your message.

## Written Communications (9.3)

Function: Before you write it down, know this

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How to use tool: Many people are intimidated by writing. Even so, there are times when writing is the best way to communicate, and oftentimes the only way to get your message across.

### **Write With Necessary Caution...**

When writing, be mindful of the fact that once something is in written form, it cannot be taken back. Communicating through words can be more concrete than verbal communications, with less room for error and even less room for mistakes. This presents written communicators with new challenges, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, even writing style and actual wording.

Thankfully, today's technology makes memo, letter and proposal writing much easier by providing reliable tools that check and even correct misspelled words and incorrect grammar use. Unfortunately, these tools are not fail proof and will require your support, making your knowledge in this area important.

### **The Importance of "Style"...**

Some of the most basic tips to remember when writing include:

- Avoid the use of slang words.
  - Try not to use abbreviations (unless appropriately defined).
  - Steer away from the use of symbols (such as ampersands (&)).
  - Clichés should be avoided, or at the very least, used with caution.
  - Brackets are used to play down words or phrases.
  - Dashes are generally used for emphasis.
  - Great care should ALWAYS be taken to spell the names of people and companies correctly.
  - Numbers should be expressed as words when the number is less than 10 or is used to start a sentence (example: 10 years ago, my brother and I...). The number 10, or
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anything greater than 10, should be expressed as a figure (example: My brother has 13 Matchbox cars.)

- Quotation marks should be placed around any directly quoted speech or text and around titles of publications.
- Keep sentences short.

While the above tips cover the most common mistakes made when writing letters, memos and reports, they in no way cover everything you need to know to ensure your written communications are accurate and understood.

While this takes some practice, there are many sources available to assist with writing style, including "[The Elements of Style](#)", by Strunk and White. One glance in any newsroom or on the desk of even the most accomplished writers and you are sure to find this small, easy-to-read, easy-to-understand, no-nonsense guide to writing. It is clear, concise and perhaps the best book of its kind. If you plan on writing a great deal of letters or even proposals, it is strongly recommended that you picky up this nifty guide, which by the way, will fit in your shirt pocket.

#### **Letter Writing Hints...**

When writing letters, it is best to address the letter to an individual. And, when beginning the letter with a personal name, be sure to end it with an appropriate closing, such as 'Sincerely yours'. If you cannot obtain an individual's name, consider ending it with a more generic (less personal) closing, such as 'With kindest regards'.

For normal business letters, your letter should start with an overall summary, showing in the first paragraph why the letter is relevant to the reader. It's not a good practice to make the reader go past the first paragraph to find out why the letter was sent to them.

The body of the letter needs to explain the reason for the correspondence, including any relevant background and current information. Make sure the information flows logically, ensuring you are making your points effectively.

The closing of the letter is the final impression you leave with the reader. End with an action point, such as 'I will call you later this week to discuss this further'.

#### **The Importance of Careful Proofing**

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when writing a letter is to check it thoroughly when it is completed. Even when you think it is exactly what you want, read it one more time. This "unwritten" rule holds true for everything you write – memos, letters, proposals, etc.

Use both the grammar and spell check on your computer, paying very, very close attention to every word highlighted. Do not place total faith on your computer here. Instead, you should have both a printed dictionary and thesaurus nearby to double-check everything your computers editing tools highlight, as these tools are certainly not always reliable, for a variety of reasons.

When checking your written communications, make sure the document is clear and concise. Is there anything in the written communication that could be misinterpreted? Does it raise unanswered questions or fail to make the point you need to get across?

Can you cut down on the number of words used? For instance, don't use 20 words when you can use 10. While you do not want to be curt or abrupt, you do not want to waste the reader's time with unnecessary words or phrases.

Is your written communication well organized? Does each idea proceed logically to the next? Make sure your written communications are easy to read and contain the necessary information, using facts where needed and avoiding information that is not relevant. Again, outline the course of action you expect, such as a return call or visit.

Close appropriately, making sure to include your contact information. While this may seem obvious, it is sometimes overlooked and can make your written communications look amateurish. This can diminish your chances of meeting your written communication's goals.

