



COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS

The Basics of Interpersonal Communication

Introduction

Studies have shown that as much as 85 percent of a person's success in life is determined by his ability to effectively communication with people.

That's quite a bit of your personal success!

How are your communication skills? Do you understand everything said to you perfectly? Do other people completely understand what you say? Can you totally comprehend a newspaper article without re-reading it several times? Do your letters get the result you want every time?

If not, read on to learn about The Listening Component, The Speaking Component, and The Written Component.

The Listening Component

Did you say what I heard?

Listening is perhaps the most overlooked of all the communication skills yet very few people ever bother to improve their listening ability. Take a look at the following example:

A Colonel issued the following directive to his Executive Officer:

“Tomorrow evening at approximately 1900 hours, Haley’s Comet will be visible in this area, an event which occurs only once every 75 years. Have the men fall in in the battalion area in fatigues, and I will explain this rare phenomenon to them. In case of rain, we will not be able to see anything, so assemble the men in the theatre and I will show them films of it.”

Executive Officer to Company Commander:

“By order of the Colonel, tomorrow at 1900 hours, Haley’s Comet will appear above the battalion area. If it rains, fall the men in in fatigues. The march to the theatre where the rare phenomenon will take place, something which occurs only once every 75 years.”

Company Commander to Lieutenant:

“By order of the Colonel in fatigues at 1900 hours tomorrow evening the phenomenal Haley’s Comet will appear in the theatre. In case of rain in the battalion area, the Colonel will give another order, something which occurs once every 75 years.”

Lieutenant to Sergeant:

“Tomorrow at 1900 hours, the Colonel will appear in the theater, with Haley’s Comet, something which happens every 75 years. If it rains, the Colonel will order the comet into the battalion area.”

Sergeant to Squad:

“When it rains tomorrow at 1900 hours, the phenomenal 75-year-old General Haley, accompanied by the Colonel, will drive his comet through the battalion area theater in fatigues.”

Our messages can get pretty mixed up if they are forced to pass through many channels. It seems that each person does a personal rewrite of the message, and, by the time it reaches its final destination, it really bears no resemblance to the original message.

Of course, all our messages would be received more clearly if people would learn how to listen. You’ve met them—the bad listeners—the people who are so wrapped up in what they are saying that they never hear you say you’re not interested—the people always waiting their “turn” to talk.

It's easy to understand how some people get this way. We are not trained to listen so it's no wonder many of us don't understand the basic rules of listening.

Developing listening skills may be more important than we realize. Many studies have been made to determine how much of a person's time is actually spent in listening. The findings are quite interesting. For instance: One study concluded that the average businessperson spends 40 percent of his or her working time listening. The figure for executives is closer to 80 percent.

Think about it. Many of the world's most important affairs are settled around conference tables. In these conferences, when one man talks, it is extremely important that all others listen. A decision based on a misunderstood statement could affect millions of lives.

It is equally important that you learn to become an effective listener. Your decisions may not affect a million people, but they certainly affect the person you are with the most—you!

Listening is a Learned Skill

A common mistake is to assume that listening ability is based on overall intelligence. Not so. Listening is a skill that is developed, never instinctive. Listening can be learned, and it takes no high IQ to do it either. This has been proven in the few schools and companies where effective listening is taught. The percentage of the messages that were retained by listeners after training was sometimes as much as three times higher than before training.

Another misconception is that any person who listens a lot will be a good listener. Again not necessarily true. Practice makes permanent, not perfect. If a person has developed poor listening habits, repeated practice of them will only make them harder to change.

Good Listeners are Masters of Conversation

What is a "good conversationalist" or an "interesting person to talk to?" What qualities does he or she possess that aren't developed in most of us? These people make you feel as if you are the only person in the world as far as they are concerned. They give each person they talk to their full attention. They listen with their whole body. They don't fidget with things on their desk or answer the phone. They don't glance out the window or clean their nails. They listen!

Try this technique the next time you talk to someone. Stop everything you are doing and give him or her your undivided attention. Don't nod or wave at others as they pass by, just listen. It's not as easy as it sounds, but it becomes easier after just a few hours of practice.

So, to become a good conversationalist, don't concentrate on becoming a good talker. Instead, concentrate on becoming one who is good to "talk to." Become a good listener. Watch people at the next meeting you attend. Pick out the liveliest conversations and see who speaks and who listens. Watch the listener especially closely and see what listening skills he or she uses.

