

GE Foundation Workplace Skills Program

Module Seven Interpersonal Communication Skills

Participant Booklet

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Introduction to Module Seven

Interpersonal Communication Skills

There are very few skills in life and work that are more important than interpersonal communication skills. Talking clearly to people so you are understood goes hand in hand with your ability to accurately listen to others and successfully understand what they are trying to communicate. These abilities will strengthen your relationships, help you to resolve conflicts, and increase your capacity to solve problems.

There are individuals who seem to have natural abilities when it comes to interpersonal communication, but for the most part the majority of people need to learn and refine these skills over time. As you improve your communication skills, misunderstandings happen less often and people feel heard and understood.

There are six critical communication skills that we will focus on during this module:

1. Attending
2. Active Listening
3. Questioning
4. Presenting
5. Confirming
6. Summarizing

This module will also provide two frameworks that will help you understand the interpersonal communication process. We will practice communication skills in small groups and participants will have a coach and receive feedback. In addition, you will discuss communication filters and obstacles and barriers to effective communication. Finally, participants will have the opportunity to conduct a self-assessment on their communication skills and strategies.

Understanding the Communication Process

VERBAL MESSAGES

Behaviour

Behaviour



- THINKING
- FEELING
- VALUES
- PERCEPTIONS



- THINKING
- FEELING
- VALUES
- PERCEPTIONS

QUIET MESSAGES

Communication Demonstration

How is he feeling?

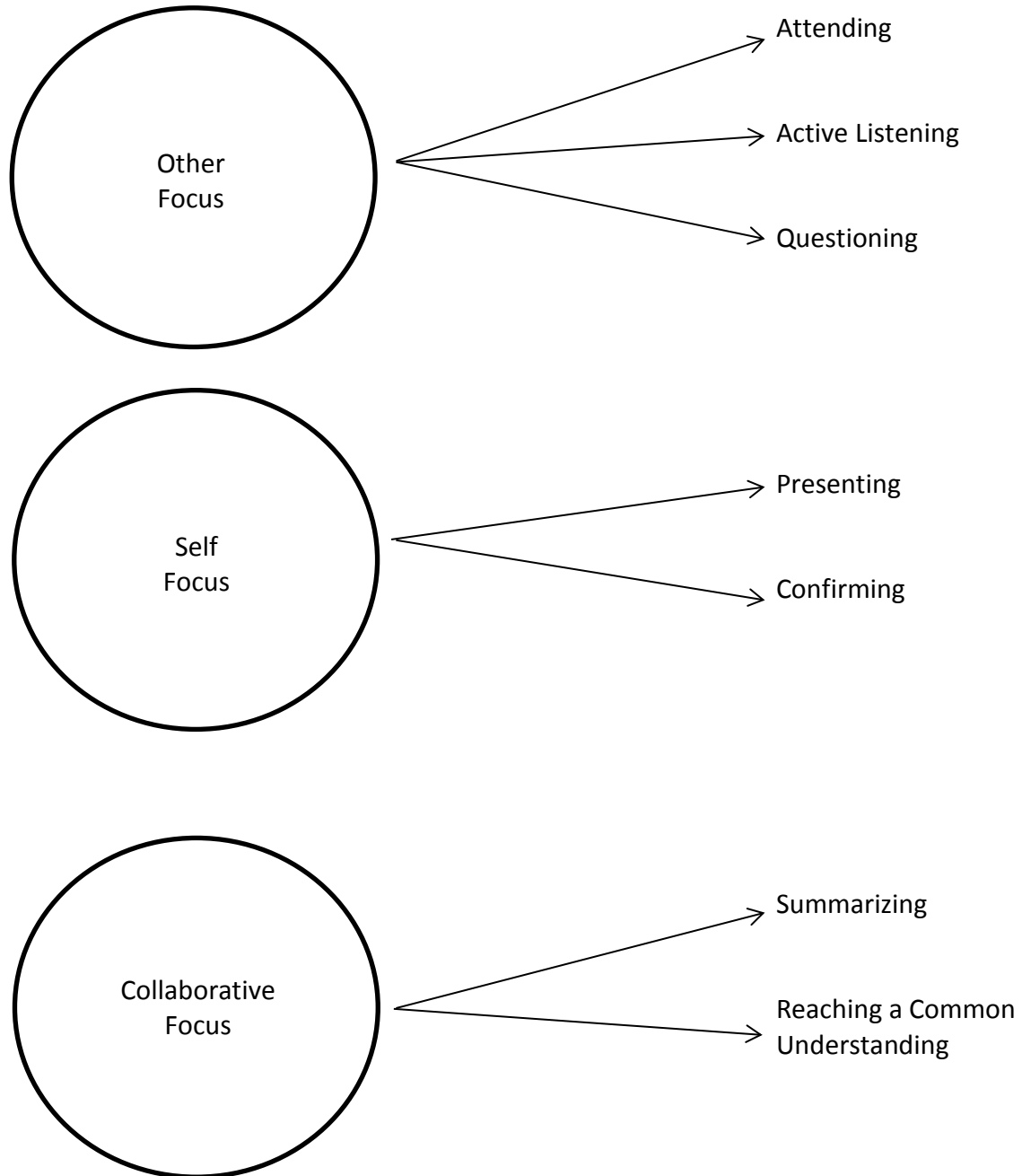
What is he thinking?