In the next article we look at a special case of written communication - use of email.

## Communicating By Email (9.4)

Function: Communicate effectively in the electronic age

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How to use tool: As with all written communications, your emails should be clear and concise. Sentences should be kept short and to the point.

This starts with the email's subject line. Use the subject line to inform the receiver of EXACTLY what the email is about. Keep in mind, the subject line should offer a short summary of the email and allows for just a few words. Because everyone gets emails they do not want (i.e. Spam), appropriate use of the subject line increases the chances your email will be read and not discarded into the deleted email file without so much as a glance.

Because emails have the date and time they were sent, it is not necessary to include this information in your email correspondences. However, the writing used in the email should liken that used in other business writings. The email should be clear and concise, with the purpose of the email detailed in the very first paragraph.

The body of the email should contain all pertinent information (see writing tips in Written Communications) and should be direct and informative.

Make sure to include any call to action you desire, such as a phone call or follow-up appointment. Then, make sure you include your contact information, including your name, title, phone and fax numbers, as well as snail-mail address. If you have additional email addresses, you may want to include these, as well.

If you regularly correspond using email, make sure to clean out your email inbox at least once each day. Of course, the exception here may be on days you do not work, such as weekends and holidays.

Make sure you return emails in a timely manner. This is a simple act of courtesy and will also serve to encourage senders to return your emails in a timely manner.

Internal email should be treated as regular email, following the same rules as outlined above. However, internal email should be checked regularly throughout the working day and returned in a much quicker manner as much of these detail timely projects, immediate updates, meeting notes, etc. Nonetheless, internal emails, just like emails, should not be informal. Remember, these are written forms of communication that can be printed out and viewed by others than those originally intended for.

## Running Effective Meetings (9.5)

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**How to use tool:** While meetings are wonderful tools for generating ideas, expanding on thoughts and managing group activity, this face-to-face contact with team members and colleagues can easily fail without adequate preparation and leadership.

### **The Importance of Preparation**

To ensure everyone involved has the opportunity to provide their input, start your meeting off on the right foot by designating a meeting time that allows all participants the time needed to adequately prepare.

Once a meeting time and place has been designated, make yourself available for questions that may arise as participants prepare for the meeting. If you are the meeting leader, make a meeting agenda, complete with detailed notes. In these notes, outline the goal and proposed structure of the meeting, and share this with the participants. This will allow all involved to prepare and to come to the meeting ready to work together to meet the goal(s) at hand.

The success of the meeting is hinged on the skills displayed by the meeting leader. To ensure the meeting is successful, the leader should:

- Generate an agenda to all involved in the meeting
- Start the discussion and encourage active participation
- Work to keep the meeting at a comfortable pace – not moving too fast or too slow
- Summarize the discussion and the recommendations at the end of each logical section
- Circulate minutes to all participants

While these tips will help ensure your meeting is productive and well-received, there are other important areas that need to be touched on to make sure your meeting and negotiation skills are fine-tuned and ready to take to the boardroom.

### Managing a Meeting

Choosing the right participants is key to the success of any meeting. Make sure all participants can contribute and choose good decision-makers and problem-solvers. Try to keep the number of participants to a maximum of 12, preferably fewer. Make sure the people with the necessary information for the items listed in the meeting agenda are the ones that are invited.

If you are the leader, work diligently to ensure everyone's thoughts and ideas are heard by guiding the meeting so that there is a free flow of debate with no individual dominating and no extensive discussions between two people. As time dwindles for each item on the distributed agenda, you may find it useful to stop the discussion, then quickly summarize the debate on that agenda item and move on the next item on the agenda.

When an agenda item is resolved or action is agreed upon, make it clear who in the meeting will be responsible for this. In an effort to bypass confusion and misunderstandings, summarize the action to be taken and include this in the meeting's minutes.

### Issuing Minutes

Minutes record the decisions of the meeting and the actions agreed. They provide a record of the meeting and, importantly, they provide a review document for use at the next meeting so that progress can be measured - this makes them a useful disciplining technique as individuals' performance and non-performance of agreed actions is given high visibility.

