

Top tips for improving your non-verbal communication skills

Non-verbal communication is believed to account for anything between 50 – 70% of communication. It can be tricky to improve your non-verbal communication skills as this type of communication is almost completely unconscious and a part of your ‘personality’. In addition, different cultures and social groups have different norms around non-verbal communication.

The first step to improving non-verbal communication is to become aware of it. The next step is to try to alter any habits that may be off-putting – this can take a lot of effort and may feel quite unnatural at first. One useful tip is to ‘fake it until you make it’ – that is, act as though the following non-verbal communication skills come naturally to you, in the hope that, eventually, they will become natural:

Body language: Your posture matters. If you cross your legs and/or arms when talking to others, turn away from them, stand still in a very rigid manner, slouch, or fidget, it can be off-putting for those you are communicating with. Your body language implies that you are uncomfortable and defensive.

Be careful about standing or sitting too close to others, or touching others, when communicating with them. Respect people’s personal space. Remember that different cultures, and different individuals, can have different norms and preferences about proximity and touch.

Work on coming across as relaxed when interacting with others or delivering a presentation. Stand or sit up straight and face your audience openly. If appropriate, move around a bit and use hand gestures to emphasise your points. Try filming yourself delivering a talk to see how your body language comes across. Better still, do this with a classmate and analyse each other’s body language.

Facial expression and eye contact: Facial expressions convey a lot about how a person really feels. If you frown, look terrified, or appear miserable, your audience will feel uncomfortable and may focus, not on what you are saying, but how you look while saying it. Practice relaxing your facial muscles, conveying an open facial expression, and even smiling a bit if you can.

In western cultures, it is generally considered important to make eye contact with others when you speak to them. Doing so conveys honesty and respect. If you are speaking to a group, try to make brief eye contact with everyone in the room. Your gaze should roam around the room and include those at the back. Do not prolong eye contact with anyone, as this can make people uncomfortable.

Tone, pitch, and speed of voice: If you speak in a very monotonous tone of voice, it can be quite dull for your audience, so try to work on coming across as lively and interested in what you are saying. Sometimes when people are nervous their voices become softer, higher, or they can become breathless. You may need to practice projecting your voice. Breathing exercises can help. Nerves can also cause you to speak too fast, which can make it difficult

for your audience to hear everything that you have to say. Try to speak slowly, clearly, and in a voice loud enough to reach all of your listeners.

Appearance: Your appearance, funnily enough, is also a kind of non-verbal communication. This includes your dress, make-up, and hairstyle. Depending on the context, you may need to pay attention to your appearance. When delivering a presentation as a student, ensure that you are reasonably wellgroomed – this demonstrates that you take the process seriously and have respect for your audience.

Nonverbal communication works both ways! Learn to notice and interpret the body language of others. If your audience becomes restless or otherwise conveys that they have stopped listening to you, it may be time for you to change your approach to re-engage their attention..

Public Speaking and Presentation Skills

Voice

- Understand the mechanics and physiology of breathing and vocalisation
- Project your voice more powerfully for greater authority
- Improve your vocal tone, pace, clarity, quality and enunciation
- Prepare your voice for public speaking with practical drills and warm-up exercises.

Body

- Master your own body language through self-awareness
- Build physical presence and confidence
- Signal authority through your stance and posture
- Use movement and gesture effectively to make your point.

Content

- Prepare a presentation by selecting effective messages, topics and themes
- Analyse the audience and occasion to develop targeted positioning
- Power up your language and rhetoric to win attention, interest and memory
- Explain complex ideas so that everyone will understand, care and respond.

Structure

- Organise what you have to say with a clear and coherent structure
- Make your information easier to absorb using narrative, framing and focus techniques
- Open and close your presentation with a memorable introduction and conclusion
- Illustrate your ideas effectively with visual aids such as PowerPoint.

