

Lesson – Effective Communication Skills



Lesson Overview

In this lesson, participants will learn about various types of communication and how important effective communication is in the workplace.

Lesson Objectives

After completing this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Understand the definition of communication
- Identify different types of communication
- Successfully practice written, verbal and non-verbal communication skills

Lesson at a Glance

Activity	Materials	Preparation	Approximate class time
FOCUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whiteboard and markers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. None 	15 – 20 minutes
LEARN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Using Clear Verbal Communication</i> handout • <i>Images for Directors</i> handout • <i>Drawing Space for Creators</i> handout • <i>Business Letter Block Format</i> handout • <i>Effective Written Communication on the Job - Business Letter Scenarios</i> handout • <i>Business Letter Assessment Rubric</i> • <i>Non-verbal Communication Brainstorming Activity</i> handout 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Print/photocopy the <i>Using Clear Verbal Communication</i> – one per student 2. Print/photocopy the <i>Images for Directors</i> handout – one copy with images cut apart 3. Print/photocopy the <i>Drawing Space for Creators</i> – one per group 4. Print/photocopy the <i>Business Letter Block Format</i> handout – one per student 5. Print/photocopy the <i>Effective Written Communication on the Job – Business Letter Scenarios</i> – one per student 	Part 1 – 30 minutes Part 2 – 60 minutes Part 3 – 30 minutes

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Print/Photocopy the <i>Business Letter Assessment Rubric</i> – one per student for the instructor assessment 7. Print/photocopy the <i>Non-verbal Communication Brainstorming Activity</i> handout – one per group 	
REVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>None</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>None</i> 	10 minutes



Lesson – Effective Communication Skills

FOCUS: Class Discussion

15 - 20 minutes

Purpose:

Good communication skills, both verbal and written, are important to have on the job. This lesson will give students a chance evaluate effective communication and how they can improve their own communication skills.

Materials:

- White board and marker

Facilitation Steps:

1. Begin by introducing the definition of communication to the class. Communication is the exchange of information between a sender and a receiver. Communication involves speaking, listening, reading and writing. To be an effective communicator you need to be clear and direct. Ask students what types of communication occur. Some answers might be written, verbal or nonverbal.

2. Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Assign a recorder to write down the group answers to the following question:

How do you use communication skills at school?

Give groups 5 minutes to brainstorm.

3. Call the class back together and have each recorder share their groups answers. Are there some that were on everyone's list?

Some responses might be:

- Talking in class
- Writing a report
- Making a class presentation

- Answering a question

4. Tell students that good communication is a key skill that employers need in the workplace. Now that they have identified a few ways they are using and developing their communication skills in school, discuss ways they may use communication skills in the workplace.

5. Have each student choose one occupation (it can be anything) and give one example of how communication is used in that position. (See below for examples)

Doctor – verbal communication explaining treatment to a patient

Journalist – writing an news article for a magazine or newspaper

Wait staff or server at a restaurant – verbal communication explaining daily specials to a customer

Marketing associate – writing a blog about a new product

6. Now that students have an understanding of what communication is and how it is used on the job, ask each student to answer the following question: Why are good communication skills important in the workplace? (Hint: Think about what can happen when communication is poor.)
7. Ask each student to share their answer to the question. Answers could include – so that tasks are carried out accurately, so customers get the information they need, to get things done in an efficient manner.



Lesson – Effective Communication Skills

LEARN: Active Practice

120 minutes

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to have participants actively practice effective communication in a series of different activities. To develop effective communication skills, students need practice just like any other skill.

Materials:

- *Images for Directors* handout
- *Drawing Space for Creators* handout
- *Using Clear Verbal Communication* handout - one for each group

Facilitation Steps:

Activity 1 – Using Clear Verbal Communication (30 minutes)

1. Divide the class into groups of four. If you do not have an even number of students, add one extra to various groups, making no group more than five.
2. Assign each person in the group one of the following roles:
 - Director
 - Manager
 - Creator
 - Observer(s)
3. Hand out the *Using Clear Verbal Communication* handout to each group. Review

the job of each of the roles in the group. Make sure students understand what they are to do in this exercise.

