

# COMMUNICATION



## Lesson: Communication

**This lesson is about different communication styles. It contains information about how to develop the valuable interpersonal skills involved in being an effective communicator.**

**Level:** Intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level B1 and above)

**Time:** 60 mins

**How to use this lesson:**

This lesson is best done in class, where you can check your students' understanding of the ideas and vocabulary presented. Allow plenty of time for discussion of the different aspects of the topic (see suggestions below).

Teacher's notes

## Worksheet A

- 1 Explain that this table represents some of the *dos and don'ts* of good communication. Students may need help with some of the vocabulary so encourage them to ask if they are not sure about anything. You may want to go through the pairs of points with the class and ask students for their comments after each pair. Alternatively, allow about five minutes for students to read the comments alone or discuss them with a partner.

Allow a further two minutes for students to try to add their own ideas (preferably working alone).

Continue the class discussion, incorporating students' suggestions. Ask for examples from their own experience where you think is appropriate.

Prompt with further questions such as:

- ▶ *When is it really important to communicate effectively?*
- ▶ *What are the results of bad communication skills?*
- ▶ *Can you suggest ways to avoid speaking when you're really angry? (Take a deep breath, count to ten, etc.)*
- ▶ *Does your body language play a part in communication? How?*
- ▶ *What sort of things do people do in conversation that you like? What do they do that you dislike?*

- 2 Ask the class to read the situations to make sure they understand them fully. Allow up to ten minutes for students to write their answers. Those who finish quickly can discuss and compare their answers with a partner.

Elicit answers from as many students as possible, asking them to tell you the exact words they would use where appropriate (this can be a useful way to gently guide students in how to use more diplomatic English). For each situation, tell students (or ask them to suggest) which approaches are *confrontational*, *over-aggressive*, *(in)effective*, *(un)reasonable*, etc. See suggestions below for each situation. There are no right or wrong answers – what suits some people might not suit others, and there are other variables. Treat this as an opportunity for students to say what they would do and perhaps question the usefulness of the alternatives. The main aim is discussion, so if students disagree, they need to say why in English. Bear in mind that examples of communication styles are given in exercise 3, so you might want to preview some of these words.

Notes on the situations:

- 1 Waiting patiently despite being treated badly turns you into a victim, but it does avoid a confrontation. Insisting on being served in your turn might work, but it might anger the employee even more, so nothing would be gained. Walking out might be a solution for some, but its effectiveness would depend on how much you needed the goods.
- 2 This situation aims to focus students' attention on communication in public and how they feel about it. Some might flatly refuse to do it, while others might panic and spend the next 24 hours preparing. Others still might be totally relaxed about it.
- 3 Use this situation to find out how good your students might be in a confrontation. Some might suggest listening carefully and sympathetically, while others might feel defensive. Students might suggest ways to calm the agitated friend down.

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- This will reveal how much patience and tact they have. Here, it would be useful for students to suggest the actual words they might use. Invite students to help define the boundary between being firm and being offensive (e.g. the difference between, "I'm really sorry but can you please leave me to finish this" and "How many more times are you going to interrupt me?").
- This is a difficult situation and one in which you don't want to cause offence. One practical solution would be to explain quickly that you have to leave but get the other person's phone number and call the next day.
- Tact and diplomacy play a big role in the responses here. This kind of phone conversation is difficult and some might even suggest hanging up without any attempt to be polite if they have been bothered many times by similar calls. Make sure students understand the full range of responses from sympathetic (this person is just doing a job) to angry (you do not want to be disturbed by this kind of call). Ask students to say how they would feel after each response.

## Worksheet B

- Students may not know all of the target words in this exercise but they can make educated guesses about some of them. Start by asking them to read the texts without filling in the gaps – just to think about their answers. Allow up to five minutes for this. Those who finish early can compare with a partner. Then elicit suggestions, starting with the first text.

Draw attention to the examples embedded in the texts to help students arrive at the correct answers. For example, gap 1 (passive) refers to people who don't often "get what they want because they often give in and say yes to things they don't really want"; gap 2 (aggressive) refers to people who "have more power over the other person, but it's a form of bullying, which leaves the other person feeling used", etc.

Discuss the texts as a class, asking for other examples of the communication styles mentioned. The aim of this discussion is for students to fully understand the different styles.

