Communicating

Listening

Consider these actions or steps when listening. Depending on context, they may facilitate or hinder listening. Do you:

1. Interrupt or do you give speakers the opportunity to finish what they are saying before you speak?
2. Concentrate on each word?
3. Focus on the purpose of the conversation (e.g., to provide information, answer specific questions, give examples, etc.)?
4. Resist the temptation to verbally or mentally finish what you think the speaker is going to say?
5. Maintain eye contact with the speaker?
6. Consciously watch the speaker’s body language for additional clues as to how the speaker feels about the topic under discussion or is feeling in general?
7. Make mental or written notes?
8. Link ideas and content from what is being said, to form your observations, conclusions or recommendations?
9. Create mnemonics (to remember key points memory aids based on associating words or ideas, making an anagram, etc.)?
10. Control your own movements and actions, in function of the communication?
11. Show appreciation for the speaker’s ideas?
12. Ask questions at the end of the speaker’s statement in order to completely understand what has been said (ask for clarification, or examples, or ‘why’, etc.)?
13. Uses respectful language in any feedback or questions?
14. Listen for exaggeration, bias, prejudice, or emotions in the language used?
15. Summarise the main argument or ideas after the speaker has finished?
16. Maintain eye contact with the person who is talking to you?
17. Paraphrase what has been said before you respond?
18. Withhold judgment and try to understand the speaker’s point of view?
19. Put aside preconceived opinions about the speaker’s viewpoint and really listen with an open mind?
20. Indicate your interest in what the speaker is saying through facial expressions, posture, and body language?
21. Indicate your encouragement to the speaker as he communicates through facial expressions, posture, and body language?
22. Periodically assess your listening skills by reflecting on your listening strengths and weaknesses?

If you’re not doing these things, you may not be listening. And if you are, here are tips for asking effective questions, which helps facilitate the communication process:

✓ Know the subject
✓ Know why you are asking – the objective of the question

  o To get an answer and if so which type
  o To involve
  o To Probe
  o To verify
✓ Pick the right type of question in function of the objective
  
  o Open – general, broad, non-specific
  o Closed – specific, focussed and requiring limited possible answers (e.g. ‘yes’ or ‘no’)
  o Probing – to go deeper (why? How? Etc.)
  o Verifying – ‘if I understand correctly, is this (action) what you believe should be done?’

✓ Keep them short
✓ Be careful with hypothetical questions ('What would happen if ...?')
✓ Avoid questions that are:
  
  o Impossible to answer
  o Irrelevant
  o Unclear or hard to understand
  o Multiple in a single query
  o Aggressive or embarrassing
  o Rhetorical
  o Liable to be answered in a way you do not want (be careful asking a question the answer to which you might not like)

**Oral/Aural communication Techniques**

The following techniques should be developed practiced by coordinators:

- **Enunciating:** Speaking clearly, articulating each syllable. This requires one to speak more slowly and to consciously pronounce each syllable of each word. Voice control and projection, intonation and appropriate breathing are important. Enunciating is especially important when non-mother-tongue speakers and listeners are involved.

- **Listening and Repeating:** Repeating verbatim to confirm understanding and ensure the content is heard by all who need to hear it.

- **Listening and Summarizing:** Condensing (making shorter) the content of several comments that may have been made over many minutes.

- **Listening and Probing:** Digging deeper to uncover what may remain unclear or unsaid, for example by asking non-aggressive questions including:

  o Can you give us any advice as to how we should deal with this?
  o Are there any other ways you think we should address this?
  o Is there anything that you recommend we should do or consider?
  o Is there anything else you think we should know?
  o Could you help us by explaining why you do not want us to do that and what alternatives there may be?
  o You have a very tough job. What is the most difficult challenge and how might we help?

- **Listening and acknowledging:** Recognising and acknowledging a statement with an aggressive or frustrated or sharp tone, without judgement. The intention is to acknowledge the underlying concern or frustration and to show that you understand that frustration, without saying that this
is also your point of view. This may help lessen tension and build a relationship. Terms such as the following may help:

- I understand that you feel very strongly about this ...
- If I understand your point correctly, you would like ...
- You certainly have a right to disagree ...
- That must be very annoying ...

