

Business communication skills that every professional needs



Communication is the foundation of every business activity — and most of our regular day-to-day activities too. Communicating in a business setting can be a little bit different and often more stressful than our everyday communications. Whether you're talking to a customer, manager, or coworker you want to make the right impression. Here are the skills and best practices you need to adopt in order to navigate communication in a work environment.

Tailoring business communication to company culture

Just like you adjust your clothing for different business settings, you'll need to learn to adjust your communication. If you work in a more formal setting, you'd wear a suit rather than jeans. Your tone and communication style should also be adjusted to match the desired level of formality.

If you are new to your organization, take note of how other members of your workplace greet one another. It may vary depending on each member's place in the org chart. Do your coworkers greet your manager with a "Good Morning, Sir" or a "Hey, What's Up?". Do team members share memes or GIFs in the team Slack channel or is it for more focused and formal business discussions?

Effective business communication can be tricky, as what is normalized or acceptable will vary between different businesses. However, listening and observing is a key part of effective communication, so use those skills to gain an understanding of each business' culture and norms.

Communication skills for effective teamwork

Being a good collaborator and team member goes a long way in business. Employers like to see that you can communicate and collaborate effectively with your peers.

Conflict resolution

Often conflicts or disagreements arise simply due to poor communication. It's also true that building a diverse workplace means that you're likely to experience differences of opinions as everyone is coming to the table with different experiences, cultures, and ideas. This is a good thing!

Conflict is often healthy in the business world. Healthy and respectful conflict leads to better decision-making and greater innovation.

Emotional intelligence is necessary for good communication and conflict resolution in the workplace. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and control your own emotions as well as perceive and understand other people's emotions. Professionals need to be able to be self aware and recognize when their emotions are distorting their view or a discussion is getting too passionate. It's also important to recognize and acknowledge team member's feelings and engage in respectful conflict resolution if you have upset them or a misunderstanding has occurred. Emotionally intelligent professionals proceed calmly and with empathy when conflict arises.

Active listening skills

Be honest with yourself. When others in the workplace are talking, are you really listening to them or do you find yourself getting distracted or thinking about what you are going to say next? When you are nervous in business settings it is easy to focus on what you need to say, your own body language, and how you are being perceived. However, you're likely going to make a better impression by being a good listener and engaging with others when they speak than focusing solely on your own half of the interaction.

Leverage your nonverbal communication skills to demonstrate that you are listening by having open body language (avoid crossing your arms), maintaining eye contact with the speaker, and nodding or making appropriate gestures in response to what the speaker is sharing. Use facial expressions and nonverbal cues to show that you're engaged.

At appropriate points you may also speak in order to agree with the speaker, clarify something that they've said, or provide appropriate commentary. Try not to provide commentary that changes the direction of the conversation or brings the focus back to you too heavily. Often, we try to share examples of our own experiences or stories to relate to others, but it's helpful to let the person finish what they were sharing first. You don't want to become the coworker that makes every conversation about yourself.

Business writing skills

A common mistake that people make when writing in a business setting is trying too hard to sound smart. Business writing should be formal, but it should also be clear. Don't use abbreviations or any of the silly phrases that you'd use on social media. However, you also don't want to turn every memo or email into a PhD thesis.

The best written communication skill that you can possess is the ability to convey a message in a clear and concise manner. Craft messages that give the intended audience exactly the information that they need to know. Avoid uncertainty or excessive wordiness. After all, most business professionals are busy.

Being able to adjust your tone in writing can be a bit trickier than in speech. Practice writing in a motivational tone (commonly used for LinkedIn posts in case you need a reference point), serious or formal tones (for writing

related to HR, policy, or legal topics in business), and friendly tones (to use with leads and coworkers).

Presentation skills

Were you one of those kids that hated getting up in front of the class to speak? Well then it's time to build up your presentation skills.

Not all careers require frequent presentations, but it's rare to find a role where you never need to speak or share information with the group in a meeting. Public speaking can be scary, but there are a couple of tools that you can use to improve:

- **Be mindful of pacing.** Often when people are nervous, they speak too quickly. This makes it hard for your audience to understand what you are saying. Practice reciting information or a presentation at a steady pace with medium tempo.
- **Learn how to connect with your audience.** If you are giving a presentation at work, choose a coworker that you feel comfortable with and look at them as you present. You may even want to ask them to sit front and center. Looking out into the audience helps you appear more confident and better engages your audience.
- **Build confidence.** Public speaking is largely about confidence — or at least sounding confident. If you need to give a presentation at a staff meeting or client meeting, ask a few coworkers to listen to you practice. Starting with a smaller audience can help. If you are working on general public speaking skills and don't have a presentation coming up, build confidence by making a concentrated effort to speak up more during meetings. Many of us spend most meetings on mute or sitting quietly in the back of the room. Gradually increase your participation by speaking up and get comfortable sharing ideas publicly.

Consider your communication channel

One of the most common business communication mistakes that people make is choosing the wrong communication channel for their message. Everyone hates attending a meeting that could have been an email, right? However, the inverse can also be true.

Never be afraid to ask someone about their preferred communication methods. Knowing your audience is important. For example, if you know that you will need to follow up with a customer, ask them during the initial conversation how they would prefer for you to follow up. Some people like the personal touch that comes with a phone call, while other customers may be too busy to answer unscheduled calls or feel more comfortable with email or text messaging. While communication channel preferences are often associated with generational differences, it is a good idea to ask rather than assume what a customer will prefer. Learning how to communicate with customers based on their own preferences will allow you to provide better customer service.

You can also apply this to coworkers and managers. Instant messaging is becoming a popular form of communication between workplace teams, so you may be directed to use Teams or Slack for day-to-day conversations and teamwork. When you start a new job, ask about the best channel for questions to coworkers and your manager's preferences.

In addition to asking about individual preferences, it's also important to understand what messages are well suited for written communication and which should be delivered in-person (or at least over Zoom). Think about whether the recipient is likely to have questions about what you are telling them, or if the message could raise

concern when delivered in writing. After all, some messages may feel more ominous when nonverbal communication such as tone and body language are not present. If communicating major changes, face-to-face may be best so that you can answer questions right away and ensure that your message is delivered in the correct tone.

Strong communication comes from practice

Don't worry if you haven't mastered all of the skills on the list. Many of your coworkers are still intimidated by speaking up during large meetings or handling conflict too. The best way to improve is to practice.

Use LinkedIn to practice your professional writing skills and break out of your comfort zone. Work up to public speaking by being a more active participant in smaller meetings. Take time to observe your company's culture and practice active listening to understand how others communicate within your organization. Building communication skills is an ongoing process.