

E-PME  *Enlisted*
PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

Effective Communications 4.A.01

Learning Objective(s): DEMONSTRATE effective communication skills.

Why You Need to Know This

Professional and effective verbal communication skills are essential for your success in the Coast Guard. To be a successful Petty Officer, you must be able to effectively communicate your ideas, plans, and objectives up and down the chain-of-command. Being a leader means more than just talking to people and telling them what to do - a good communicator is also a good listener. Effective leaders listen to the ideas and opinions of others and ask for clarity when they are confronted with information or situations they do not understand. The purpose of this lesson is to develop your understanding of the communication process and provide tips to improve your communication and listening skills.

Topics Covered

This section will cover the following five topics:

- The Communication Process
- Types of Communication
- The Five Elements of a Message
- Barriers to Communications
- Effective Listening Skills

At the end of this lesson you will be required to participate in a learning activity. You are encouraged to first review the learning activity and the sign off requirements located in the “**You and Your Supervisor**” section of this lesson. Reviewing this information before you begin the lesson will allow you to take proper notes and focus on key learning points.

The Communication Process

Communication is defined as a process of transferring thoughts, ideas, messages and information from one individual, or group, to another. However, effective communication requires more than just transmitting a message. The message must be clear, accurate, and above all, understood by the person or persons with whom you are communicating.

Types of Communications

Communication is generally classified into three types, which include:

- **Verbal**
 - **Vocal**
 - **Visual**
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Verbal Communication

Verbal communication, also referred to as oral communication, involves the actual words we use to speak and includes **language** and **articulation**. Research has shown that daily communication breaks down to 9% writing, 16% reading, 30% speaking, and 45% listening. Whether talking face-to-face or over the phone, verbal communication is an essential part of how you interact with others. Using the wrong words can result in misunderstanding by confounding the meaning of what you are trying to convey.

The list below contains some tips on how you can improve your verbal communication skills:

- Organize your thoughts before you speak and stay focused on your purpose to inform, direct or influence.
 - Speak slowly and pronounce all words clearly.
 - Select words that are understandable to the person you are speaking with – don't use "big words" just to impress
 - Read aloud to improve your articulation.
 - Avoid using too much technical jargon when speaking to someone who may be unfamiliar with the terms you are using.
 - Prepare your response in advance and practice what you are going to say before you actually say it.
 - Practice saying aloud words you have difficulty pronouncing
 - Don't try to talk while eating or drinking.
 - Avoid using filler words like umm, ah, or ugh. If you don't know what to say just stay silent or say that you do not know the answer.
 - Take time to ensure you understand the other person before responding, practice good listening techniques.
 - Be respectful; do not interrupt the person you are speaking with.
 - Ask for feedback to make sure your message was understood.
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Vocal Communication

Vocal communication involves qualities such as intonation, resonance, rhythm, pitch, volume, inflection, and clarity, all of which can have a direct impact on the receipt of the message. Our voice can convey much more than just words. Studies have shown that the percentage of understanding gained from the spoken word is considerably less than the meaning that people gain from listening to a person's tone of voice and looking at their nonverbal behaviors. What this means is that **what we say is often less impactful than how we say it!**

The list below contains some tips on how to improve your vocal communication skills:

- Pay attention to the volume of your voice. Be aware of your surroundings and don't shout or speak too softly. Speak loud enough only to be heard.
- Keep a measured tone of voice as this can reveal if you are happy, angry or nervous.
- Regulate your rate of speech by not talking too quickly or too slow.
- Place appropriate emphasis (inflection) on key words.
- Allow opportunity in your conversation for silence and pauses.

Visual Communication

Visual communication essentially involves body language or what people see. This includes aspects such as gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, etc., which also become part of the communication process. It is important to be aware of these visual cues, as they may result in conflicting or mixed messages.

The list below contains some tips on how to improve your visual communication skills:

- Maintain appropriate eye contact when talking to someone. Avoiding eye contact or staring for too long can make people uncomfortable.
- Be aware of your facial expressions a frown or a smile sends a very clear message.
- Use small hand gestures and avoid gestures that may be perceived as aggressive like pointing or making a fist.
- Maintain good posture, sitting slumped in a chair with arms firmly crossed may give a negative message.
- Respect personal space by keeping an appropriate body distance.
- Observe other people's reactions to you as you speak.

The Five Elements of a Message

Communication is a dynamic process, ongoing and ever changing. The five major elements of communication are listed below:

- **Sender:**

The sender is the source of the communication. The sender formulates the message and starts the communication process by encoding the information into language and symbols. The message is then transmitted verbally, vocally or visually to the receiver.

- **Receiver:**

The receiver gets the message, decodes it, and then must interpret its meaning. Only when the receiver has understood the message can true communication take place. To interpret the message correctly, the words in the message must mean the same thing to the receiver as they do the sender, otherwise the exchange may result in miscommunication.

- **Message:**

The message is not only conveyed information, but the emotions that give the words meaning. Words alone do not fully establish the full intention of the message. Vocal and visual communication may also provide important clues that the receiver may need in order to interpret the message.

