

Freshmen Seminar

Lesson Plan

Topic: Communication Skills

Length of Class: 55 minutes

Does this lesson require a “pre-class” activity? No

Objective:

1. To teach first year students about the importance and need for communication skills.
2. To explore different forms of communication and how to use them properly.
3. To discover way to improve their communication skills for the future.

Class outline:

I. Attendance & Announcements (10 minutes)

II. Activities (20 minutes)

III. Discussion on Communication & Reflection (25 minutes)

Activities:

- A. Birthday Line up & reflection
 - a. Without speaking or writing, have the students line themselves up by birthdates (including or not including year). This is used to illustrate ways of communicating in different ways/
- B. Activity Options (after each, have class reflect on communication skills used during the activity)
 - a. Cranium Activities- Use cards from the game Cranium to have students try out different methods of communicating. Use the Blue and Green cards. Blue require drawing on the board and Green are similar to charades.
 - b. Human Machines- Separate the class into groups of 5 and hand each group a slip of paper with their machine. Provide the groups 5-7 minutes to prepare and have the rest of the class guess the machine they are trying to imitate.
- C. Discussion on importance and forms of communication
 - a. See additional information below
- D. Ways to improve communication skills
 - a. Take a class that involves public speaking- presentations, theater, etc.
 - b. Volunteer to give a committee’s report to the larger group
 - c. Take on a leadership role in an organization
 - d. Try out for a part in a play or get involved with SAFE, Swallow This performances

Support Materials/Handouts: Cranium Game, Communication Skills Notes for Instructor, Human Machines Activity, 10 Tips for Effective Email Handout

Communication Skills Notes for Instructor

What is communicating? The art of being able to structure and transmit a message in a way that another can easily understand and/or accept.

Types of communication:

Verbal- oral, written, e-mail

Non-Verbal- expression, expressive behaviors, body language

Communication Distinctions

Formal/Informal- official/unofficial information exchange

Vertical/Horizontal- superior-subordinate/peers

Personal/Impersonal- Situation of mutual influence/exchange without mutual influence

Instrumental/Expressive- Necessary for job/non-job information transmission

Why Communications Skills Are So Important:

- The purpose of communication is to get your message across to others clearly and unambiguously. If there isn't effort, then there can be errors, misinterpretation, and confusion.
- Communication Skills have been cited as an important decisive factor in hiring for jobs, especially managers. These skills include written and oral presentations, as well as an ability to work with others. Although it's seen as important, people still have issues communicating 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.

To have effective communication you must pay attention to the following:

- Know your audience: Different audiences require delivering messages differently. Ask the class for examples?
- Message types: Written, oral and nonverbal communications are affected by the sender's tone, method of organization, validity of the argument, what is communicated and what is left out, as well as by the individual style of communicating.
- Channel: What are different channels? Verbal including face-to-face meetings, telephone and videoconferencing; and written including letters, emails, memos and reports. Different channels have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, it's not particularly effective to give a long list of directions verbally, while you'll quickly cause problems if you criticize someone strongly by email.
- Receiver: Your message is delivered to individual members of your audience. Remember that depending on your method of communication, individual receivers may process things differently based on their own experiences and feelings. This will influence their understanding of your message and their response.
- 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: Think about the situation and environment. You must also weigh-in the circumstances surrounding your communications, such as situational and cultural context.

What can affect communication in a negative way?

- Lengthy or disorganized message
- Poor verbal and body language
- Too much information too fast
- Ask class for any other examples?

Active Listening

- People speak at 100 to 175 words per minute (WPM), but they can listen intelligently at 600 to 800 words per minute. Since only a part of our mind is paying attention, it is easy to go into mind drift - thinking about other things while listening to someone.
- To combat this, you must use active listening skills, which involves listening with a purpose. It may be to gain information, obtain directions, understand others, solve problems, share interest, see how another person feels, show support, etc.
- If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating their words mentally as they say it - this will reinforce their message and help you control mind drift.