4. Give each Director the picture of their object. Ensure no other team members can see it. Give each Creator a blank sheet of paper and make sure they have a pencil and/or eraser. Observers should have paper for note taking. The Creators are to sit in the opposite corner of the classroom away from the Directors. They should not be able to hear the conversation between the Director and the Manager. Observers should be free to move where they need to in order to watch each step of the activity.
5. Have each group follow the written instructions on the handout.
6. Give each group five to ten minutes to complete the activity. When the time is up, call the class back together. Have each group share the original picture of the Director's object and the final product of the Creator. While comparing the before and after results, have the Observers share what worked, what didn't and how everyone reacted under pressure. Have them share anything they believe could have done differently and perhaps in a clearer way. This will provide a way for each group to reflect on how successful their communication was as a group.

Using Clear Verbal Communication Activity

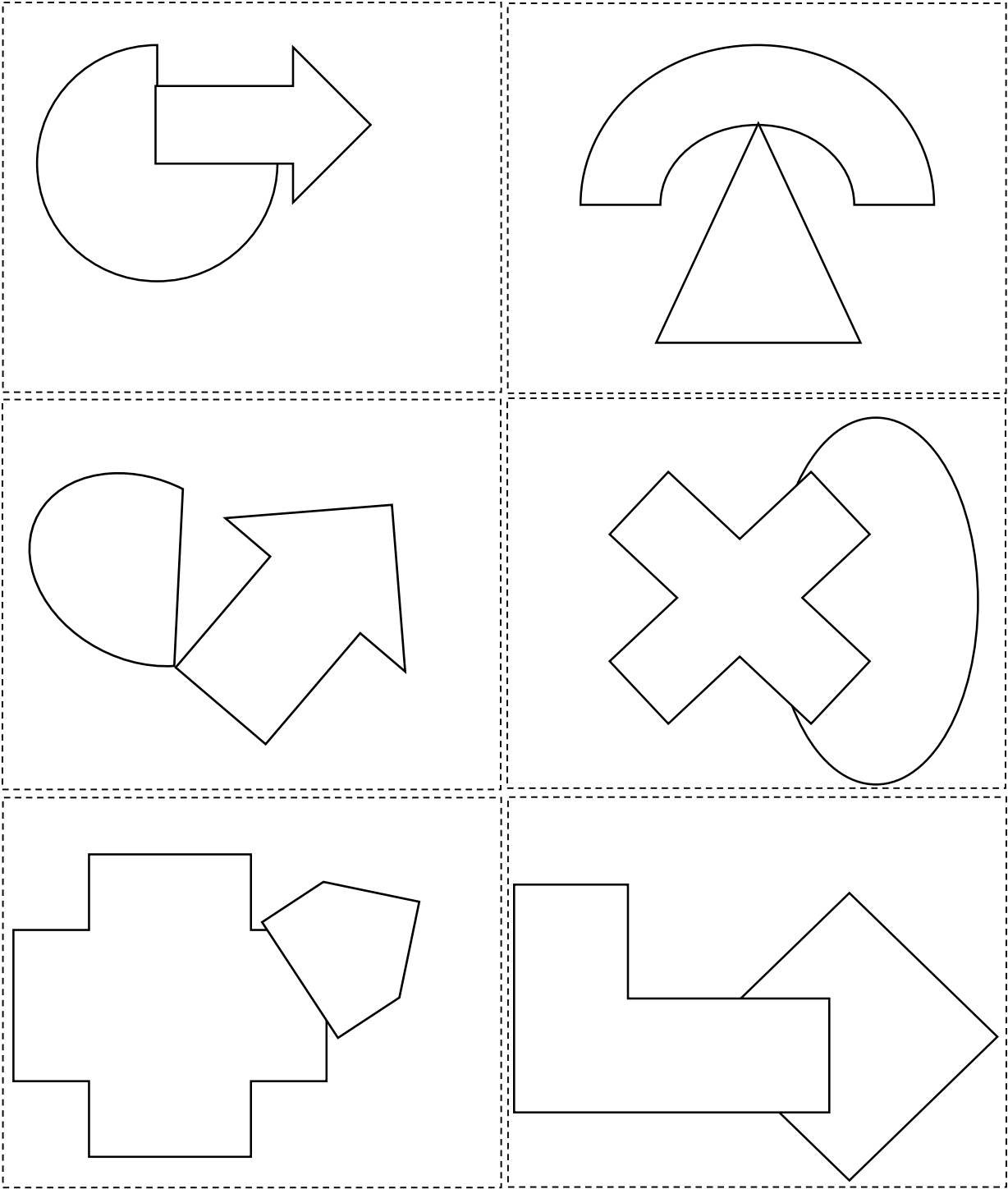
1. Assign one person to perform each of the following roles in this activity. If you have more than four people, have two people act as observers.
 - Director – Give clear verbal instructions to the Manager so that the Creator can make an exact copy of the original.
 - Manager – Listen to the Director’s instructions and then go to the other part of the room to where Creator is and pass on the instructions.
 - Creator – Recreate the image from the verbal instructions given by the Manager.
 - Observer(s) – Watch and make detailed notes about what worked, what didn’t and how each person reacted under pressure.