The style of the minutes issued depends on the circumstances - in situations of critical importance and where the record is important, then you may need to take detailed minutes. Where this is not the case, then minutes can be simple lists of decisions made and of actions to be taken (with the responsible person identified). Generally, they should be as short as possible as long as all key information is shown - this makes them quick and easy to prepare and digest.

It is always impressive if the leader of a meeting issues minutes within 24 hours of the end of the meeting - it's even better if they are issued on the same day.

## Win-Win Negotiation (9.6)

Function: Finding a Fair Compromise

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How to use tool: Negotiation skills help you to resolve situations where what you want conflicts with what someone else wants. The aim of negotiation is to explore the situation to find a solution that is acceptable to both parties.

There are different styles of negotiation, depending on circumstances. Where you do not expect to deal with people ever again and you do not need their goodwill, then it may be appropriate to 'play hardball', seeking to win a negotiation while the other person loses

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out. Many people go through this when they buy or sell a house – this is why house-buying can be such a confrontational and difficult experience. Similarly, where there is a great deal at stake in a negotiation (for example, in large sales negotiations), then it may be appropriate to prepare in detail and use a certain amount of subtle gamesmanship to gain advantage.

Both of these approaches are usually wrong for resolving disputes with people you have an ongoing relationship with: if one person plays hardball, then this disadvantages the other person – this may, quite fairly, lead to reprisal later. Similarly, using tricks and manipulation during a negotiation can severely undermine trust and damage teamwork. While a manipulative person may not get caught out if negotiation is infrequent, this is not the case when people work together on a frequent basis. Honesty and openness are the best policies in this case.

### **Preparing for a successful negotiation...**

Depending on the scale of the disagreement, a level of preparation may be appropriate for conducting a successful negotiation.

For small disagreements, excessive preparation can be counter-productive because it takes time that is better used elsewhere. It can also be seen as manipulative because just as it strengthens your position, it can weaken the other person's.

If a major disagreement needs to be resolved, then it can be worth preparing thoroughly. Think through the following points before you start negotiating:

- **Goals:** what do you want to get out of the negotiation? What do you expect the other person to want?
- **Trades:** What do you and the other person have that you can trade? What do you each have that the other might want? What might you each be prepared to give away?
- **Alternatives:** if you don't reach agreement with the other person, what alternatives do you have? Are these good or bad? How much does it matter if you do not reach agreement? Does failure to reach an agreement cut you out of future opportunities? What alternatives might the other person have?
- **Relationships:** what is the history of the relationship? Could or should this history impact the negotiation? Will there be any hidden issues that may influence the negotiation? How will you handle these?
- **'Expected outcomes':** what outcome will people be expecting from this negotiation? What has the outcome been in the past, and what precedents have been set?
- **The consequences:** what are the consequences for you of winning or losing this negotiation? What are the consequences for the other person?
- **Power:** who has what power in the relationship? Who controls resources? Who stands to lose the most if agreement isn't reached? What power does the other person have to deliver what you hope for?
- **Possible solutions:** based on all of the considerations, what possible compromises might there be?

Style is critical...

For a negotiation to be 'win-win', both parties should feel positive about the situation when the negotiation is concluded. This helps to maintain a good working relationship afterwards. This governs the style of the negotiation – histrionics and displays of emotion are clearly inappropriate because they undermine the rational basis of the negotiation and because they bring a manipulative aspect to them.

Despite this, emotion can be an important subject of discussion because people's emotional needs must fairly be met. If emotion is not discussed where it needs to be, then the agreement reached can be unsatisfactory and temporary. Be as detached as possible when discussing your own emotions – perhaps discuss them as if they belong to someone else.

### **Negotiating successfully...**

The negotiation itself is a careful exploration of your position and the other person's position, with the goal of finding a mutually acceptable compromise that gives you both as much of what you want as possible. People's positions are rarely as fundamentally opposed as they may initially appear - the other person may quite often have very different goals from the ones you expect!

In an ideal situation, you will find that the other person wants what you are prepared to trade, and that you are prepared to give what the other person wants.