Pay Attention

You'll find that all good listeners start by paying attention to their speaker. It's unlikely that anyone will ever pick up a clear message if they aren't paying attention to it.

Here's an example: Three ladies were overheard while sitting on the porch one day. The conversation went like this:

Emma: It sure is windy today!

Susan: Wednesday? I thought it was Thursday.

Kay: Thirsty? Me too, let's have some tea.

The ladies in this example either had a hearing problem or just weren't giving each other their full attention.

However, attention without interest will do no good. So look for ways to become interested in what your speaker is saying. Ask yourself these questions:

As people talk to you, do you find it hard to keep your mind on what they are saying?

When someone is talking to you, do you sometimes try to make him or her think you are paying attention when you are not?

Do outside sounds, people nearby, or other things distract you while listening?

Some people think they can determine, before someone else speaks, whether he or she has anything worthwhile to say or not. They assume from previous experience or from the person's appearance that they know what he or she has to say. People who hold this attitude are not good listeners and often miss hearing valuable information because they "already knew what he was going to say."

The key to interest is need. If you need to be entertained, you will listen to an entertaining speaker. If you need information on building codes, you will listen as a city employee delivers a technical talk. If you need to know more about a person in order to effectively communicate with him, you will listen as he speaks to you.

A technique used by some people is to assume that every person has something worthwhile to say. When you take this approach to conversation, it becomes important that you hear the entire message in order to pick out the "worthwhile" part. Develop in yourself a desire, a need to become a better listener, and your interest in other people will increase. To do this, review the first part of this chapter and remind yourself of the importance of being an effective listener.

Seek the Message

A good listener is a hunter. He doesn't just sit back and wait for the message to "happen" to him; he seeks it out. As a listener, you are not entirely at the mercy of the speaker in receiving the message. You may actually seek out a message and clarify it through the application of proper listening skills.

What are listening skills? Once you have paid attention and have become interested in a message, what more can you do?

There are many things you can do. Put yourself in the place of your speaker. When you talk to another person, how do you feel if he just sits and stares at you? Most people would feel very uncomfortable and would become more concerned about their listener's inactivity than about delivering their message. The way you listen affects the way he or she speaks.

There are five basic listening skills:

1. Listen with your whole body.

An actor was once asked to describe the technique that made him effective. He said, "If I am playing the part of an old man, I don't just dress like an old man, I act like an old man with my whole body."

Use your facial expressions and body movements to tell your speaker how well you understand his message. Sit forward in your chair and remove distractions between you and the speaker. Nod when you agree; raise your eyebrows when you are confused; smile when you are pleased; show your concern and interest with all your motions. When you do this, you will help him become a better speaker.

2. Give your speaker verbal signs.

Just as a driver looks for speed limit signs, detour signs, and danger signals on the road so he or she will take the best route, the speaker looks and listens for signs from you to help him communicate. Signs you might use are "Uh huh;" "I see;" "Yes, I know;" "Huh?" and similar statements. Use these to show your speaker when to slow down, speed up, stop, or take a new direction. Ask questions about the things he or she doesn't mention to clarify the message.

3. Replay the message for clarity.

Network TV stations use the instant replay to make sure their audience sees what happened more clearly. We can employ this same technique to improve our communications.

When you are not sure you heard the message the way he meant it, stop the speaker and say, "This is how I heard what you said—am I correct?" Or say, "In other words..." and restate the message the way you heard it.

4. Listen to the message, not just the words.

If your child says, "Will you hold my hand while we go into the school?" what is his message? Is he telling you that he likes to hold your hand while in school? Or is he really saying, "I'm scared. Will you hold my hand so I won't be scared?" There are lots of clues to tell us when words aren't carrying the full message.

Facial expressions, gestures, voice tone, eye contact, and touch each help transmit information. However, if you are not conscious of this communication, you can miss the unstated messages which many times contradict the stated ones.

When you have difficulty hearing a speaker, you can pick up a lot of the message through actions. Watch for gestures, facial expressions, and body movements.

If you are listening for the message and not just to the words, you can develop the skill of active listening and help your speaker overcome communication barriers such as emotions. An active listener responds to feelings not just statements.

5. Summarize as you listen.

Normal speaking rate is about 125 words per minute. Our minds think many times faster than that. Take advantage of the edge this gives you by summarizing as you listen.