Engagement

- Connect with your audience through meaningful interaction
- Involve, reference and consult your audience to link them to you and your topic
- Break the ice at the beginning, call to action at the end
- Handle difficult questions professionally.

Execution

- Speak in public with new-found confidence and presence

- Deliver much more influential, memorable and convincing presentations
- Overcome the effects of nervousness, stress and fear of public speaking
- Practicalities: speaking notes, slides, timing, microphones, autocues, webcasting, etc.

Planning

- Attention grabbers
- Closing summation
- Plan for Q&A
- Making it your own

Engaging Your Audience

When you speak, try to engage your audience. This makes you feel less isolated as a speaker and keeps everyone involved with your message. If appropriate, ask leading questions targeted to individuals or groups, and encourage people to participate and ask questions.

Keep in mind that some words reduce your power as a speaker. Think about how these sentences sound:

“I just want to add that I think we really need the Common Core State Standards.”

“I just think this plan is a good one.”

Phrases such as “*Just*” and “*I think*” limit your authority and conviction. Don’t use them.

“I believe in the Common Core State Standards because they are clearer and more focused.”

“I am confident that this plan will increase enrollment and allow our members stronger advocacy efforts.”

Notice the increase in authority and conviction?

A similar word is “*actually*.” When you use “*actually*,” it conveys a sense of submissiveness or even surprise.

“Actually, I’d like to add that we were under budget last year.”

By removing *actually* your message is clear, concise and stresses confidence:

“We were under budget last year.”

Also, pay attention to how you’re speaking. If you’re nervous, you might talk quickly. This increases the chances that you’ll trip over your words or say something you don’t mean. Force yourself to slow down by breathing deeply. Don’t be afraid to gather your thoughts; pauses are an important part of conversation, and they make you sound confident, natural, and authentic.

Finally, avoid reading word-for-word from your notes. When you read, you are not looking at your audience so you will not be seen as an engaging speaker. Additionally, when you try to read from your notes and look up occasionally, you appear awkward and come across as less confident.

Instead, make a list of important points on index cards and use bullet points. For instance for this workshop, I know I need to cover each of the strategies: planning, practice, engaging your audience, body language, thinking positively, and calming nerves.

Steps for Conquering Your Presentation Nerves

Step 1 – Know your audience

Step 2 – Know your material

Step 3 – Structure your presentation

Step 4 – Calm yourself from the inside

Step 1 — Know Your Audience: If you are asked to speak to a group, make sure to take time to find out a few things beforehand:

- Ask who will be in the audience? (Are they parents, teachers, members of the business community, school board members, etc.)
- What do they already know about the topic? Are they experts on the topic? Will this be brand new information?
- Is there a meeting or event planned before and/or after your talk? What other topics will be discussed? What is the agenda for the meeting? How much time do you have?

The more confident you are that you are presenting useful and interesting material for your audience, the less nervous you will be overall. A great tip is to greet audience members at the door and do a quick survey of why they are there and what they expect. This really helps you build a rapport with the group.

Step 2 — Know Your Material: Nothing is worse for nerves than trying to give a presentation on a topic that you do not know! Our modules will provide you with information and tools for each of the topics; however, it is on you to make sure that you take time to read the material and become familiar with each topic. Remember: Your audience will ask you questions and will look to you as the expert.

Another important point to remember is that you cannot possibly cover everything you know in your presentation. That would probably be long and boring. So select the most pertinent points from your subject base and then supplement with other material if time allows. A great tip is to make your material interesting and memorable, include occasional questions to the audience to encourage audience participation. This enhances the learning experience and gives you a break from presenting. It also allows you deliver your information in a more conversational manner, which is often more believable.

Step 3 — Structure Your Presentation: A common technique for trying to calm nervousness is memorizing what you intend to say; however, all this does is make your

delivery sound like it is coming from a robot. If you miss a word or draw a blank, your whole presentation is thrown off and then your nervousness gets worse. It is far better to structure your presentation so that you give yourself clues to what is coming next.

