

# How Good Are Your Communication Skills?

## Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Reading Effectively

Communication is one of the most important skills that you need to succeed in the workplace.

If you want to be an expert communicator, you need to be effective at all points in the communication process – from "sender" through to "receiver" – and you must be comfortable with the different channels of communication – face to face, online, written, and so on. This is because poor communicators often struggle to develop their careers beyond a certain point.

So, how can you find out how good your communication skills really are? Take this short quiz to find out.

## The Communication Quiz

### Instructions

For each statement, click the button in the column that best describes you. Please answer questions as you actually are (rather than how you think you should be), and don't worry if some questions seem to score in the "wrong direction."

*See next page for quiz.*

**15 Statements to Answer****Not  
at All****Rarely****Sometimes****Often****Very  
Often**

**1** I try to anticipate and predict possible causes of confusion, and I deal with them up front.

**2** When I write a memo, email, or other document, I give all of the background information and detail I can to make sure that my message is understood.

**3** If I don't understand something, I tend to keep this to myself and figure it out later.

**4** I'm surprised to find that people haven't understood what I've said.

**5** I can tend to say what I think, without worrying about how the other person perceives it. I assume that we'll be able to work it out later.

**6** When people talk to me, I try to see their perspectives.

**7** I use email to communicate complex issues with people. It's quick and efficient.

**8** When I finish writing a report, memo, or email, I scan it quickly for typos and so forth, and then send it off right away.

**9** When talking to people, I pay attention to their body language.

**10** I use diagrams and charts to help express my ideas.

**11** Before I communicate, I think about what the person needs to know, and how best to convey it.

15 Statements to Answer	Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
<b>12</b> When someone's talking to me, I think about what I'm going to say next to make sure I get my point across correctly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>13</b> Before I send a message, I think about the best way to communicate it (in person, over the phone, in a newsletter, via memo, and so on).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>14</b> I try to help people understand the underlying concepts behind the point I am discussing. This reduces misconceptions and increases understanding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>15</b> I consider cultural barriers when planning my communications.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
15-35	You need to keep working on your communication skills. You are not expressing yourself clearly and you may not be receiving messages correctly, either. The good news is that, by paying close attention to the way in which you communicate, you can improve your effectiveness at work and enjoy better working relationships with your colleagues! The rest of this article will direct you to some great tools for improving your communication skills. (Read below to start.)

36-55 You're a capable communicator, but you sometimes experience communication problems. Take the time to think about your approach to communication, and focus on receiving messages effectively,

Score	Comment
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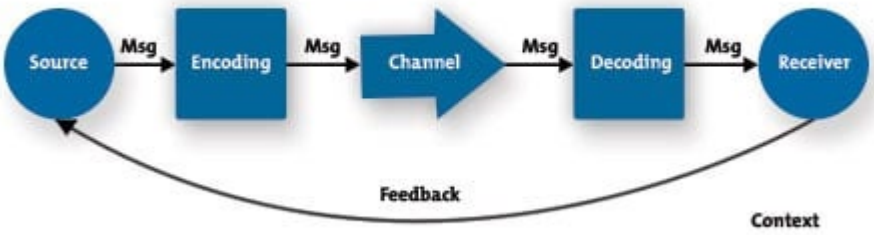
as much as sending them. This will help to improve your ability to communicate. (Read below to start.)

56-75	Excellent! You understand your role as a communicator, both when you send messages and when you receive them. You anticipate problems, and you choose the right channel to communicate. People respect you for your ability to communicate clearly and they appreciate your listening skills. (Read below for more.)
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## Detailed Interpretation

Whenever you communicate with someone else, you each follow the steps of the Communication Process (see figure 1, below).

Figure 1. The Communication Process



During this process, the person who is the source of the communication encodes it into a message, and transmits it through a channel. The receiver decodes the message, and, in one way or another, feeds back his or her understanding or a lack of understanding to the source.

By understanding the steps in the process, you can become more aware of your role in it, recognize what you need to do to communicate effectively, anticipate problems before they happen, and improve your overall ability to communicate effectively.

The sections below help you do this, and improve the way that you communicate at each stage of the process.

# The Source – Planning Your Message

*(Questions 2, 11)*

Before you start communicating, take a moment to figure out what you want to say, and why. Don't waste time conveying information that isn't necessary – and don't waste the listener or reader's time either. Too often, people just keep talking or writing because they think that by saying more they'll surely cover all the points. Often, however, all they do is confuse the people that they're talking to.

To **plan your communication** :

- Understand your objective. Why are you communicating?
- Understand your audience. With whom are you communicating? What do they need to know?
- Plan what you want to say, and how you'll send the message.
- Seek feedback on how well your message was received.

When you do this, you'll be able to craft a message that will be received positively by your audience.

Good communicators use the **KISS** ("Keep It Simple and Straightforward") principle. They know that less is often more, and that good communication should be efficient as well as effective.