Summarize just as you would in taking notes on a lecture. Use key words to remind you of main points. Don't try to remember whole sentences. Recent studies have shown that students who took the fewest notes retained the most of what they heard. The more extensive your notes become, the less you are able to listen. Draw brief mental outlines and review them later when there is time to expand your notes on each point.

Don't get caught up in little "side trips" taken by the speaker. Many people tend to go around the world to get across the street. If you listen without summarizing, you can easily become confused by supplementary messages.

The Speaking Component

The young man drove up the dirt driveway past the “mule for sale” sign and the old man met him in the yard. Together they walked to the corral where the mule was kept. It looked like a healthy animal, but could it pull a plow and take orders? They agreed to a tryout prior to payment. So the young man hitched up the mule to the plow, slapped his back with the reins, and yelled “Git up!” The mule didn’t respond. Again he yelled, “Move, mule, pull the plow!” He still merely stood there. After four more tries to get the animal started the young man gave up. He laid down the reins and called the old man. When the old fellow arrived he told him of his predicament and said, “I guess I just can’t use this mule; he’s deaf.”

The old man said, “Wait a minute, let me see if he will work for me. I’ve never had this trouble before.” He then picked up a two-by-four and hit the mule with it, right between the eyes. Then he said, “Pull the plow, mule!” and the mule started pulling.

The young man was alarmed by this cruel action and said, “Hold on, old man! Why did you hit the mule like that?” The old man replied, “Young fellow, if you want an animal to do something, you have to get his attention first.”

Most people know that in order to effectively communicate with a person, we must first get their attention. But just getting their attention is not enough. To be an effective communicator we must receive favorable attention. In other words, we establish a favorable relationship with our listener.

All communication is built on this relationship. The relationship is established the moment we have each other’s attention, but it must be maintained if our communication is to be accurate throughout the message.

For instance: Let’s say you are a member of a civic club attending a meeting to hear a guest speaker. The speaker is introduced as President of XYZ Corporation, one of the largest in the state, and his credentials really impress you. The moment he begins to speak, your relationship is a good one. However, three minutes into his talk he says, “All civic clubs should be abolished. I don’t know why anyone would be dumb enough to join one.” At that point, your relationship changes. Now, instead of wanting to applaud him, you may want to walk out on him. He has indirectly called you “dumb” and has criticized an organization you care about.

From this moment on, anything he says will be heard differently than before his statement about civic clubs. When we like someone we assume his or her intentions are good if faced with a choice between a “good” meaning or “bad” meaning. When we dislike a person we take the opposite assumption.

For instance, “I’ve heard some interesting things about you lately.” If you hear that from a friend, how do you interpret it? If it’s from someone you don’t have a good relationship with, how do you interpret it then?

The point to all of this is to give you some tools to become a more effective communicator. Here are eleven skills you can use.

Skill One: Names

The first step in being an effective communicator is to call people by name. However, if you get the name wrong, the entire relationship starts off on a bad note. A person’s name, to him or her, is one of the sweetest sounds on earth. One almost always listens when he hears his name being used. So the better we are at remembering names, the better we will be at dealing with people. Here are some ways to help with name memory.

Get a Clear Image

If you’re introduced to someone whose name you don’t quite catch, there’s no way you can remember it later. Most people are embarrassed to ask for the name again, but thinking it through, the person will think far more of us if we ask him or her to repeat the name once or twice than if we forget it later.

If, after having him or her repeat it, you are still not sure of it, ask how it is spelled. Don’t just say “Spell it,” say “That’s interesting; how do you spell it?” The person will be glad to tell you. To reinforce it and get a “clear image,” write it down as soon as you get the chance, then look at it and put it away. Don’t rely on the note for the name, however, work on memorizing it.

Repetition

Once you have heard the name, you must somehow reinforce it so you will remember it later. The key to this is repetition. This isn’t repeating it over and over to yourself, it is using it. For example:

“Hi, I’m John Jones.”
“John Jones?”
“Yes.”
“I’m glad to meet you, John. My name is...”

In this example you heard the name once and repeated it twice. The more often you use the name, the more comfortable it will become.

Association

It’s nice to remember a list of names, but without faces to put the names on, we can’t do very much in the way of effective communication. That’s when association can help.

Associate the name to the face. When you shake hands, look squarely into the person’s eyes and repeat the name. Then look for some distinguishing feature to help you remember the face with the name like large ears, a mole, freckles, etc. Associate the

thought of the name with that feature, then the next time you see him or her, the feature will help remind you of the name.

