

15.15: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Discuss verbal communication and its role in business
- Discuss nonverbal communication and its role in business

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is perhaps the most obvious and understood mode of communication, and it is certainly a powerful tool in your communication toolbox. Put simply, verbal communication is the sharing of information between two individuals using words.

Spoken versus Written Communication

While we typically focus on speech while talking about verbal communication, it's important to remember that writing is also a form of verbal communication. After all, writing uses words too!

Imagine for a moment that you're a college student who is struggling with material in a class. Rather than simply giving up, you decide that you're going to ask your instructor for the guidance you need to make it through the end of the semester. Now, you have a few choices for using verbal communication to do this. You might choose to call your instructor, if they've provided contact information, or talk to them in person after class or during office hours. You may take a different approach and send them an email. You can probably identify your own list of pros and cons for each of these approaches. But really, what's the difference between writing and talking in these situations? Let's look at four of the major differences between the two:

1. **Formal versus Informal:** We generally use spoken communication informally while we use written communication formally.
2. **Synchronous versus Asynchronous:** Synchronous communication is communication that takes place in real time, such as a conversation with a friend. In contrast, asynchronous communication is communication that is not immediate and occurs over longer periods of time, such as letters, email, or even text messages.
3. **Recorded versus Unrecorded:** Written communication is generally archived and recorded for later retrieval while spoken communication is generally not recorded.

Benefits of Spoken Communication

Spoken communication can be a conversation, a meeting, or even a speech. Spoken communication is powerful in that it allows for input from every part of the social communication model. You encode your thoughts into the spoken word and look to your audience to decode and take the message in. You can ask for feedback directly to confirm understanding of your message.

In a world where we do most of our talking by email and text, spoken communication is a breath of fresh air. Leverage the power of spoken communication to create relationships—you can establish a rapport and a sense of trust with your audience when you speak with them. Spoken communication allows you to bond on a more emotional level with your listeners.

Spoken communication also makes it easier to ensure understanding by addressing objections and clearing up misunderstandings: you can adjust your message as you communicate it, based on the feedback you're getting from your audience. Spoken communication allows you to walk away from a conversation with a higher degree of certainty that your message was received.

Verbal communication is a powerful tool, and it's made even more powerful when paired with listening and nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication

We've already employed a little bit of nonverbal communication with the active listening skills we've previously discussed: nodding, facial expressions, leaning toward the speaker to show interest—all of those are forms of nonverbal communication. Body language can reinforce your spoken message or it can contradict it entirely.

There's a myth that says that when you speak, only 35 percent of your communication is verbal and 65 percent of it is nonverbal. That's not entirely true (or else foreign languages would be much easier to understand!). But it's absolutely true that nonverbal communication can make or break your message. Here are some types of nonverbal communication and the effects they can have on the success of your communication:

- **Facial expressions:** Your teenage cousin we referred to at the beginning of this section might have told you he was happy, but his apathetic facial expression may have communicated different information. Facial expressions—happy, sad, angry—help you convey your message. Be aware of your facial expression when you talk and particularly when you listen, which is when it's easy to forget.
- **Gestures:** When you speak, a gesture can make your message stronger. Pointing out something you want your listener to look at more closely is an example of nonverbal communication that makes your message understood. Motioning warmly toward a coworker who deserves special recognition, making a fist to show frustration or anger, such gestures help further engage your audience when you speak.
- **Proximity:** How close you are to your audience when you speak sends a nonverbal message. If your size is imposing and you leave a very small distance between you and your listener, it's likely your nonverbal communication will be a bit threatening. On the other hand, giving someone too much space is an awkward nonverbal communication that might confuse your listener.
- **Touch:** Shaking an audience member's hand, putting your hand on his shoulder: these are nonverbal cues that can affect the success of your message. Touch communicates affection, but it also communicates power. In fact, when women touch a listener, it's often assumed that they're being affectionate or conveying empathy, but when a man touches a listener, it can be taken as a sign of communicating power or even dominance.
- **Eye contact:** Making and maintaining eye contact with an audience when you're verbally communicating or listening communicates to the other party that you're interested and engaged in the conversation. Good eye contact often conveys the trait of honesty to the other party.
- **Appearance:** Your clothing, hair, and jewelry are also a part of nonverbal communication. If you put a dachshund pin on your lapel each morning (because you have a pet dachshund), that says something about you as a person. Similarly, the quality and condition of your clothing, how it fits, if it's appropriate for the season—all of these things speak nonverbally about you as a communicator.

Nonverbal communication reveals a lot about you as a communicator and how you relate to other people. It pays to be aware of the elements of your nonverbal communication so you can maximize the impact of your message.

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Verbal and Nonverbal Communication. **Authored by:** Freedom Learning Group. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Spoken Versus Written Communication. **Authored by:** Scott T Paynton and Linda K Hahn. **Provided by:** Humboldt State University. **Located at:** https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Survey_of_Communication_Study. **License:** CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike

This page titled [15.15: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication](#) is shared under a [CC BY 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Nina Burokas](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [1.15: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication](#) by Nina Burokas is licensed [CC BY 4.0](#). Original source: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-businesscommunicationmgrs>.