# Encoding – Creating a Clear, Well-Crafted Message

*(Questions 1, 5, 8, 10, 15)*

When you know what you want to say, decide exactly **how** you'll say it. You're responsible for sending a message that's clear and concise. To achieve this, you need to consider not only what you'll say, but also how you think the recipient will perceive it.

We often focus on the message that we want to send, and the way in which we'll send it. But if our message is delivered without considering the recipient's perspective, it's likely that part of that message will be lost. To communicate more effectively:

- Understand what you truly need and want to say.
- Anticipate the other person's reaction to your message.
- Choose words and body language that allow the other person to really hear what you're saying.

With **written communication** , make sure that what you write will be perceived the way you intend. Words on a page generally have no emotion – they don't "smile" or "frown" at you while you're reading them (unless you're a very talented writer, of course!)

When writing, take time to do the following:

- Review your style.

- Avoid [jargon](#) or slang.
- Check your grammar and punctuation.
- Check also for tone, attitude, nuance, and other subtleties. If you think the message may be misunderstood, it probably will. Take the time to clarify it!
- Familiarize yourself with your company's writing policies or style guides.

Another important consideration is to use pictures, charts, and diagrams wherever possible. As the saying goes, "a picture speaks a thousand words." Our article on [charts and graphs](#) has some great tips that help you to use these to communicate clearly.

Also, whether you speak or write your message, consider the [cultural context](#). If there's potential for miscommunication or misunderstanding due to cultural or language barriers, address these issues in advance. Consult with people who are familiar with these types of barriers and do your research, so that you're aware of problems you may face. See our article on [Effective Cross-Culture Communication](#) for more help.

## Choosing the Right Channel

*(Questions 7, 11, 13)*

Along with encoding your message, you need to choose the best communication channel to use to send it. You want to be efficient, while also making the most of your communication opportunity. Using email to send simple directions is practical. However, if you want to delegate a complex task, an email will probably just lead to more questions, so it may be best to arrange a time to speak in person. And if your communication has any negative emotional content, stay well away from email! Make sure that you communicate face to face or by phone, so that you can judge the impact of your words and adjust your message appropriately.

When choosing the right channel for your message, consider the following:

- The sensitivity and emotional content of the subject.
- How easy it is to communicate detail.
- The receiver's preferences.
- Time constraints.
- The need to ask and answer questions.

## Decoding – Receiving and Interpreting a Message

*(Questions 3, 6, 12, 14)*

It can be easy to focus on speaking: we want to get our points out there, because we usually have lots to say. However, to be a great communicator, you also need to step back, let the other person talk, and **listen**.

This doesn't mean that you should be passive. Listening is hard work, which is why effective listening is called **active listening**. To listen actively, give your undivided attention to the speaker:

- Look at the person.
- Pay attention to his or her body language.
- Avoid distractions.
- Nod and smile to acknowledge points.
- Occasionally think back about what the person has said.
- Allow the person to speak, without thinking about what you'll say next.
- Don't interrupt.

**Empathic listening** also helps you decode messages accurately. To understand a message fully, you have to understand the emotions and underlying feelings that the speaker is expressing. This is where an understanding of **body language** can be useful.

## Feedback

*(Questions 4, 9)*

You need feedback, because without it, you can't be sure that people have understood your message. Sometimes feedback is verbal, and sometimes it's not. We've looked at the importance of asking questions and listening carefully. However, feedback through **body language** can also help you to assess the impact of your message. By watching the facial expressions, gestures, and posture of the person you're communicating with, you can spot:

- Confidence levels.
- Defensiveness.
- Agreement.
- Comprehension (or lack of understanding).
- Level of interest.
- Level of engagement with the message.
- Truthfulness (or lying/dishonesty).

As a speaker, understanding your listener's body language can give you an opportunity to adjust your message and make it more understandable, appealing, or interesting. As a listener, body language can show you more about what the other person is saying. You can then ask questions to ensure that you have, indeed, understood each other. In both situations, you can better avoid miscommunication if it happens.

Feedback can also be formal. If you're communicating something really important, it can often be worth asking questions of the person you're talking to make sure that they've understood fully. And if you're receiving this sort of communication, repeat it in your own words to check your understanding.

### *Key Points*

It can take a lot of effort to communicate effectively. However, you need to be able to communicate well if you're going to make the most of the opportunities that life has to offer.

By learning the skills you need to communicate effectively, you can learn how to get your ideas across clearly and effectively, and understand much more of the information that's conveyed to you.

Whether you're a speaker, a listener, a writer, or a reader, you are responsible for making sure that messages are communicated accurately. Pay attention to words and actions, ask questions, and watch body language. These will all help to ensure that you say what you mean, and hear what is intended.

### *Note:*

This assessment has not been validated and is intended for illustrative purposes only. It is just one of many that help you evaluate your abilities in a wide range of important career skills. [Click here](#) for other self-tests.

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