If the name/face association is difficult for you, you might want to associate the person to someone you already know who has the same name. If the person's name is Sarah, find some similarity between him and a Sarah you already know. Then, whenever you look at this person, you will think of the other one with the same name. This won't be as easy if you are trying to remember the full name, but it helps with first names.

These name memory techniques help establish a good relationship between the speaker and the listener.

Skill Two: Smile

Try it the next time you see someone. Give your biggest, most sincere smile and see how that person responds. You've heard the saying, "If you see someone without a smile, give him one of yours." Corny as it sounds, this can be one of the most effective tools in being a successful communicator and it's also quite easy.

Skill Three: Be Modest

The temptation to toot your own horn is quite strong, but it can be quite a turn off for whoever is listening to you. Think about how you feel when you have to listen to someone else tell you what a great job they do! You can resist that temptation, however. Some find it humbling to study the lives of great men whenever they are tempted to be a little too proud of themselves. Take Andrew Carnegie, for instance. Here is a man who was so wealthy and famous that he could afford to pay one of his employees a salary of one million dollars a year. Yet, he asked that the epitaph on his gravestone read "Here lies one who knew how to get around him men who were cleverer than himself."

Another way to retain your modesty is to wait until the next time someone asks you about your successes and gives you a good opportunity to boast. When asked, instead of giving your full exciting autobiography, just give a one-sentence answer and then ask a question about the other person. People are much more interested in talking about themselves than in listening to other people, so use this as your trump card. Giving someone else the opportunity to talk about himself or herself even one time means that they leave the experience with an extremely favorable impression of you. That means you can accomplish quite a lot in the next conversation.

Skill Four: Take an Interest in Others

Skill One described how the Image, Repetition, Association formula works so successfully. The main reason it does so is because it forces you to take an interest in the other person. Interest is flattering. Imagine introducing yourself to someone and having him reply, "Are you THE (your name)? I've wanted to meet you. Please tell me about your experience with..."

If that person were sincere in the interest, you couldn't help but be flattered.

It's the same when you use the trick. Remember someone's birthday or anniversary. Remember the ages of children. Remember personal things about them and then drop a card in the mail or call on important days.

The "little" things you remember will determine how you are remembered. Get into the habit of noticing other people.

Skill Five: Avoid Arguments

It has been said that nobody wins an argument. Even if you think you end up on the winning side, the person who "lost" is not going to be happy about it. Nothing can be accomplished through arguing. Arguments drop conversation from the logical level to the emotional level and little is accomplished there.

To handle conflict without getting into an argument, start off on the right foot. Just as first impressions are important, so are opening statements.

Skill Six: Begin on a Positive Note

When a conflict is obvious, start your remarks by pointing out the things on which you agree. Never tell someone he or she is wrong, because the moment you do, he or she is forced into defense in order to save face. Don't drive someone into a corner by making value judgments or putting yourself above them.

Begin with praise and honest appreciation and don't forget the "magic words" of please and thank you.

Skill Seven: Ask Questions Only When You Want the Answer

Lawyers are skilled at asking questions in a way that will produce the answers they need. They can use questions to bring out details, to help make a person aware of his own mistakes, and to clarify a point. You don't need to go to law school to learn how to do this. Reread Skill Six. How many times have you said something like, "Are you still going to do that even you know it will spoil my day?" Questions like this leave very few answers available. The person either has to say yes or no to it, and neither answer is satisfactory for both of you.

Instead, whenever you ask a question, make sure it will produce the type of answer you want. When your daughter wants to be dropped off at the mall don't ask her, "You're not going to spend all of your allowance on new shoes, are you?" Instead ask something like, "How's the saving program for your new computer going?" She then has to answer back with more than a yes-no and you have effectively made your point without attacking her judgment.

An alternate method of questioning has become quite popular due to its effectiveness. In this technique, you merely offer a choice between acceptable answers. For instance, if you want to go out to eat, ask your spouse, "Would you like to eat at a Mexican or an Italian restaurant tonight?" Even if the spouse says McDonald's, you're still eating out.

Don't ask your three-year-old if he is ready to go to bed. Instead say, "Do you want Mommy to tuck you in, or would you rather have Daddy do it?" Salesmen are especially good at this. They don't ask if you want the car, they ask if you would rather have the car in blue or red.

Use questions instead of direct orders. Instead of saying, "Type this up right away," say, "Can you type this up for me before break time, please?" Ask questions designed to produce the answers you want.