- Have a set of key phrases listed on a cue card.
- Refer to these phrases to trigger your mind as to what is coming up next.
- If you're using slides, use these key phrases in your transitions.

This approach helps you control your own uncertainty about whether you will remember what you want to say and the order you want to say it.

Step 4 — Calm Yourself from the Inside: Nervousness causes physiological reactions, which are mostly attributed to the increase of adrenaline in your system. You can counteract these effects with a few simple techniques:

Practice deep breathing – Adrenalin causes you to breathe shallowly. By breathing deeply your brain will get the oxygen it needs and the slower pace will trick your body into believing you are calmer. It also helps with voice quivers, which can occur when your breathing is irregular.

Drink water – Adrenalin can cause a dry mouth, which in turn leads to getting tongue-tied. Have a glass of water handy. Take sips occasionally, especially when you want to emphasize a point.

Smile – This is a natural relaxant that sends positive chemicals through your body.

Use visualization techniques – Imagine that you are delivering your presentation to an audience that is interested, enthused, smiling, and reacting positively. Cement this positive image in your mind and recall it right before you are ready to go on.

Here are a few more calming presentation tips:

- Press and massage your forehead to energize the front of the brain and speech center.
- Just before you start talking, pause, make eye contact, and smile. This last moment of peace is very relaxing and gives you time to adjust to being the center of attention.
- Speak more slowly than you would in a conversation, and leave longer pauses between sentences. This slower pace will calm you down, and it will also make you easier to hear, especially at the back of a large room.
- Move around during your presentation. This will expend some of your nervous energy.
- Remember that the audience is there to get some information and it is your job to put it across to them.

When it comes to presenting, nerves are inevitable. Letting them get the better of you is not. You need to develop a strategy for taking the focus off your nervousness and putting that energy to positive use. By controlling as much of the uncertainty as you can, you increase your confidence in your ability to deliver an excellent presentation. This confidence then counteracts your nerves, and you create a positive cycle for yourself.

Nerves are not your enemy and you don't have to fear public speaking. For your next presentation, be knowledgeable, be well-practiced and prepared, and try out some physical relaxation techniques. Amaze yourself and impress your audience with your calm and cool delivery of a great presentation.

Preparing for an Interview

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- ♣ Research the company and position description by using their company website, CEO resources, LinkedIn, and networking with contacts and employees. Glassdoor and Vault are great resources, which, accessed through the CEO's website provide full access.
- ♣ Be prepared to give specific examples from your experience, education, or skills that are relevant to the job and organization. Use the position description as a guide.
- ♣ Prepare 4-5 relevant questions for the interviewer that focus on the company's mission and goals (see examples on back).
- ♣ Practice, practice, practice! Visit the CEO for a mock interview and more information on preparing for an interview.
- ♣ Create a portfolio with samples of your work, reference letters, awards and other materials that demonstrate your abilities.
- ♣ Get travel and parking information and an estimated time commitment so that there are no surprises on the interview day.

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- ♣ Make sure that you look professional. It is appropriate to dress more formally for the interview even if the environment is casual.
- ♣ Avoid heavy use of scented body products as others may be sensitive to the scent.
- ♣ Arrive at least fifteen minutes early and be sure to bring money for parking.
- ♣ Bring a professional looking folder or padfolio with two copies of your resume, list of references, pen, calendar, and notepad.
- ♣ Demonstrate enthusiasm and interest by making eye contact, smiling, and a firm handshake.
- ♣ Be courteous to everyone you meet; others not directly in the interview process may be asked to express an opinion about you.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- ♣ Give clear and concise answers with specific examples about your past experiences, skills, and abilities that directly relate to the position or company goals. Mention your accomplishments whenever possible.
- ♣ Clearly articulate your career goals and how they relate to the position.
- ♣ Avoid talking negatively about past supervisors, co-workers, or companies of employment. ♣ Avoid asking about salary and benefits during the first interview.
- ♣ Ask at least two of your pre-prepared, well thought out questions to determine if this organization and job is right place for you.
- ♣ Maintain eye contact and avoid fidgeting during your interview. Calm nerves.
- ♣ You need to be fully engaged in this conversation, so turn off your cell phone and do not check it.