2. Instructions for activity:
 - a. The Director is given a picture of an image and this person is the only one allowed to see the picture.
 - b. The Director gives instructions to the Manager, explaining what the image looks like so that the Manager can give good instructions to the Creator. During this part of the activity, the Creator is located across the room so that they cannot see or hear the instructions as the Director gives them to the Manager.
 - c. The Manager then goes over to the Creator and verbally passes on the instructions from the Director as clearly as possible.
 - d. The Creator is given the Drawing Space for Creators handout and attempts to draw the image as instructed by the Manager.
 - e. The Observer(s) silently watch the entire activity and make notes about what has worked well, what has not worked well and how each person has performed under pressure. Write down suggestions for a different way to communicate the instructions if you believe there is a better way than observed.

3. Compare the Director’s picture of the image with the end result.

Images for Directors

Cut each of the following images apart and give one to each Director. Make sure that the Director is the only one to see the image in the group.



Drawing Space for Creators

Draw your image in the box provided below. Follow the instructions from the Manager as closely as possible. Good luck!



Activity 2 – Writing a Business Letter (60 minutes)

1. Introduce business letters. Tell students that an important skill in many job settings is to know how to write a proper business letter. One of the easiest and most widely used business letter formats is called the Block Format.
2. Give each student the *Business Letter Block Format* handout. Review the standard parts of a business letter with students:
 - Heading
 - Date
 - Inside Address
 - Subject
 - Salutation
 - Body Paragraphs
 - Closing and Signature
 - Enclosure
3. Give each student the *Effective Written Communication on the Job – Business Letter Scenarios*. Students should choose one of the scenarios on the handout and write a business letter to address the situation. They should follow the block style format.
4. After each student has completed an initial draft, each student should have another peer edit their initial business letter draft. Peer editors should follow the template and make sure that each part is included in the draft, along with spelling and grammar checks.
5. Have students prepare the final business letter and turn it in as part of their grade for this lesson. Use the attached *Business Letter Assessment Rubric* for your convenience.

Effective Written Communication on the Job – Business Letter Scenarios

Choose one of the following scenarios and write an appropriate and professional business letter. You can invent the name of the person you are writing to, and the address and/or business name if needed.

Scenario A: You work in the customer service department for Walmart. You receive a complaint regarding a customer’s experience in the electronics department of a local store. The customer was felt that they were disrespected.

Scenario B: You work in a sporting goods store. A customer has written to you asking if you have a product in your store called the Fitbit. Your store does carry it along with other competitive products.

Scenario C: You work in the marketing department for a cell phone company. You were recently approached in a phone call from an advertising firm asking if you would like to purchase pens with your company’s logo on it from them.

Scenario D: You are the Human Resources director at a large law firm. You need to send a letter to a candidate who interviewed but did not get the job.