Skill Eight: Know What You Want to Say

It sounds ridiculously simple, but it is important. Too many people jump into a conversation or stand up to speak without first deciding what they want to say. At a recent city board meeting, the board was considering a zoning change near a residential area. A young attorney, who was known for opposing almost any issue that most people supported, asked for the floor. When the chairman recognized him, he said, "I don't know if I'm for or against this proposal but I wanted to be heard." Then for 45 minutes he spoke on unrelated subjects and finally decided he was opposed to the issue. Forty-five minutes of taxpayer's time wasted while he decided what he wanted to say! What a waste!

Knowing what you will say can even save you time on the telephone. The next time you make a phone call, write a brief outline of what you want to say and follow it. You'll find that your phone conversations are half as long without losing any effectiveness. You also won't forget important things you wanted to say. This is especially important on long distance calls.

Public speakers, whether giving a brief report or a keynote address, organize their thoughts into brief outlines to assure they cover all points and don't get off on an unrelated subject.

We could all stand to follow their example. Before you speak, ask yourself, "What am I going to say? Why am I going to say it? Will it make any difference if I don't say it?"

Another benefit of organizing your thoughts is that there are fewer hard feelings due to impulsive statements.

In a fight, a difference between a professional boxer and an angry man is that the angry man charges in swinging wildly, trying to land a blow. The professional, on the other hand, watches and waits, looks for the right opportunity and then strikes. He thinks before he acts, and because of it, suffers much less abuse than someone who doesn't think first.

You'll find this true in any field. The man who thinks before he acts, who has conditioned his responses through the exercise of judgment, will be successful more often than others. In interpersonal communication one can employ the same formula for success—think before you speak.

Words, once uttered, cannot be recalled, and they will stay in the mind of the listener indefinitely.

Skill Nine: Speak in Terms They Understand

A guest at a house, Jean, asked if the housekeeper would be working for the family on Wednesday night. She was told no and so Jean asked the housekeeper, “Do you have a uniform and can you work for me on Wednesday?” The housekeeper said, “Yes I do and I’ll be glad to work on Wednesday.”

The evening was a big event for Jean because her husband was entertaining his boss in hopes of receiving a promotion. At the appointed time, Jean answered a knock at the door and there stood the housekeeper in her uniform: a man’s army coat and overseas cap, brass buttons and all. Her idea of “uniform” was not what Jean assumed it would be. It is important to make sure you are speaking the same language when dealing with others.

Because our backgrounds differ so greatly, we come to attach different meanings to words. A “joint” to a doctor is where two bones meet. To a cop, it is something quite different. For this reason, we should be specific in all our communication. People have a tendency to imply meanings many times instead of stating known facts.

The more specific your statement is, the less room is left for confusion. A good formula to follow in all communication is the K.I.S.S. formula. It stands for Keep It Simple, Stupid. Make your message easy to understand and don’t use slang or technical jargon to “flower it up” and you will sound smarter.

Skill Ten: Be Aware

An effective communicator is one who is alert and aware of many things. Aware can be an acronym to use in remembering how to communicate well.

A—assemble your message. In your mind outline in order the things you want to say.

W—watch your listener to see if you are getting through and to recognize distractions.

A—adapt your delivery to the situation. Deliver it in the way it will be received best.

R—relate your message in the order you assembled it. Relate it to the needs and interests of your listeners.

E—evaluate how well you’ve communicated by asking questions.

Be aware of the needs of your listener. It’s hard to convince your son to brush his teeth while the ice cream man is driving by. If his needs at the moment are not met by your message, wait until later or adjust your message to the circumstances.

Be aware of feedback from your listener indicating whether you are getting through or not. Watch your listener to see if he is looking at you or something else. If there are distracting noises present, don’t ignore them; your listener won’t. When you are sensitive to your listener’s responses, you can adjust your delivery if you realize you aren’t communicating accurately.

Skill Eleven: Be Yourself

This doesn't mean that you don't aspire to be all you are capable of being. You should do that. But don't try to impress others into believing you are smarter or more sophisticated than you are. If you do, you'll only end up looking foolish.

Be human. When you are wrong or when you make a mistake, admit it. Then go on to correct the situation. If you are too little to admit your mistakes, you may be overlooked the next time opportunity comes around. Be big enough to admit your mistakes.

Above all else, in dealing with people, be sincere. All these communication skills are useless if you don't back them up with sincerity.