With reference to the first text, you may want to point out that experts have outlined another style, called passive-aggressive. When people are *passive-aggressive*, they behave in a passive way but the intention is to hurt or influence the other person. Examples of this include sulking, refusing to speak, deliberately doing a job badly, etc. Things that people say can be sarcastic, such as "Fine!" "Whatever!" or "That's OK. You just go ahead and have a good time without me. I'll just stay here on my own!" Ask students to think of other examples that they have experienced.

Answers:

- |   |            |   |               |   |             |
|---|------------|---|---------------|---|-------------|
| 1 | passive    | 4 | argumentative | 7 | patient     |
| 2 | aggressive | 5 | patronising   | 8 | sympathetic |
| 3 | assertive  | 6 | tactful       | 9 | persuasive  |

- Allow 3-4 minutes for students to read the responses and think about the styles they represent. If you prefer, they can discuss this in pairs. Elicit answers.

Follow up by asking students to suggest how the responses could be different. For instance, in situation 1, what would happen if you didn't take a deep breath and count to ten? In situation 2, what would be a more assertive way to deal with this?

Answers:

- Students might suggest that this is too *passive*, but it is a *patient* response and shows *tactful* behaviour.
- This is a *passive* response. It might also be *tactful* if, for example, you often (or have recently) put your friend in a similar position.
- This response is *aggressive*. It is also *argumentative* and could be considered *patronising*, implying that the other person is stupid or inferior.



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- 5 For each situation, divide the class into groups of three or four and give them five minutes to prepare, following the guidelines given. Ideally, you should play the role of the extra person (manager/team member/friend), responding in an appropriate way to the things the group say. It would be better to do this one group at a time, with the other students listening so that they can discuss it afterwards. In large classes, or if time is limited, ask other students to play the extra role.

Follow up with a discussion on how well each situation was handled. Encourage critics to use the vocabulary in exercise 3 (*I thought X was too aggressive*) when discussing the role play. Ask for suggestions to deal with each situation differently.

As well as the words chosen, students may have communicated different things using body language or tone of voice. Draw attention to anything that was noteworthy.

Depending on the group and their interests, you can add further role-play activities. For example, if the students know each other very well, you could ask them to play a team of doctors. They have to discuss how they will tell their patient (you) that he/she has a serious illness and there are various ways to approach it. As above, give them five minutes to discuss what they are going to say before they call you in.

Other situations could include persuading a friend to join the group on a trip, complaining that someone is not doing enough work on a joint project, talking a teacher into letting them do the lesson outside, etc.

Teacher's notes



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### Worksheet A

- 1 Read the check-list below and try to add one more example in each category. Discuss your answers.

# Communicating: the right and wrong way to do things

Here are some good and bad ways to communicate

#### Effective communicating

- ☆ Be a good listener; wait until the other person has finished speaking.
- ☆ Give the other person your full attention. Stop what you are doing while he/she is talking.
- ☆ Maintain eye contact.
- ☆ Make encouraging sounds, like "Go on," "Really?" etc.
- ☆ Let the other person finish each sentence.
- ☆ Emphasise the point you want to make, perhaps using facts or evidence to back it up.
- ☆ Ask the other person about himself/herself.
- ☆ Choose when to talk and what to say – wait a little if you are angry.
- ☆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☆ \_\_\_\_\_

#### Ineffective communicating

- ☆ Keep interrupting because you have something important to say.
- ☆ Fiddle with things, or look at your computer/phone, while saying "Go on – I am listening".
- ☆ Look out of the window.
- ☆ Yawn.
- ☆ Finish the other person's sentences for them.
- ☆ Mention the point you want to make, but stress your feelings and repeat them.
- ☆ Keep to the subject of you.
- ☆ Say what you think when you think it, even if you are angry.
- ☆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☆ \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 Imagine you are in the situations below. For each one, briefly note down what you would do next or what you would say.

- 1 You are waiting for a shop assistant to serve you but he keeps serving other people. When you try to get his attention, he is rude to you and tells you to wait.

What do you do/say? \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 You are a member of a club and one of the organisers asks you to give a short talk about the club for some visitors. The talk is tomorrow.

What do you do/say? \_\_\_\_\_

Student's notes



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- 3 A friend comes to your house and is clearly angry. Even worse, your friend is angry with you, although you can't imagine why.