What doubts or fears are rising to the surface?

What are his frustrations?

What is his greatest concern?

Three Communication Positions



**WE USE OUR EYES TO “HEAR”
WHAT IS BEING SAID**

WE GET MEANING FROM HOW THINGS ARE SAID

**“It is estimated that in a normal conversation
between 65-93% of the social meaning is
carried by non-verbal messages.”**

Johnson, D.W., (2014). *Reaching out: Interpersonal effectiveness and self-actualization* (11th edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Nonverbal Communication

Gestures

Body Language

Movement

Eye Contact

Tone

Facial Expressions

Impacted by:

1. How we feel
2. Whether or not we like the message
3. Who is delivering the message

Seven Important Emotions

Influencing Facial Expressions

1. Sadness
2. Anger
3. Surprise
4. Fear
5. Disgust
6. Contempt
7. Happiness

Nonverbal Communication Observation

Gestures	Body Language
Movement	Eye Contact
Tone	Facial Expressions

Obstacles and Barriers to Communication

On the following three pages are a list of 12 behaviors that create obstacles and barriers to you and effective communication.

1. Please **read** the three pages and familiarize yourself with the 12 obstacles and barriers.
2. Go back and **rate** yourself on each behavior on a scale of 1-10. Please consider how frequently you use these behaviors in your interactions with others.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	9 10
Never	Infrequently	Half	Frequently	Always
Use	Use	of the	Use	Use
		Time		

3. **Calculate** your score. Add up your total, multiply by 100, and divide by 120.

$$\frac{\text{Total score} \times 100}{120} = \text{grade}$$

0-20	Very Basic
20-40	Okay.... Room for Improvement
40-60	Watch Out
60-80	Proceed with Caution
80 – 100	Alert!! Trouble!!

4. **Reflect** on your self-assessment.

Roadblocks to Communication

SCORE

1. **ORDERING, COMMANDING**

"You must..." "You have to..." "You will..."

- Can produce fear or active resistance.
- Invites push back.

2. **WARNING, THREATENING**

"If you don't, then..." "You'd better, or..."

- Can produce fear, submissiveness.
- Can cause resentment, anger, and rebellion.

3. **MORALIZING, PREACHING**

"You should..." "You ought to..." "It is your responsibility..."

- Creates guilt feelings.
- Can cause one to "dig in" and defend his or her position even more. ("Who says?")
- Communicates lack of trust in one's sense of responsibility.

4. **ADVISING, GIVING SOLUTIONS**

"What I would do is..." "Why don't you ..." "Let me suggest..."

- Can imply one is not able to solve one's own problems.
- Prevents one from thinking through a problem, considering alternative solutions, and trying them out in reality.
- Can cause dependency or resistance.

5. **PERSUADING WITH LOGIC, ARGUING**

"Here is why you are wrong..." "The facts are..." "Yes, but..."

- Provokes a defensive position and counter-arguments.
- Often causes one to "turn off"; to quit listening.

6. JUDGING, CRITICIZING, BLAMING

"You are not thinking maturely..." "You are lazy..."

- Implies incompetency, poor judgment.
- Cuts off communication from the individual over fear of negative judgment.
- One often accepts judgments as true ("I am bad.") or retaliates ("You're not so great yourself!").