The Written Component

The pen is mightier than the sword if you know how to use it.

Throughout history man's efforts to communicate have taken many forms. In prehistoric times he used gestures, sounds, and drawings to convey his thoughts. As language developed he was able to communicate even more. He developed symbols to represent the language, and written communication became possible.

In communicating through written symbols, however, two things limit the ability to convey the thought: 1) The author's knowledge of the language and symbols and 2) The reader's understanding of the language and symbols as used by the author. The sentence you are reading now would be totally meaningless to you if you were not familiar with the words used. Unless the writer and the reader attach the same meaning to the symbols, communication will be ineffective.

Consider the word "run," for example:

Did you ever **run** out of money?

Who will **run** for President?

Is that the mail for the New York to Miami **run**?

People who can't read will **run** into some problems

Can you **run** this machine?

This example could be continued, but we might **run** out of space.

In order to understand words as used by others it is very important to be aware of all the different meanings they can have. So, basic to any improvement in ability to communicate is the study of language.

Vocabulary

A person's position in life is almost always in direct proportion to his or her knowledge. Knowledge, on the other hand, is almost always in direct relation to a person's understanding of language, in other words, his or her vocabulary. It is rare indeed to find a very successful person with a poor vocabulary.

If you feel there is room for improvement in your knowledge of language, try the following: First, determine how much time and effort you are willing to devote to this study; then begin to study the English language by reading a book on how to increase your vocabulary, or enroll in a night class or home-study course. Use crossword puzzles and similar exercises to learn new words.

Studies have shown that people with a good understanding of language earn better grades in school, higher incomes, more responsibility, more respect from other people, and in general are easier to get to know than those with lesser vocabularies.

Reading

In our early schooling we learn to read, and from then on, we read to learn. It is extremely rare to see an effective reading class offered in a public school, and sometimes even in private schools. Because of this, many of us have developed bad reading habits.

Some people in business have as much as one million words of reading material facing them each week. Much of this material is unimportant, while other material is very important. However, most of us read all material the same way—one word at a time. That might seem ridiculous to say, but, if you have studied effective reading, you know there is another way.

The average person reads between 200 and 300 words per minute and comprehends between 70 and 90 percent of what he or she reads. Here are some ways to increase your reading speed without decreasing your comprehension.

Single Word Fixation—Practice reading a paragraph while seeing two words with each glance instead of one. If that is comfortable for you then try seeing three words, or try to see half a sentence at each glance. If you can move from seeing one word per glance to seeing two, you have doubled your reading speed. Try this technique on a whole page of material then go back over it to see how much you comprehended.

Subvocalization—This means mentally saying each word as you read, which slows your reading speed down to the speed at which you talk. Our minds are capable of comprehending information many times faster than the speed of conversation. This has been proved through the use of a technique once used in some moving pictures called subliminal cuts. One or two frames were spliced into the movie that showed the picture of a soft drink or some popcorn. When the movie was projected at normal speed, these frames were never noticed because they were on the screen for only a fraction of a second, but soon people found themselves thinking about a visit to the concession stand. Your mind is much faster than you give it credit for being. Push yourself to read faster than you talk.

Regression—Regression is the unconscious tendency to go back over material we just read and it can really slow us down. To overcome this, push yourself to read faster than usual. Many people use a pen or pencil to pace them and try to synchronize their eyes with the speed of movement of their pen.

Concentration—Inability to concentrate can only be overcome through practice. Each day, as you read, try to see only the material you are reading. Practice “not hearing” the sounds around you. It won’t be easy, but with practice you’ll improve.

Reading Styles—Since reading material comes in so many different forms, doesn’t it seem logical that we should develop several reading styles to suit the material? Some reading styles you might find useful are:

Previewing—As we read, many times we are distracted by the illustrations or confused by the way the material is arranged. This can be avoided by Previewing. Previewing is just what it seems—looking over the material before you read it. In previewing, you should look at all the charts and illustrations, read major headings, look at footnotes and highlighted material, and examine the general layout of the material. Reading goes more smoothly when distractions are removed and the reader is familiar with the material.

Scanning—Many times, material that is irrelevant to our work is brought to our attention. It can be very frustrating to read through an entire article and learn there was no reason to read it. By developing the ability to scan, you can reduce such instances to a minimum. To scan effectively, look over the material from start to finish, read the first and last sentences in major paragraphs, look at headings and italicized words. Use these as keys to tell you, in general, what the article is about and how the author develops his points. After you scan the material you can decide whether to read it word for word or not.