If this is not the case and one person must give way, then it is fair for this person to try to negotiate some form of compensation for doing so – the scale of this compensation will often depend on the many of the factors we discussed above. Ultimately, both sides should feel comfortable with the final solution if the agreement is to be considered win-win.

## Speaking to an Audience (9.7)

Function: Communicate Complex Ideas Successfully

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How to use tool: Speaking to an audience can be fun and exciting. However, lack of preparation or not clearly defining the presentation's goals and its audience can make even the best-intended presentation a complete disaster.

### Preparation - The Key to Successful Speaking...

To ensure your presentation is effective, first determine your objective. Ask yourself:

- Why am I giving the presentation?
- What do I want the audience to take away from the presentation?

Second, determine your audience. Their familiarity with the presentation topic will determine the level at which you present your speech.

### **How to Structure Your Presentation**

Once you have determined your presentation's objective and overall goal, as well as the audience, it's time to structure your presentation. You will need to start this process by determining the length of the presentation.

Take the allotted time and break it into smaller segments, with each segment tackling a specific task (all of which reflect the overall objective of the presentation). For example, the first segment should be the presentation introduction. In this segment, you should give an overview of your presentation, or a short summary of your speech, explaining the topic, why you are covering this topic, and what you hope to accomplish.

The next segment should tackle the first item on your agenda, with the following segment tackling the following item on your agenda, and so on.

Once you have developed the introduction and outlined the following segments, spend some time thinking about the conclusion of the presentation. The introduction of the presentation and the conclusion of the presentation are the most important parts and should have the strongest impact.

### **Achieving Clarity and Impact**

Keep your presentation short and simple. Your audience will not remember every point of your presentation, so highlight the most important parts. The longer the presentation, the higher the risk of boredom.

When in doubt, use the "tell 'em" structure:

- Tell them what you are going to tell them (For instance, "In this presentation I will show you...").
- Tell them the key points, expanding and illustrating each one, clearly and concisely.
- Tell them what you have told them (For instance, "In closing..." or "In summary...") and conclude.

### **Reinforce Your Message With Visual Aids**

Next, consider the use of visual aids. Slide projectors, data projectors, video machines and computers should be tested out beforehand to make sure they are operating correctly and that you know how to use them.

Make sure you do not cram too much information onto any single visual. A good rule of thumb to follow is to keep each visual to six lines or less. Also, make sure any type or graphics are large enough the audience can see it clearly (from all seats) and make sure the colors used are easy on the eyes, taking into account the lighting.

You should also be aware that much of your authority will be judged by the visual quality of your slides - you need to make sure that their design supports the style of your message, and that your slide design and presentation is up to the standards expected by your audience.

When using overheads, these should be clearly marked and arranged in order beforehand. Flip charts should be prepared in advance when possible. When used during the presentation to take notes, make print large enough for all participants to see.

When using these various visuals, do not turn your back to the audience. Position yourself so you can use the visuals while facing your audience.

### **Arranging the Room**

If possible, visit the room in which you will make the presentation well in advance. Determine seating (circle seating encourages interaction, rows of seats discourages interaction, etc.) and determine how the visual aids you choose will work. Consider lighting, space, even the temperature of the room. Consider placing notepads and pencils at each seat if participants need to take notes. Or, you may want to have glasses at each seat with a few pitchers of water if the presentation is going to last more than half of an hour. If you do this, make sure you allow time for bathroom breaks.

While you do not need to memorize your entire presentation, make yourself very, very familiar with it through several practice runs. Rehearse the presentation in its entirety as often as you can before delivering it to a live audience. The more you rehearse, the more confident you will be and the more fluent you will seem to your audience - if you know your subject matter and have adequately prepared, you will be able to deliver your message loud and clear.

When in doubt or nervous, stay focused on your purpose – helping your audience understand your message. Direct your thoughts to the subject at hand. The audience has come to hear your presentation and you will succeed!