7. PRAISING, AGREEING

"Well, I think you're doing a great job!"

- Implies high expectations.
- Can be seen as patronizing or as a manipulative effort to encourage desired behavior.
- Can cause anxiety when one's perception of self doesn't match other's praise.

8. NAME-CALLING, RIDICULING

"Crybaby" "Okay, Mr. Smarty..."

- Can cause one to feel unworthy.
- Can have a devastating effect on the self-image of the individual.
- Often provokes verbal retaliation.

9. ANALYZING, DIAGNOSING

"What's wrong with you is..." "You're just tired"

"You don't really mean that."

- Can be threatening and frustrating.
- One can feel either trapped, exposed, or not believed.

10. REASSURING, SYMPATHIZING

"Don't worry" "You'll feel better" "Oh, cheer up!"

- Causes one to feel misunderstood.
- Evokes strong feelings of hostility ("That's easy for you to say!").

11. PROBING AND QUESTIONS

"Why..." "Who..." "What did you..." "How..."

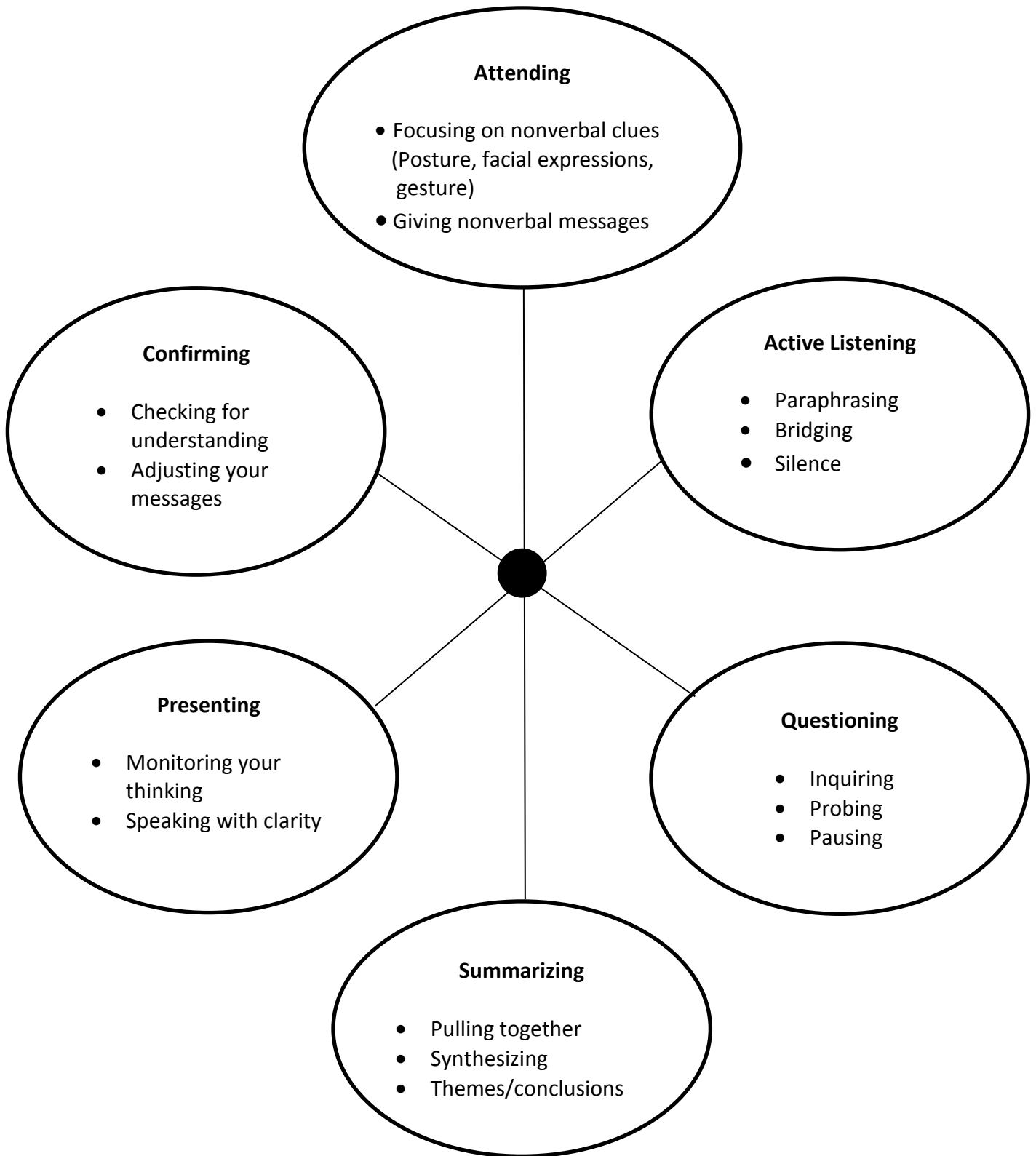
- Answering questions often results in getting subsequent criticisms.
- Individuals often learn to reply with non-answers, avoidance, half-truths, or lies.
- Since questions often keep one in the dark as to what the other is driving at, one may become anxious and fearful.