Skim—Skimming reading material is just touching the surface at a few places and skipping the areas in between. For instance, you should skim material like a dictionary when looking up a word. Let your eyes drift over the material, but only key in on certain specific words. You'd also skim a magazine for information on certain subjects, names, or dates.

Linear Reading—This is the type of reading we are used to; reading one line at a time. Just because you read one line at a time doesn't mean you have to read one word at a time. Read for speed but don't worry all the time about complete comprehension. For example, in reading a newspaper, you can grasp 60 to 70 percent of the content by just reading the headlines and the first two paragraphs of each article.

The point to remember is to read actively not passively. Don't wait for the material to tell you what you want to know, go after it, using several reading styles, and seek out the things you want to know.

Writing

We've learned to pick up the written word, now let's learn to put it down. Many people who are brilliant conversationalists have a very difficult time with written communication. They get hung up trying to make sure all their grammar and punctuation is proper and end up with some very dull letters. Grammar is important, but be yourself when you write. People will recognize you more quickly and understand you more clearly.

Written communications is often regarded as a chore, mostly because we think faster than we can write. Writing can be enjoyable if approached in the right way. People tend to avoid doing things that are not comfortable to them and seek out things that come easy.

This section contains some hints for the most likely types of writing you might have to do.

Letters—As a person gains increased responsibilities, the need for effective letter writing increases. There is more mail to answer, more people to contact out of town and more information to distribute. All the more reason for each letter to be an effective one.

Some things to watch in letter writing are: 1) Be concise, don't take lots of extra words to emphasize your point; 2) Be clear, say it in as few words as possible, but be careful not to make it so concise that it comes across like a military report; 3) Write with your reader in mind. Don't use words he may not be familiar with; 4) reread your letters to see if they can be easily understood. It doesn't take long to rewrite a letter. The extra effort can be worth the problems you avoid by eliminating poor communication; and 5) Use the proper salutation.

<u>Avoid</u>	<u>Instead Use</u>
In the manner of...	As, Like
Due, in large measure, to...	Due to
On the occasion of...	When
In view of the fact that...	Since
In the amount of...	Of, For
With reference to...	About, Concerning
On the part of...	For, Among

Sometimes failure to reread a letter can lead to great confusion. Check out the examples below, which were received by a welfare department in application for support:

I am writing the Welfare Department to say that my baby was born two years old. When do I get the money?

Mrs. Jones has not had any clothes for a year and has been visited regularly by the clergy.

I cannot get sick pay. I have six children. Can you tell me why?

In answer to your letter, I have given birth to a boy weighing ten pounds. I hope this is satisfactory.

As you can see, rereading AND rewriting can be well worth the effort!

A letter should start with a statement that will gain the interest of the reader. To communicate, we must gain attention first. One of the best ways to obtain attention and interest is to talk in terms of what the other person wants.

A thank-you note to a friend can be very effective with a simple "Dear John: at the top, but other correspondence requires a more formal salutation.

In writing to elected officials a good item to remember is, regardless of whether the person is President of the United States or your local mayor, address the person as “The Honorable” and then follow with the person’s name. When you begin the letter it is generally acceptable to use the following:

Sir:
Dear Sir:
Dear Senator Johnson:
Dear Mr. Smith:
Dear Congressman Jones:

If your letter is to a company president your address should state his name as, “Mr. John Doe” then his title on the next line. The salutation could be:

Sir: or
Dear Sir: or
Dear Mr. Doe:

A letter to a company when you don’t know the name of an individual in the firm should be begun with:

Gentlemen: or
Dear Sirs: or
Dear Sir and Madam:

E-Mails—While e-mails are an easy and fast way to communicate, many people don’t quite get the fact that they are still a type of written communication. They don’t spend the time and effort to make sure they have everything correct before hitting the “send” button.

With e-mails, the important thing to remember is that it is simply an electronic, and instant, version of a letter. All of the things you would do in a formal letter should be done for e-mails. This is an important fact that many people ignore.

If you’re simply e-mailing to your best pal when you want to start the weekend barbeque, you can afford to be chatty or brief. The problem is that many people treat every e-mail they send as if it’s going to a friend instead of being a form of written communication.

Do the same things with an e-mail that you do a letter. Reread, and if necessary rewrite, it **BEFORE** you hit the send key. Make sure your words are spelled correctly and that you’ve not made any of the phrasing mistakes in the examples used in the Letters section of this manual.