**Listening and acknowledging and reframing:** Transforming a statement with an aggressive tone into a neutral statement, without manipulating it. The intention is to acknowledge the underlying concern or frustration, to show that you understand that frustration and, without saying that this is also your point of view, to build the next step towards continued discussion or negotiation. This may help lessen tension and build a relationship. Terms such as the following may help:

- I can understand your anger and annoyance.
- If I have heard correctly, you disagree strongly with the way the decision was made and the fact that you had not been told about it.
- So, if I understand correctly, the content of the decision is not so much the problem, rather the manner in which it was made and communicated.
- We certainly have to review how we make and communicate decisions.

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**Ten rules for writing (plus six)**

Good writing is hard to find and hard to do. Lazy writers use length and verbosity to disguise undisciplined writing, often without knowing they are doing it. Inevitably what might be strong, thoughtful content drowns in the chaos of verbosity. Avoiding the rigorous work required to create clear, concise prose is common. Writing is tough work.

Writing is one of many coordination tools. At a basic level, coordinators need to know how to do it. Practice can make perfect but, fortunately, writing in this context doesn’t require perfection. It requires clarity, brevity and coherence. For coordination purposes, applying the rules below can help achieve this.

1. Know your audience. Ask yourself why and for whom you are writing (objectives and audience).

2. Outline: Identify the point, or relevance of each idea. Is it an observation, option, conclusion, recommendation, etc.? Decide how these grouped ideas should flow. Organise them into a skeleton or framework.

3. Communicate one idea per sentence and keep your sentences short and simple (e.g. subject, verb, object).

4. Be conscious of page length. Whenever possible, keep documents to one or two pages.
5. Where possible, use graphics, tables, bullet-points and numbered lists instead of text

6. Don’t use the wrong words - terms not widely understood; acronyms; words already implicit in the text, etc.

7. Try to use verbs instead of nouns

8. Use the right words correctly: Use thesauruses; dictionaries, grammar and spell checks; etc.

9. Check the punctuation. Punctuate as you would say it – pauses, stops, breaks, etc.

10. The best writing is done in the editing. When you’ve finished a first draft, leave it. Come back after a break to re-read and edit it.

Making oral presentations

Preparing PowerPoint Slides

PowerPoint slides should be designed to ensure the following:

1. They contain no more than 6 words per line and 6 lines per slide (the “6x6” rule)
2. Lines are widely spaced and font size does not go below “20”
3. Contrast is high - black on white or white on black (no pastel fonts)
4. Numbering is used instead of bullets - to aid readers and discussion
5. Slides are not ‘cluttered’ with excessive use of objects or ‘decorations’

The following checklist is from the University of Southampton, UK www.studyskills.soton.ac.uk. Use of the materials is gratefully acknowledged.

Establish Rapport

1. Introduce yourself
2. Smile and sound interested
3. Develop eye contact
4. Share the structure of your talk
5. Use the right language for your audience
6. Maintain the right pace
7. Use your voice and pauses to move between points
8. Use notes to move you from one point to next

Dealing with Nerves

1. Be prepared: On top of improving your performance, thorough preparation will make you more confident about your ability to present the material
2. Use prompts: Consider using prompt cards, if possible. If you can’t use cards, follow a PowerPoint or a text.
3. Breathe: Breathing deeply before you start slows your heart rate. This should make you feel less nervous.
4. Look at your audience: It may be counter-intuitive but, through this contact, presenters tend to grow calmer.
5. Don’t forget to pause: Pause between points or slides. This allows the audience to catch up and gives you time to prepare the next part.
6. Smile: Smile and look relaxed. This should create a more relaxed atmosphere for you (and your audience).
Preparing the content of your talk

- Who is your audience?
- What are the objectives/aims of this talk?
- Find the sources, read, cut down and trim for talk
- Develop a ‘line’, ‘argument’, ‘thread’
- Argue your thread tightly
- Reference well (especially if academic talk)

The organization of your talk

- Impose a structure: beginning, middle and end
- Explain structure and aims of talk to audience
- Use the ‘beginning’ to gain audience attention, but make sure it is pertinent to your argument
  - a quote
  - a startling fact/opinion
  - a question
  - a picture/video sequence/sound
- Make points within the ‘middle’ clear, well defined and neatly linked.
- The ‘end’ section is your ‘take-home-message’. What do you want your audience to remember? What’s your main message?