12. DIVERTING, SARCASM, WITHDRAWAL

"Let's talk about pleasant things..." "Why don't you try running the world!" Remaining silent; turning away.

- Implies that life's difficulties are to be avoided rather than dealt with.
- Can infer one's problems are unimportant.
- Stops openness from the individual when he or she is experiencing a difficulty.

Communication Skills Overview



Communications Skill Overview

Attending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paying attention to nonverbal messages • eye contact • body language • tone • posture • paying attention to verbal messages • thoughts, feelings, beliefs
Active Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using nonverbal gestures (smiling, eye contact, nodding) • paraphrasing... reflecting back what you heard • bridging thinking, emotions, beliefs, insights with experiences • silence... allow for “comfortable quiet”
Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inquiring ... asking questions out of curiosity ... asking for related information • probing ... asking a series of questions ... going deeper ... challenging thinking and beliefs • pausing means giving appropriate wait time
Presenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • your time to express your ideas, thinking, feelings... • mentally organizing your thoughts • aligning your mental activity with your verbal and nonverbal messages
Confirming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • checking with the other person to ensure they understand • asking clarifying questions • adjusting your communication to clear up misunderstandings
Summarizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bringing together the essence of the communication • identifying themes and patterns in the dialogue • reaching conclusions

Listening

The Critical Skill

Opening Questions:

1. When is listening easy?
2. When is listening most difficult?
3. What does it feel like when someone really listens to you?
4. What are some barriers that distort our ability to listen and understand others?

Guidelines for Giving Feedback

Effective Feedback is ...

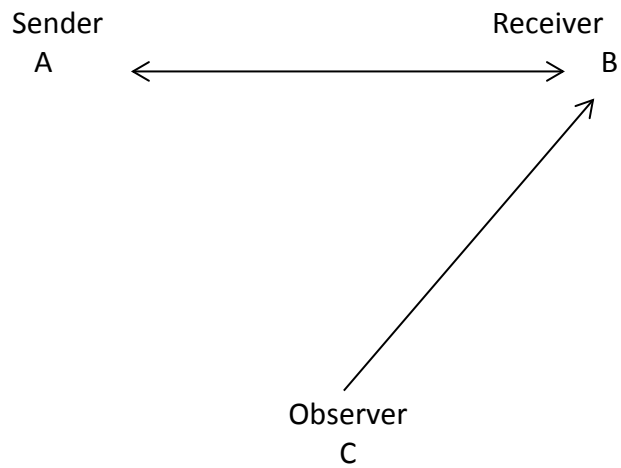
- Descriptive not evaluative
- Specific not general
- Focused (less is more)
- Well-timed
- Helpful to the person on the receiving end
- Intended to be more of a conversation rather than a presentation

Feedback Questions

1. What communication skills did you see the person using effectively?
2. Where were there missed opportunities?
3. What are one or two tips you would suggest?

Communication Skills Practice

The purpose of this activity is to provide an opportunity to practice communication skills and get feedback.



Each person must be a sender, a receiver, and an observer.