Non-Verbal Communication:

- Use nonverbal behaviors to raise the channel of interpersonal communication.
- Nonverbal communication is facial expressions like smiles, gestures, eye contact, and even your posture. This shows the person you are communicating with that you are indeed listening actively and will prompt further communications while keeping costly, time-consuming misunderstandings at a minimum.
- How Can Individuals Improve the Nonverbal Components of Their Communications?
 - Whether you're communicating with one person or a group, nonverbal messages play an important role. Kristen Amundson (1993) notes that one study found 93 percent of a message is sent non-verbally, and only 7 percent through what is said. Doreen S. Geddes (1995) offers the following pointers:
 - *Body orientation.* To indicate you like and respect people, face them when interacting.
 - *Posture.* Good posture is associated with confidence and enthusiasm. It indicates our degree of tenseness or relaxation. Observing the posture of others provides clues to their feelings.
 - *Facial expression.* Notice facial expressions. Some people mask emotions by not using facial expression; others exaggerate facial expression to belie their real feelings. If you sense contradictions in verbal and nonverbal messages, gently probe deeper.
 - *Eye contact.* Frequent eye contact communicates interest and confidence. Avoidance communicates the opposite.
 - *Use of space.* The less distance, the more intimate and informal the relationship. Staying behind your desk when someone comes to visit gives the impression that you are unapproachable.
 - *Personal appearance.* People tend to show more respect and respond more positively to individuals who are well-dressed, but not overdressed.

Give Feedback:

- What someone says and what we hear can be amazingly different! Why is this?
- Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear.
- Feedback is a verbal communications means used to clearly demonstrate you are actively listening and to confirm the communications between you and others. Obviously, this serves to further ensure the communications are understood and is a great tool to use to verify everything you heard while actively listening.
- Paraphrasing- The real purpose of paraphrasing is not to clarify what the other person actually meant, but to show what it meant to you. This may mean restating the original statement in more specific terms, using an example, or restating it in more general terms.
- Repeat back or summarize to ensure that you understand. Restate what you think you heard and ask, "Have I understood you correctly?" If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not understand you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"

Positive Confrontation and Requesting Behavior Change:

- "I"-messages reflect one's own views and rely on description rather than criticism, blame, or prescription. The message is less likely to prompt defensive reactions and more likely to be heard by the recipient. One form of "I"-message includes three elements: (1) the problem or situation, (2) your feelings about the issue, and (3) the reason for the concern. For example, "When you miss staff meetings, I get concerned that we're making plans without your input."
- A simpler form is referring directly to feelings ("I'm angry"), use similes, ("I feel like a fish out of water"), or describe what you'd like to do ("I'd like to leave the room now").

Human Machines

Group 1 task: Create a machine out of humans by imitating the appearance and action of the machine.

Your machine: Blender

Group 2 task: Create a machine out of humans by imitating the appearance and action of the machine.

Your machine: Toaster

Group 3 task: Create a machine out of humans by imitating the appearance and action of the machine.

Your machine: Lawn Mower

Group 4 task: Create a machine out of humans by imitating the appearance and action of the machine.

Your machine: Washing Machine

Group 5 task: Create a machine out of humans by imitating the appearance and action of the machine.

Your machine: Copy Machine

10 Tips for Effective E-mail

by Ellen Dowling, PhD

1. Think before you write. Just because you can send information faster than ever before, it doesn't mean that you should send it. Analyze your readers to make certain that you are sending a message that will be both clear and useful.
2. Remember that you can always deny that you said it. But if you write it, you may be held accountable for many moons. You may be surprised to find where your message may end up.
3. Keep your message concise. Remember that the view screen in most e-mail programs shows only approximately one half of a hard-copy page. Save longer messages and formal reports for attachments. On the other hand, do not keep your message so short that the reader has no idea what you're talking about. Include at least a summary (action or information) in the first paragraph of your message.
4. Remember that e-mail is not necessarily confidential. Some companies will retain the right to monitor employees' messages. (Refer to #1 and #2, above.) Don't send anything you wouldn't be comfortable seeing published in your company's newsletter (or your community's newspaper).
5. Don't attempt to "discipline" your readers. It's unprofessional to lose control in person—to do so in writing usually just makes the situation worse.
6. Don't "spam" your readers. Don't send them unnecessary or frivolous messages. Soon, they'll quit opening any message from you.
7. DON'T TYPE IN ALL CAPS! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE YELLING AT THE READERS! Remember, if you emphasize everything, you will have emphasized nothing.
8. don't type in all lower case. (unless you're e.e. cummings.) if you violate the rules of English grammar and usage, you make it difficult for the reader to read.
9. Use the "Subject" line to get the readers' attention. Replace vague lines ("Information on XYZ Project," or "Status Report Q1") with better "hooks": "Need your input on Tralfamadore Project," or "Analysis of recent problems with the new Veeblefretzer."
10. Take the time to proofread your document before you sent it. Rub the document thru the spell checker and/or the grammar checker. Even simple typos will make you look sloppy and damage your professional credibility.