Take your time with these. If you’re sending business e-mails, they are just as important as a letter printed on the company letterhead and need to look just as professional. Use proper salutations and close with your name, title, and the name of the company as the form of an electronic signature.

News Articles—It’s entirely possible that you could end up in a situation where you need to prepare a news article or announcement for the local newspaper. In these days of economic challenges, there are a lot of businesses that want the public to know about the good things they are doing in the community and who take the time to send press releases to newspapers and radio and TV stations. In writing these, a special style must be used. News articles are written in what is known as the “inverted pyramid.” In other words, the most important information is always first with supporting details last. The first paragraph should always answer Who? What? Where? When? and How?

News articles are very rarely long, so write concisely. Take the time to make sure you’re not wasting any space with words that are unnecessary or else the editor of the paper will cut your article to fit the space and may end up cutting things that are important to you.

Write using words that the average 12-year-old would use. The general population, on average, reads on a 7th or 8th grade reading level; so don’t be tempted to use flowery or technical language.

Reports—In writing reports, the same questions that need to be answered for news articles should be answered here. In fact, the same basic format applies. The only difference is that you will go into far more detail with a report than with a news article and the words you choose will be directed at the people who will be reading your report. In other words, if you’re writing a report to be read by scientists, use the terminologies and specialized language they work in every day.

Write your report with the important information coming first, like a general synopsis, at the front of the report. This gives your reader an easy way to understand exactly what you will be conveying in your report.

Once the synopsis is done, move on to the respective parts of the report, fleshing everything out with details. Give the reader the main point or conclusion of each section in the first paragraph of that section and then support your point with details, facts, and figures.

Always give ALL of the pertinent information in a report. Answer the Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? questions with all of your points.

Make sure your format is easy to follow. In other words, make it easy for the reader to find the beginning of each section and the main point of that section. Use numbering keys, bolding, underlining, and paragraph spacing to make sure what’s really important is easily located and understood.

The End

The people were all gathered beneath the platform where he stood. There were thousands of them, standing, watching, and waiting for the big moment. As he raised his hand for silence he could see all their horses and wagons in the distance, a reminder that they had traveled hundreds of miles to witness this event. Then he spoke, and his voice carried clearly through the mist from the falls.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I am about to risk my life for your entertainment (a hush fell over the crowd). As you can see, this cable is stretched from the United States side to the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. In a moment I will pick up the balance bar and walk the cable to the other side, a feat never before accomplished by any man. Do you believe I can do it?”

“Yes,” the crowd cries. “You are the world’s greatest dare devil, Valdini! You can if you say you can!”

With that, he picked up the bar and, placing one foot before the other, step by step he disappeared into the mist from the falls.

“He’s dead!” someone cried. “He’s fallen into the water!” An uneasy feeling rushed through the crowd until all at once they saw what they had hoped, but never expected to see. Valdini emerged from the mist on the Canadian side. He made it! Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

But what was this? Valdini was on the cable again! He was walking back across the falls to the U.S. side. Once more he disappeared into the mist and again emerged victorious on the opposite side. The crowd greeted him with cheers. Never had anyone displayed such courage and ability.

The Great Valdini turned to the crowd and bowed from the waist. Then he gestured for silence. “You people have inspired me,” he said. “Your faith in me has made me decide to try something new. I’m going to push a wheelbarrow across the falls. Do you believe I can do it?”

“You can if you say you can,” they replied.

“Do you believe I can push it across with a man in it?” he asked.

“You’re the best. You can if you say you can,” came the response.

“Then who will get into the wheelbarrow?” Valdini asked. No one responded. When the silence became too unbearable, he asked again, “Which of you will ride in the wheelbarrow as I push it across?” Still no response.

“I’m confused, ladies and gentlemen,” he said. “You said I can if I say I can. You said I am the greatest. If that is true, then why won’t any of you get in the wheelbarrow?” Valdini received no answer.

Would you have climbed into the wheelbarrow? Only you can answer that question.

The moral to this little story is that unless you take action on what you’ve read and learned in this manual, you’ll never accomplish improvement in your communication skills. Don’t do like the crowd in this story and agree something can be accomplished without then working to accomplish it.

The skills and techniques mentioned in this manual are essential to effective communication. For maximum benefit they must be used often enough to become habitual. Therefore, use them in your daily routine if you wish to truly learn them!