What do you do/say? \_\_\_\_\_

- 4 The same person has interrupted you three times for trivial reasons and you are really desperate to finish something. They are about to interrupt you for a fourth time.

What do you do/say? \_\_\_\_\_

- 5 You are just leaving a party and an old friend, who you hadn't noticed earlier, comes up to you for a chat. The problem is, you have to leave now or you will miss the last bus.

What do you do/say? \_\_\_\_\_

- 6 You receive a phone call from somebody trying to sell you something. You are not interested.

What do you do/say? \_\_\_\_\_

Student's copy



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### Worksheet B

Student's copy

#### 3 Complete the texts using the words given.

Experts say that communication can be divided into three styles. In \_\_\_\_\_ communication, the person doesn't often get what they want because they often give in and say yes to things they don't really want. They often do this to make other people like them but the opposite often happens and people think they are 'easy' or 'soft'. In \_\_\_\_\_ communication, you have more power over the other person, but it's a form of bullying, which leaves the other person feeling used. Yes, you might get what you want but it's no way to build a lasting relationship. With \_\_\_\_\_ communication, you clearly and firmly say what you want, so that the other person understands perfectly. Some people find this difficult to do but experts agree that it is the best method.

**aggressive / assertive / passive**

I sometimes wonder if anyone has got a family like mine. I've got two brothers – one younger and one older. When I was growing up, the younger one was really \_\_\_\_\_. Whatever I said, he seemed to say the opposite, as if he was always looking for a fight. My older brother was OK but he never really thought much of my opinion. He was often \_\_\_\_\_, saying things like, "What do you know about it? You're just a kid". I've got a sister too. She was the \_\_\_\_\_ one, always trying to keep the peace between us and getting us to see things from the other person's point of view. Sometimes it worked, but there were a lot of fights!

**tactful / argumentative / patronising**

Anyone will tell you that relationships sometimes need hard work if they're going to succeed. Sometimes you need to be \_\_\_\_\_ with the other person, such as when they're behaving strangely or doing something that annoys you. You also have to be \_\_\_\_\_ when the other person has a problem – after all, wouldn't you want them to listen to your problems? But there are many other ways that we behave in a relationship. For example, we can be \_\_\_\_\_ if we want to do something but the other person doesn't. It's all about give and take. Relationships are rarely perfect, but we can make them work.

**persuasive / sympathetic / patient**

#### 4 Look at the situations below and, using the words from exercise 3, describe the reaction.

- 1 In an argument, a friend says something hurtful to you. You are really angry but you count to ten in your head and avoid saying something that you might regret later.

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- 2 Someone asks you to do something that you really haven't got time to do. You agree to do it because it's for a friend and you want them to like you.

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- 3 You get a phone call from a friend while you are studying. You say, "I told you not to phone me today! I can't talk to you – I'm studying!" and put the phone down.

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### 5 Role play. In groups of three or four, act out the following situations.

- 1 You are the owners of a company which is going through a difficult time. You have decided that the only way for the company to survive is to make one of your managers redundant (his/her role will be played by your teacher or another student). This person has worked with you for many years and you are all friends. Decide:

- ▶ what sort of tone you will use when speaking to him/her
- ▶ how you are going to break the news to him/her
- ▶ who is going to say what
- ▶ what you can say to help 'soften the blow'

Now act out the situation. Afterwards, discuss how well (or badly) you dealt with it.

- 2 You are all members of the same group (you decide – it could be a sports group or an organising committee for a party, for example). You want to ask another member (your teacher or another student) to take on some extra responsibilities. Decide:

- ▶ what you are going to ask the other person to do
- ▶ why you can't do it yourselves
- ▶ why the other person should do it
- ▶ how you are going to persuade the other person to do it
- ▶ the advantages of the other person doing it

Now act out the situation. Afterwards, discuss how well (or badly) you dealt with it.

- 3 You are a group of friends. Another friend (your teacher or another student) has been behaving strangely recently. He/She has done and said some things that you didn't like (you decide what they are). You are worried about your friend, and a little annoyed. Decide:

- ▶ what sort of tone you will use when speaking to him/her
- ▶ how you are going to introduce the subject
- ▶ who is going to say what (each person should give an example of the bad behaviour)
- ▶ what you are going to ask your friend to do
- ▶ why your friend should do it

Now act out the situation. Afterwards, discuss how well (or badly) you dealt with it.

Student's copy