### **Tips and Techniques**

Tips to help make your presentation a smashing success:

- Avoid too many statistics and confusing information in your presentation. Instead, put this information in a handout for participants to refer to at a later date.
- If you forget your words, pause for a moment and remember your objective. While the words may not come right back to you, this will help keep you on track and may even help you to think of additional thoughts and ideas your audience will benefit from hearing.
- Visualize yourself succeeding.
- Before the presentation, focus on the needs of the audience.
- If necessary, calm your nerves with an appropriate relaxation technique (for example, see 8.4 and 8.5).
- Take a public speaking course at a local college or university. These are oftentimes offered as night courses and are usually very inexpensive, while providing you with important skills that will enhance your confidence in this area.
- Videotape yourself going through the presentation. All you need to do this is a video camera and a tripod. Then, run through the video and make changes according to your thoughts on the taped presentation.

Many of these points are summarized in our next tool, the Presentation Planning Checklist.

## Presentation Planning Checklist (9.8)

Function: Making sure you have remembered all key points

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How to use tool: The following presentation checklist will help you deliver successful presentation. This is adapted in part from "Business Communications: A Cultural and Strategic Approach" by Michael J. Rouse and Sandra Rouse.

### **Presentation:**

- Does your introduction grab participant's attention and explain your objectives?
- Do you follow this by clearly defining the points of the presentation?
- Are these main points in logical sequence?
- Do these flow well?
- Do the main points need support from visual aids?
- Does your closing summarize the presentation clearly and concisely?
- Is the conclusion strong?
- Have you tied the conclusion to the introduction?

### **Delivery:**

- Are you knowledgeable about the topic covered in your presentation?
- Do you have your notes in order?
- Where and how will you present (indoors, outdoors, standing, sitting, etc.)?
- Have you visited the presentation site?
- Have you checked your visual aids to ensure they are working and you know how to use them?

### **Appearance:**

- Make sure you are dressed and groomed appropriately and in keeping with the audience's expectations.
- Practice your speech standing (or sitting, if applicable), paying close attention to your body language, even your posture, both of which will be assessed by the audience.

### **Visual Aids:**

- Are the visual aids attractive, easy to read and easy to understand?
- Are they tied into the points you are trying to communicate?
- Can they be easily seen from all areas of the room?

## Communicating Internationally (9.9)

Function: Cross-culture communication made easy

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How to use tool: With more and more companies globalizing, employees in various international locations now have day-to-day communications with each other. Given different cultural contexts, this brings new communication challenges to the workplace.

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Even when these employees speak the same language (for instance, correspondences between English-speakers in the U.S. and English-speakers in the UK), there are some cultural differences that should be considered in an effort to optimize communications between the two parties.

In such cases, effective communication strategy begins with the understanding that the sender of the message and the receiver of the message are from different cultures and backgrounds. Of course, this introduces a certain amount of uncertainty, making communications even more complex.

Without getting into cultures and sub-cultures, it is perhaps most important to realize that a basic understanding of cultural diversity is the key to effective cross-cultural communications. Without intently studying the individual cultures and languages, we must all learn how to better communicate with individuals and groups whose first language, or language of choice, does not match our own.

Learning the basics about culture and at least something about the language of communication in the host country are necessary. This is necessary even for the basic level of understanding required to engage in appropriate greetings and physical contact, which can be a tricky area inter-culturally. For instance, kissing a business associate is not considered an appropriate business practice in the U.S, but in Paris, one peck on each cheek is an acceptable greeting. And, the handshake that is widely accepted in the U.S. is not recognized in all other cultures.

While many companies now offer training in the different cultures where the company conducts business, it is important that employees being thrust into communicating across cultures practice patience and work on their own to increase their knowledge and understanding of the different culture. This requires the ability to see that a person's own behaviors and reactions are oftentimes culturally driven.

Perhaps simply showing a genuine interest, paired with patience and understanding, is the best answer here.

## Moving On...

We have put a great deal of effort into developing and testing this e-book to make it as useful as possible. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve it for the future, then please let us know at [editorial@mindtools.com](mailto:editorial@mindtools.com) or through the Mind Tools web site at [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com). Alternatively, if you have enjoyed this e-book and found it useful, please [let us know!](#)

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James Manktelow  
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