Scenario E: You are a fifth grade teacher at Heritage Elementary School. You need to write a letter to your district superintendent informing her about an upcoming fundraiser you are doing to raise money for a field trip to Washington, D.C.

Scenario F: You are a manager at a local fast food restaurant. A customer recently contacted you via email to tell you that they found a piece of plastic in a hamburger. They are not happy about it and are threatening to sue.



Business Letter Block Format

When writing a business letter, follow the format below.

Heading – Your Address Name Street Address City, State, ZIP	Skip 1 line
Date	Skip 2 lines
Inside Address Mr./Mrs./Ms./Dr. Full name of Recipient Job Title of Recipient (if applicable) Name of the Company/Organization (if applicable) Street Address City, State, ZIP	Skip 1 line
Subject:	Skip 1 line
Salutation (Dear Ms./Mrs./Mr. and Last Name and a colon at the end)	Skip 1 line
Body Paragraphs This is the content of the letter. The paragraphs should be single spaced with one line skipped between each paragraph. Body Paragraph 1 Body Paragraph 2 Body Paragraph 3	Skip 1 line
Closing (Sincerely,) Your Typed Name (Handwritten Signature Above) Your Typed Title	Skip 3 lines
Enclosure Use this if your letter includes another document other than the letter itself. If it is more than one, you would type "Enclosures."	Skip 1 line



Business Letter Assessment Rubric

Name: _____

Topic (Weight)	1	2	3	4
Return Address & Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Return address or letterhead is missing. <input type="checkbox"/> Date is missing. <input type="checkbox"/> 4 or more spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Return address or letterhead is missing some information. <input type="checkbox"/> Date is there but format is incorrect. <input type="checkbox"/> 3 spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Return address or letterhead is complete & accurate. <input type="checkbox"/> Date is complete & positioned correctly. <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Return address or letterhead is complete & accurate. <input type="checkbox"/> Date is complete & positioned correctly. <input type="checkbox"/> No spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors.
Inside Address & Salutation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Inside address is missing. <input type="checkbox"/> Salutation is missing. <input type="checkbox"/> Subject line is missing. <input type="checkbox"/> More than 3 spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Inside address is missing information. <input type="checkbox"/> Salutation is inappropriate. <input type="checkbox"/> Subject line information is misleading. <input type="checkbox"/> 3 spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Inside address is complete & accurate. <input type="checkbox"/> Salutation is appropriate but incomplete. <input type="checkbox"/> A subject line needed or added correctly. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 - 2 spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Inside address is complete & accurate. <input type="checkbox"/> Salutation is appropriate & complete. <input type="checkbox"/> A subject line needed or added correctly. <input type="checkbox"/> No spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors.
Content Organization & Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No organization pattern is apparent. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph order does not follow suggested format. <input type="checkbox"/> Message has enough missing or incorrect information to be ineffective in meeting the writer's goal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization is not appropriate to the writer's purpose. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph order is close to the suggested model. <input type="checkbox"/> Two pieces of information are missing or incorrect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization is appropriate to the writer's purpose. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph order is close to the suggested model. <input type="checkbox"/> One piece of information is missing or incorrect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization is appropriate to the writer's purpose. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph order follows the suggested model. <input type="checkbox"/> Message is complete and correct.
Closing, Signature, & other End Matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> More than two pieces are missing or inaccurate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Two pieces are missing or inaccurate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> One piece is missing or inaccurate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Closing is appropriate. <input type="checkbox"/> Written & typed signatures are present. <input type="checkbox"/> Reference initials & enclosure reminder are included if needed.
Word Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is unprofessional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is inappropriate for audience. <input type="checkbox"/> Writer sometimes uses action verbs. <input type="checkbox"/> Too much use of passive voice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is mostly appropriate for audience. <input type="checkbox"/> Writer uses action verbs. <input type="checkbox"/> Use of passive voice ONLY as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is appropriate for audience. <input type="checkbox"/> Writer uses action verbs. <input type="checkbox"/> Use of passive voice ONLY as needed.
Sentences Fluency, Paragraphs, & Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> More than 2 sentence fragments. <input type="checkbox"/> Message is lost in poor construction. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraphs do not follow suggested format. <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors make message unclear. <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar & usage errors makes message unclear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Two sentence fragments. <input type="checkbox"/> Message is there, but underdeveloped. <input type="checkbox"/> Awkward paragraph construction clouds the message. <input type="checkbox"/> 3-4 spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. <input type="checkbox"/> 3 - 4 grammar & usage errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Some variation in sentence length. One fragment. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph divisions are somewhat effective. <input type="checkbox"/> Main purpose of the message is clear. <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 grammar & usage errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complete sentences of varying length. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph divisions are effective. <input type="checkbox"/> Number of paragraphs fits suggested format. <input type="checkbox"/> Main purpose of the message is clear. <input type="checkbox"/> No spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar & usage are correct.]