Delivering your talk

Be as natural as possible as this will relax you and allow you to be more spontaneous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pace</th>
<th>Visual Aids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ When nervous we speak too fast. Deep breathing slows you down.</td>
<td>✓ Visual aids: OHP or computer aided delivery (e.g. PowerPoint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Try speeding up if you have a tendency to speak slowly.</td>
<td>✓ Visual prompts help you and show structure to audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Don’t read from a sheet: you will be monotonous, talk too fast</td>
<td>✓ Computer aided delivery allows for multimedia presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Don’t ad-lib unless you know you can deliver.</td>
<td>✓ Understand the equipment you will need (from OHPs to computer leads)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Use prompts from: cards or visual aids to talk from (or large</td>
<td>✓ Make sure you have the equipment you need and that it works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>print in text to slow you down).</td>
<td>✓ Check size of room, potential audience and select correct font size (use approx. 35-40) for slides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Don’t be afraid to stop and think for a few seconds.</td>
<td>✓ Have clear, uncluttered visual aids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Build in questions for the audience (even if you just ask them</td>
<td>✓ Put graphs, etc., on handouts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to think) to slow pace.</td>
<td>✓ Don’t use prose unless pertinent, and then give them time to read it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Check for EGO (Eye Glazing Over) of audience. Make changes when</td>
<td>✓ Don’t use too much color, it distracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you detect it!</td>
<td>✓ Give out handouts necessary for talk before, give out additional material after.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contact with audience

- Look at your audience when you arrive on the stage.
- Avoid a hostile posture: hunched shoulders, arms across chest, standing on one leg!
- Develop a rapport through your opening and talk to rather than at your audience.
- Look at the whole audience not just one

Voice/language

- With nervousness the pitch of the voice rises. Deep breathing should control this.
- Vary your tone. A monotonous tone gives an EGO audience.
- Vary your tone according to content:
  - Grow louder to emphasize
(often the same) section.
✓ Try to find friendly faces at the back (in several areas) to give the appearance of looking at the whole group.
✓ If you are relaxed, your audience will be relaxed.

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- Use pause to indicate a change of direction, or “pause for thought”
- Enunciate: speak clearly (don’t allow sentences to tail off).
- Use language markers (e.g. “And now...”, “The next point...”) and tone to indicate a change/new point.
- Don’t use clichés.

Body Language

Some body language can be conducive to good communication. The manner in which a coordinator sits, stands, moves, touches or uses her/his face or body may either facilitate or impede good communication. Below are examples. They are context and culture specific - some potentially helpful and some potentially counter-productive:

1. Facial expressions: smiling, grimaces, sceptical looks, questioning expressions, etc.
2. Leaning forward or backwards towards someone during communication
3. Nodding, inclining to one side, or shaking the head
4. Slouching (lazily relaxing the body forward, or to one side)
5. Stretching out full-length (especially pointing the soles to the feet towards the other person)
6. Stretching the arms or legs
7. Sighing - inhaling or exhaling breath loudly and noticeably
8. Looking at a watch or the clock
9. Hand gestures
10. Shrugging shoulders
11. Hands in pockets
12. Fidgeting and physical ‘tics’ (unconscious, repeated actions, such as; nervous facial or body movements, clicking a pen, tapping a foot, pulling an ear lobe or the nose, jingling coins in a pocket, flicking pages, typing loudly, etc.)
13. Scratching or rubbing the head, face or body
14. Making or avoiding eye-contact
15. Touching, including hand-shaking
16. Turning away
17. Keeping too close or too distant from others
18. Re-arranging clothing
19. Playing with items, such as remote controls, phones, cups, glasses, plates, cutlery, etc.