Communication Skills Practice

1. **Talker** – When I meet a person for the first time I _____

– I am really motivated when _____

Listening Check – What I hear you saying is _____

2. **Talker** – When I think about the future, I _____

– Something that is very important to achieve is _____

Listening Check – As I understand it, you _____

3. **Talker** – What I like least about my job is _____

– What I like best about my job is _____

Listening Check – You feel _____ when _____

– You think _____ because _____

4. **Talker** – I am happiest when _____

– When I am criticized I usually _____

Listening Check – It sounds like _____

5. **Talker** – When I meet a person for the first time I _____

– What I find most difficult about having hard conversations with people is _____

– In my work, if I could only _____

Listening Check – It seems you _____

Attending

Your posture, gestures, facial expressions, and voice all send non-verbal messages to others. To ensure that what you are trying to say is not muddled or contradicted by your non-verbal messages, take note of the following basic elements of physical attending:

- Face people **SQUARELY**.
- Adopt an **OPEN** posture.
- **LEAN** toward the person to whom you are talking.
- Don't stare but do maintain good **EYE** contact.
- Remain relatively **RELAXED** with people as you talk to them.

Active Listening

- One of the best ways to show a speaker that you are listening is to repeat back what the person has said. Not necessarily using the exact words as that can sound artificial or repetitious. Active listening means paraphrasing or stating the essence of what they said. For example:

“I hear you say you are frustrated because you are not getting the recognition you deserve from your boss.”

“Let me make sure I understand you. I am hearing you doubting yourself because of this one failure.”

“I think you said the following, you are concerned about losing your job because of your last performance evaluation.”

“What you said tells me that you have lost trust in some of your colleagues.”

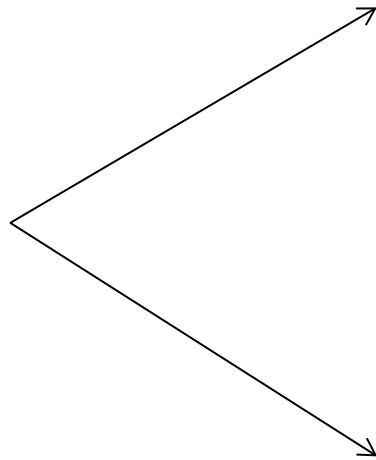
- Active listening can also help the speaker make connections between what they are doing, thinking, and feeling. The speaker may not always connect how these experiences are related until you say it out loud. For example, “It seems to me that you are feeling confused and hurt, because other team members are not turning to you for leadership anymore.”
- Active listening is not sitting and letting a person talk on and on. Rather, it is about being actively engaged in the conversation by checking in with them to ensure you both have a common understanding of what is being said. This avoids misunderstandings.

Listening For Understanding

Interference



Filters



- Biases
- Experiences
- Beliefs
- Background
- Distractions
- Doubts
- Fears
- Values
- Our Perceptions
- Our Stories

Silence

Becoming comfortable with silence or long pauses is one of the most difficult strategies to learn. It is very important to understand the value of silence and not be quick to jump in to fill the quiet space.

Silence can prove valuable lessons:

- It allows people think time to reflect on what they just said.
- Pauses can slow down the communication process so people can share information or tell their story at a more relaxed pace.
- It also allows people time to think about what they are going to say next, especially at critical moments in the conversation.

Questioning

Question for

- * information
- * clarification
- * depth of understanding

Your Questions need to

- * be open-ended
- * challenge assumptions
- * promote critical and creative thinking

Appropriate Questions

- “What is most important to you?”
- “Can you explain more about your decision _____?”
- “What do you want?”
- “What do you need in this situation?”
- “How do you feel when _____?”

Inappropriate Questions

- “Why are you _____?” (defensive)
- “Would you like to do this for me?” (manipulative)
- “I’m just curious about ...?” (intruding)

Alert – Questioning can be perceived as probing, cross-examining, or challenging a person’s knowledge, competence, or honesty.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions encourage people to provide more information rather than yes or no responses.

Examples:

1. How are these situations different?
2. What is your point of view on that?
3. What do you mean when you say _____?
4. What causes you to think _____?
5. How did you describe _____?
6. Can you give me an example that _____?
7. How does helping him at that point make sense?
8. What's most important to you?
9. What were you expecting when _____?

Open-ended questions can help:

- begin a conversation
- give you more information about a situation
- explore topics at a deeper level
- clarify vague answers
- examine a person's position or values
- encourage reflection
- challenge a person's thinking

Summarizing

- Summarizing is trying to pull together the essence of what someone has just said in one or two sentences.
- When the listener summarizes what the talker has just said, the talker can gain insights into how their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and values are connected.
- A summary given by the listener demonstrates that the most important elements of the communication have been heard.
- Summarizing can also give the talker an opportunity to clarify or correct their message if they were misinterpreted. This helps to avoid misunderstandings.