- **Transmission Medium:**

The transmission medium is the pathway by which the message flows. It is vehicle that carries the message from the sender to the receiver, and back. The medium can be **electronic, verbal, and non-verbal**.

- **Feedback:**

The most common cause of ineffective communication is the failure of the sender to request feedback from the receiver. Feedback is the element of communication that confirms the message has been received and understood. In most written forms of communication, some reply is required. Oral communication via electronic means usually requires only a verbal repeat of the message, followed by words; “roger”, “understood”, or “aye-aye”. In face-to-face communication, feedback can be more complex. One way to get feedback from face-to-face communication is to solicit questions from your receiver, or from each person to whom your message applies.

Barriers to Communication

There are numerous physical and environmental factors which can hamper effective communication. The barriers to effective communication generally fall into to three categories, which include:

- **Physical**
 - **Psychological**
 - **Space**
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Physical Barriers

Physical barriers to effective communication include factors such as distance, noise and distractions:

Distance is considered a physical barrier because if the receiver is far away from the person speaking he or she may only be able to pick up bits and pieces of the conversation.

Noise is considered an environmental barrier to effective communication. For example, an airplane flying overhead, loud music playing, or being on a boat deck with high winds all create barriers to effective communication.

Distractions generally occur when a person is unable to concentrate or focus on the message and can be caused by both physical and environmental sources.

Psychological Barriers

Psychological factors generally involve a person's state of mind, and include factors such as attitudes, personality conflicts, fear, and personal problems.

Attitudinal barriers may be present among people who refuse to communicate due to a lack of motivation or dissatisfaction with work. or just resistance to change due to entrenched attitudes and ideas.

Personality conflicts cause barriers by limiting the free flow of information and inhibiting cooperation.

Fear can also hinder communication and can take many forms. Fear of intimation when communicating with someone in a position of authority. Fear of reprisal. Fear of looking uninformed. Fear of offending someone or saying the wrong thing.

Personal problems like worries about health, marriage or finances can also impact a person's ability to focus on the message.

Space Barriers

Space barriers generally refer to the level of comfort or discomfort people experience in relation to their physical proximity to others. Another term used to describe this experience is “personal space”. This space is different for each person and may be influenced by factors such as customs and culture. However, in the western world the three zones of interaction are generally recognized as intimate, personal and social.

- **Intimate** body contact is approximately 18 inches away for another person and is reserved for family members, very close friends, or children.
- **Personal** body contact ranges from one to four feet, and is usually reserved for friends and companions for the purpose of personal conversation.
- **Social** body contact can range from four to twelve feet and is used for public interactions and two-way conversations. Distances beyond twelve feet are usually reserved for one-way communication, such as classroom lectures and public speeches.

Effective Listening

Effective communicators know that listening is just as important as talking. Even if someone expresses their thoughts and feelings very well; if the other person isn't listening, the message won't get across. Listening to the other person not only means you're hearing what they're saying, but also trying to understand what they're trying to convey. The ability to focus entirely on what the other person is expressing is known as **active listening**.

Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. Often, when people talk to each other, they don't listen attentively. They are often distracted, half listening, or half thinking about something else. This is because they assume they already know what the other person is going to say, so rather than paying attention, they focus on how they can respond.

Active listening requires you to comprehend, interpret and evaluate what you have heard. This involves a concerted effort along a willingness to take the time to truly understand the other person. A communication model designed to help guide you through the process of active listening is known as **L.E.A.P.S.**

L.E.A.P.S.

L.E.A.P.S. is an acronym which stands for:

- **L**isten to the message received carefully and attentively. Keep an open mind to what is being said and don't be quick to offer advice or solutions.
 - **E**mpathize by acknowledging the emotions that are being expressed. It is very important to receive the message without judgment about the sender or the message sent.
 - **A**sk questions in order to get more information and to clarify information you do not understand.
 - **P**araphrase what the person has said to ensure you understand the information correctly.
 - **S**ummarize by restating the situation with all the facts to clarify the role, problem or behavior.
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Learning Activity



To successfully complete this requirement you will need to demonstrate effective communication skills by performing the following activity:

- Conduct a face-to-face conversation with your supervisor. The topic of this discussion should be based on one of the five main topics of this lesson.
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For You and Your Supervisor

In order to meet the sign-off requirement for this lesson **YOU** must perform the following:

1. Prior to meeting with your supervisor review the contents of this lesson and organize your thoughts.
2. Present/discuss your chosen topic.

Before signing off on this requirement your **SUPERVISOR** must:

1. Observe the interaction to ensure the member demonstrates the proper communication skills discussed in this lesson.
 2. Provide the member with corrective feedback and answer any questions they may have related to this topic.
 3. Sign-off the check-off sheet on the Record of Enlisted Professional Military Education (E-PME) Performance Requirements.
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References

The following reference was used in developing this lesson:

- Coast Guard Apprentice Leadership Program
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