- ♣ Do not chew gum, eat or drink (unless offered to you).
- ♣ Be honest and sincere. Just be yourself!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- ♣ Send a thank you letter within two days to the people who interviewed you. Reiterate your interest and some key points that were discussed during the interview. You can also use thank you notes to expand on a point that you discussed in the interview or ask any additional questions if you have any.
- ♣ If a large panel (more than 3 people) interviews you, you may elect to send a thank you note to the chair of the interview panel and ask them to convey your thanks, but when possible, send an individual thank you to each interviewer.
- ♣ Request business cards during your interview to ensure correct spelling of names and email addresses.
- ♣ Follow up with a phone call within a week if you have not heard back. Be persistent and try to stay optimistic.
- ♣ Be sure to send any requested material such as transcripts, applications, or references in a timely manner.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

When deciding what to wear, consider your industry's standard. It is always better to dress a bit more formally if you are unsure. Everything should be cleaned, pressed and polished. Visit the CEO Clothing Closet to select a free outfit.

- ♣ **Business Attire:** Consists of two-piece suit in black, gray, or navy with a matching shirt/dress. Make sure that clothing is not open below the neckline. Ties or stockings may be required in more formal workplaces or industries. Dark closed-toed shoes.
- ♣ **Business Casual Attire:** Can include dress pants/skirt and a shirt/sweater without a jacket. Can also include khaki pants or slacks and a nice shirt. Ties and stockings are not usually required.
- ♣ **Do NOT Wear:** revealing clothes, extensive jewelry/piercings or makeup, have exposed tattoos, too much cologne or perfume, hats indoors, open toed-toes, headphones, sunglasses, dirty clothing, or any clothing with holes.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS AND TIPS FOR EACH TYPE

- ♣ Phone/Screening Interview – Preliminary, brief interview to determine if the candidate should move forward in the process.
 - As with every interview, make sure you are enthusiastic and discuss how your skills match the needs of the employer.
 - Make sure to keep a copy of your resume close along with notes on the company and your calendar.
 - Determine a location with little distractions and background noise ahead of time. Make sure you have good cell service.
- ♣ In Person Interview - One or more employer representatives will interview the candidate. May be multiple interviews or all day.

- Can include either traditional interview questions or behavioral interview questions. See below for examples.
- ♣ Group Interview - Takes place with other candidates seeking the same job, predicts how well the candidates interact with others.
 - Try to find a good balance between getting your points across and dominating the conversation.
 - Practice a two minute introduction that summarizes your education, skills, experience, and related career goals.
 - ♣ Panel Interview - Two or more people will interview you to get different opinions. Can be a very intimidating interview format.
 - Be careful not to ignore anyone on the panel. Make eye contact with each person while answering a question.
 - When asking questions, make sure they are directed at the group rather than a specific person.
 - ♣ Videoconferencing or Internet Interview - Usually take place over Skype or other videoconferencing services.
 - Dress professionally from head to toe and make sure that your background is not distracting (e.g., white or neutral wall)
 - ♣ Pre-recorded Interview - Usually no direct interaction with a person. Given set of questions and asked to record answers.
 - Don't sound too robotic, rehearsed or rushed. Consider attire and background.
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 - ♣ Stress Interview - Designed to see how you react under pressure. Used in fast-paced positions where quick decisions are needed.
 - Focus on the way you solve the problem, not the "right" answer. A typical question is designed to induce stress and can appear very aggressive: "Was the stress of your last job too much for you to handle?"
 - ♣ Case Interview - Includes case questions about hypothetical situations. Used to test your analytical and problem-solving ability.
 - Be sure to explain your thinking process in detail to give them a good idea of the steps you take to solve a problem.