Handling Questions

✓ Questions during your talk: If you field them, don’t let the take you off track and don’t let them take too long. Allow and use questions to clarify rather than discuss points.
✓ Questions after talk: These can support a discourse. Be prepared to talk on themes that might derive from your talk (e.g. implications of things you said, other views, where to get more information).
✓ Be honest if you don’t know an answer.
✓ Be polite if someone tries to put you down - don’t enter into a row.
✓ Make sure questions are not controlled by one person.
✓ Control time and know when to finish (check for EGO).
✓ Don’t let your talk peter out through a long question time
Gender and Culture

Managing gender and culture differences can be a challenge. When mishandled, communication can stop. Here are steps for addressing gender and culture in coordination:

1. Remember that, like an iceberg, most gender and cultural specificities are unseen.
2. Learn to recognise in what you do, say and think your own deep-seated gender-centric and ethnocentric beliefs, values, motives, thought processes and behavior.
3. Learn to perceive and understand other people’s beliefs, values, motives, thought processes and behavior.
4. Build bridges by setting aside your gender and cultural biases, and putting yourself in the shoes of others.

Coordinators should keep in mind these aspects of social norms¹:

1. **Relationship with Authority**: Does the society have a primarily horizontal or hierarchical understanding of social relations? Known as the power-distance relationship, this indicates the nature and pattern of power and authority in a given society. Is power and authority held high up and far away from ordinary people, or is it close to hand and embedded within society at large? Power and authority, deference, discussion and dissent will inevitably influence how you can negotiate and who with.

2. **Male-Female Relationships**: What are the respective gender roles in a given society? What power do men and women have with respect to decision-making? How will the society view mixed groups?

3. **Individualism and Collectivism**: Some societies are more collective or individualistic than others. Gauging this within a society will help you to decide whether you need to argue in favor of individual rights or whether you would be wiser to emphasize the rights of the group when negotiating for protection and assistance. One of the difficulties with humanitarian culture is that it places great stress on the rights of the most vulnerable individuals in line with a principle of impartiality, which requires that humanitarians accord priority to certain people. This can be hard for some societies to understand.

4. **Tolerance of Ambiguity**: Some societies tolerate higher levels of ambiguity and uncertainty than others. In negotiations, this means that, while some people are quite happy for certain things to remain unclear and to be settled at a later stage, others believe that every minor detail should be resolved during the negotiation. They want every problem to be fixed before they act.

5. **Respect for the Rules**: Different cultures have different attitudes with regard to rule-related behavior. For some, rules should be applied loosely and there should be a significant amount of discretion. For others, such grey areas are intolerable and rules are absolute. Understanding how your counterparts interpret rules is obviously central to any agreement you reach.

6. **Time:** Cultures view time differently. Some demand precision and some looseness. Some place a higher value on the immediate use of time than others do. As a result, a counterpart can perceive time you spend with them both as a sign of respect and disrespect. You are giving of your time or you are taking up his/her time. Making someone wait is not always considered impolite. It can either be normal or an indication of power. Some time is sacred and should not be encroached. Coordinators should respect this when choosing the moment to meet or negotiate. For example, be sensitive to prayer time, meal times, religious festivals, holidays, anniversaries of certain events and appropriate hours of the day and night.

7. **Space and Place:** Some places are suitable for negotiation and discussion, some are not. Not all cultures allow people of the opposite sex to mingle in a particular space or to talk behind closed doors. Some space is public and some is private. Appreciating what makes for an appropriate negotiation space will be important.

8. **Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication:** What can and cannot be said varies from one culture to another. Some things can be agreed but have to remain unspoken. Other things can be verbally agreed but not carried out. The non-verbal signs in any culture also fluctuate and require careful deciphering.

9. **Sales Pitch:** The way one sells things differs across cultures. For some, a good salesperson/negotiator is someone who argues passionately. For others, to be so passionate suggests a hidden agenda with regard to the subject under negotiation. Offering gifts may or may not be part of a sales pitch. Paying to bring the counterpart to a nice venue is sometimes seen as acceptable. To others it will seem suspicious.

10. **Bargaining:** Bargaining also varies across culture. In some, it is the vendor who sets the price, while in others it is usually the buyer who makes the first bid. These different traditions will inevitably affect the way that people negotiate and reach agreement.

11. **Core principles, beliefs, ideologies and religion:** People’s fundamental beliefs, their vision of what is right and wrong, influences how they behave. They may also determine what behavior they expect and will tolerate.

12. Body language and comportment: how people communicate through their gestures and movements varies from one culture to another (see the section on body-language).