Source: <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/176703>



Activity 3 – Using Nonverbal Communication (30 minutes)

1. Introduce nonverbal communication
Play an abbreviated version of charades. Pick three students and stand them at the front of the room. Tell them to pretend that they are all about to interview for a very important job and are waiting in a conference room for the interviewer. Have the rest of the class comment on what the students' postures convey to them. Change the scenarios and choose three new students for each of the following or come up with some of your own. Tell them they are just hanging out at home playing video games with a group of friends, or about to give a presentation to a group of 5000 conference attendees, or meeting their girlfriend or boyfriend's parents for the first time. Once you have gone through various scenarios, have everyone share their opinions on how body language affects the way others see you.
2. Form small groups of three to four students. Give them the *Non-Verbal Communication Brainstorming Activity* handout. Have small groups complete the handout brainstorming all of the non-verbal ways in which people communicate. Have students complete the rest of the handout giving them about 10 minutes to complete the activity.
3. Gather the class back together and have each group share some of items they brainstormed for non-verbal communication. Next have each group share one example for each category of how non-verbal communication may be perceived in the workplace.
4. Here are three tips for improving your non-verbal communication skills:
 - Body movements include using gestures to illustrate the message you are trying to convey verbally. Use good eye contact and appropriate gestures. Have good posture and do not send mixed messages.
 - Voice quality also is important. It's not always what we say, but how we say it. Be careful of your tone when you speak. It has the power to take a simple sentence meant with no ill intent and turn it into a chaotic mess. We also want to consider the volume at which we speak.
 - Space and personal boundaries are especially important in nonverbal communication. In order to communicate effectively, we have to be aware of our space as well as the space of others.

Non-verbal Communication Brainstorming Activity

Consider the many non-verbal ways in which people communicate. As a group, brainstorm and list all of the different non-verbal ways you communicate thoughts and feelings. (Example: crossed arms)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

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15.

16.

17.

18.

19.

20.



Consider how your non-verbal communication may be perceived in a workplace setting. What messages could you be sending to coworkers with your body language? Write a brief statement of how each of the following could be perceived by a coworker. (Example: Slouched posture may show you are not interested. Or minimal eye contact may signal lack of confidence)

Eye contact:

Facial expression:

Posture:

Handshake:

Personal space:

Vocal tone:



Lesson – Effective Communication Skills

Review: The Importance of Clear Communication on the Job

10 minutes

Purpose:

The purpose of this discussion is to have participants examine how they communicate differently when the setting or group of people change. Everyone needs to learn to adjust their communication appropriately.

Materials:

- *None*

Facilitation Steps:

1. Ask participants to consider how they communicate with their friends. Then ask how they communicate with family members. Finally, ask how they are likely to communicate with an employer at a job interview. Ask for volunteers to describe each way of communicating and interacting.
2. Discuss the differences and similarities in the students' responses. Ask:
 - Why is each situation different?
 - What are the expectations of each person?
 - What would happen if you greeted your friends in the way you greeted an interviewer?
 - What would happen if you greeted an interviewer the same way you greet your friends?
3. Knowing how to communicate with people in the right context for a given situation is an important skill, as there are often unspoken rules and standards that are just expected.