Examples:

1. You are thinking _____ because you value _____ and you are not willing to compromise _____.
2. Your feelings _____ seem to be connected to your thinking that _____ as well as your assumptions about _____.

Presenting

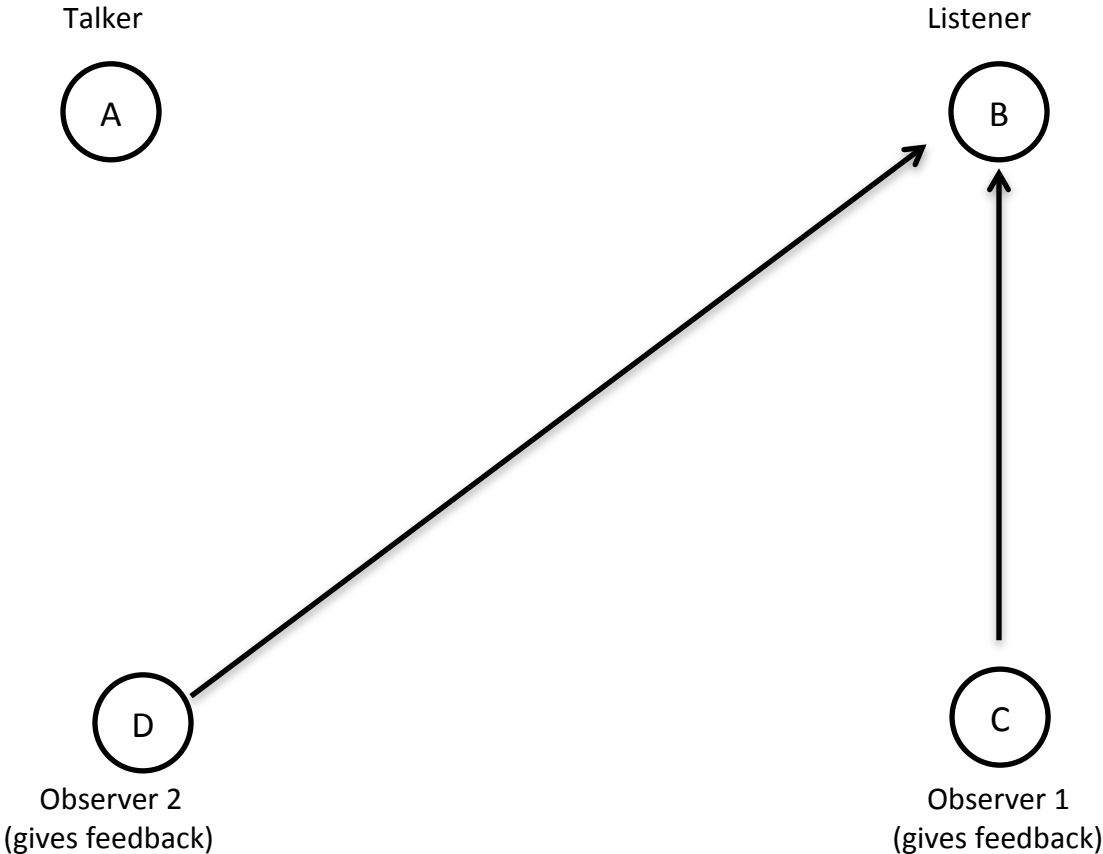
- This is your time to talk in the conversation. It is your opportunity to express your ideas, perceptions, observations, or conclusions.
- When you are speaking to someone, whether on the phone or in person, you want to be clear, concise, and direct. You want the receiver to understand your key messages and thoughts. If you ramble or provide too much information the other person may get confused or miss important messages. Convey your message in as few words as possible. Less is more.
- If you are expressing a different point of view, it is important to restate the essence of their story. Then, highlight how your point of view differs from theirs.
- To help reframe their interpretation or story, begin by saying, "Another way you can look at what happened is"

Confirming

- You cannot assume the appropriate message was received because you believe you communicated clearly. You need to check with the listener to confirm that there is a common understanding.
- Here are some questions that will help to confirm your message was received accurately:
 - Are you understanding my dilemma? Can you explain it to me?
 - What do you think I mean when I say _____?
 - Why do you think I am feeling _____?
 - What would you say if you were in my position _____?
- When you sense there is miscommunication happening, bring attention to it and try again. One strategy is to stop and have the other person ask some questions about what is confusing them.

Communication Skills Role Plays

The purpose of this activity is to focus and go deeper into each of the six communication skills.



Role Play Scenarios

Role Play A – University versus Community College

Barbara is a very capable student who is in her senior year in high school. She needs to make a decision about whether she will attend university or community college. Barbara's parents want her to attend university and become an architect, following in her mother's footsteps. Over the past two years she has developed an interest in art and her friends are encouraging her to go to community college and study graphic design. Barbara has come to you, a classmate, to help her make the decision.

Role Play B – Overwhelmed and Disappointed Student

Mark is interested in pursuing certification in one of the medical programs. He was excited to enroll at the local community college because he was looking forward to hands-on learning. The first course is medical terminology. Mark is overwhelmed with all the content and discouraged that the course is entirely in a lecture format. He is wondering if he made a bad decision and if he should drop the course and consider pursuing another community college program. Mark has made an appointment with the Community College Career Counselor

Role Play C – Finding a Summer Job

Lindsey applied for a summer job with the city to be a playground supervisor. Last year she worked for the city in a parks maintenance position. She just received a call saying that she did not get the job as a playground supervisor. It is March and she does not have a summer job lined up. She is starting to panic and has asked her best friend for advice.

Role Play D – Tensions with an Instructor

Tom is a carpentry student at the community college and he is experiencing tensions with his math instructor. Tom seems to think that it is a personality conflict where his instructor (Mr. Blake) did not like him from day one. They rub one another the wrong way. Mr. Blake has told Tom that he needs to work harder because the qualities of his assignments are below standard and he is at-risk of failing. Tom wants to talk with Mr. Blake about the tensions between them and he has come to you for advice.

Role Play E – Finances to Attend School

Joanne is a single mom. She wants to go to the community college to get certification as a nurse so she can support her young twins. Joanne is very stressed because she does not have the financial resources to pay the tuition. In addition, transportation and childcare are barriers to her enrolling in a community college course. You are her best friend and she wants to talk with you about her options.

Communication Skills Observation Sheet

Communication Skills	Observation What did you see? What did you hear?
Attending	
Active Listening	
Questioning	
Summarizing	
Presenting	
Confirming	
Non-verbals	
Silence (wait time)	

Communication Skills Self-Assessment

1 = rarely or never 2 = sometimes 3 = usually 4 = consistently

1. Are you able to read non-verbal cues (body language) accurately?	1	2	3	4
2. Are you able to use non-verbal cues to respond while in a conversation?	1	2	3	4
3. Do you typically allow someone to fully express their ideas without interrupting them?	1	2	3	4
4. Are you comfortable with silence and are you able to sit quietly and allow the other person think time?	1	2	3	4
5. Are you able to stay focused without being distracted?	1	2	3	4
6. Are you able to identify how a person is thinking and feeling, and express that to them?	1	2	3	4
7. Are you able to listen intently to a person for a period of time and capture the essence of what they just said to you?	1	2	3	4
8. Are you able to ask open-ended questions to gather more information?	1	2	3	4
9. Are you able to ask direct follow-up clarifying questions?	1	2	3	4
10. Are you able to follow the conversation rather than lead it by interjecting ideas?	1	2	3	4
11. Are you able to get beyond the words and read between the lines and understand what the person is really saying?	1	2	3	4
12. Are you able to control your emotions when somebody says something that pushes your buttons or upsets you?	1	2	3	4
13. Are you able to create an environment where the other person feels safe and is willing to open up?	1	2	3	4
14. Are you able to demonstrate (through your actions) that you care and have empathy?	1	2	3	4

Communication Skills Self Reflection

1. What have I learned about really listening to others?

2. What have I learned about asking good questions?

3. Why is it important to summarize when listening to others?

4. Why is silence and reading nonverbal cues important?

5. What personal filters or communication obstacles are getting in my way of understanding others?

6. What are my strengths or talents in communication skills?

7. Where do I need to make improvements in my communication skills?