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# **Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Governance**

**Module 2**

## **Learner Manual**

**BSBXCM401 Apply communication strategies in the workplace**

**COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**

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## Prepare for Workplace Communication

Workplace communication is any type of communication you do at work about work. This includes things like communicating about individual tasks, sharing project status updates or giving feedback to managers or employees. Knowing how to communicate in the workplace is a key part of effective collaboration—because if you can’t communicate clearly, then you risk miscommunication, confusion or even unintentionally hurting someone’s feelings.

Communication in the workplace can happen face-to-face, in writing, over a video conferencing platform or in a group meeting. It can also happen in real time or asynchronously, which happens when you’re communicating about work over email, with recorded video or in a platform like a project management tool. Some examples of workplace communication include:

- Team meetings.
- One to one feedback sessions.
- Receiving information.
- Communicating about project status or progress.
- Collaboration on cross-functional tasks.
- Non-verbal communication.

Effective communication in the workplace is all about where, how and when you are communicating.

### **Know where to communicate and the context**

Communication happens in many different forms: face-to-face, over email, via instant messages and in work management platforms. To be most effective, make sure you are following communication guidelines and messaging about the right things in the right places.

Sometimes, knowing where to communicate is half the battle. Your company may have different communication tools which makes knowing which tool to use all the more important. Which tool is appropriate for your question or comment? Do you need to communicate in real time or is it ok to send an asynchronous message? If you are not sure, ask a team member or manager where you should be sending different types of messages. It is important for everyone to be on the same page.

### **Build collaboration skills**

Collaboration is the bedrock of effective teamwork. In order to build strong team collaboration skills, you need to practice open and honest communication. This doesn’t necessarily mean always agreeing on things. Knowing how to disagree and work through those differences is a key part of collaboration too.

Collaboration and communication skills are kind of a “chicken and egg” scenario. You can build good collaboration by communicating effectively but *knowing* how to collaborate is a key component of strong communication. Essentially, this just means you will have to practice improving both collaboration and communication skills over time. As you improve team collaboration, you will get better at conveying information and opinions in a work environment and as a result, that honest communication will make collaboration feel more effortless.

### **Talk face-to-face when you can**

Perhaps the most tried-and-true way to avoid miscommunication is to talk face-to-face. If your team is virtual, speaking via video conferencing also works. Face-to-face communication is particularly important if you know a conversation is going to be hard. Tone can be difficult to communicate

through writing so ideally, you want your team member to be able to see your facial expressions and body language.

If your team is remote or distributed, communicating via a phone call instead of a video conference could work as well. Video conferencing fatigue is real, and it can make collaboration and communication particularly difficult for remote teams. Communicating over the phone reduces some of the visual strain, while still giving you the ability to hear your team member's voice and tone.

#### **Watch your body language and tone of voice**

Communication isn't just about what you say, it is also about how you say it. Make sure you are not crossing your arms or coming off as abrupt. Sometimes your body language may have nothing to do with the current situation, maybe you are tired or stressed about something in your personal life. But your team members, who might not have that context, could see your actions and assume you are angry or upset about something. Particularly for hard conversations, try to relax your body language and facial expressions to avoid giving off any unintentional cues.

#### **Prioritise two-way communication**

Listening is just as important to communication in the workplace as talking. Part of being a collaborative team member is listening to other people's ideas instead of just trying to put your own ideas out there.

There are two common types of listening: listening to reply and listening to understand. When you listen to reply, you are focusing on what you are going to say next, rather than what the other person is saying. With this type of listening, you risk missing key information or even repeating what the other person just said.

Instead, try to listen to understand. Listen to what the other person has to say without thinking about how you are going to reply. If you do think of something you want to say, jot it down so you can go back to listening to understand, instead of trying to remember the thing you want to say next.

#### **Make sure you are speaking to the right person**

Effective workplace communication is as much about who you are talking to as it is about what you are saying. Poor communication often occurs when you are talking to the wrong people or trying to share information in the wrong setting.

To avoid this, make sure the right people are in the room or receiving the message. If you are not sure who that would be, go through an exercise to identify any important project stakeholders who might be missing.<sup>1</sup>

## **Adhere to Legal Requirements**

### **Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace**

There are federal, state and territory laws in Australia to protect people from discrimination and harassment.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has statutory responsibilities under the Age Discrimination Act 2004, Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986, Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Racial Discrimination Act 1975 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1984.

In addition to the federal legislation, each state and territory in Australia has equal opportunity and anti-discrimination agencies, with statutory responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://asana.com/resources/effective-communication-workplace>

Commonwealth laws and the state/territory laws generally overlap. However, the laws apply in different ways and employers must comply with all legislation.

Employers also need to check the exemptions and exceptions in Commonwealth and state or territory legislation. An exemption or exception under one Act does not mean employers are exempt under another Act.<sup>2</sup>

Employees, commission agents, contractors and partners within a partnership are all protected from workplace discrimination in NSW by the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977. Many employees in the private sector will also be covered by the Fair Work Act 2009 and will therefore be able to bring a complaint to the Fair Work Commission if they are discriminated against.<sup>3</sup>

## Communication Styles

Broadly speaking, there are four different communication styles. Here is how each communication style is commonly defined and how these styles can show up at work:

### 1. Passive communication style

A passive communicator doesn't speak up frequently. Instead, they are happy to go with the flow and support the needs of others. Passive communicators usually are not confrontational and they may even come off as submissive. Their non-verbal communication may include things like crossing their arms while avoiding eye contact.

### 2. Aggressive communication style

A person with this communication style is very confident in their point of view, to the point where they may not listen to their teammate's opinions. They often interject their own ideas into a conversation and may sometimes use confrontational language like "you're wrong" or "you don't get it." Non-verbally, this person will maintain eye contact.

### 3. Passive-aggressive communication style

A person with this communication style will display a pattern of indirectly expressing negative feelings instead of openly communicating them. Their verbal and non-verbal communication often do not match. It involves expressing discontent or hostility through subtle, often manipulative actions. This behavior can manifest in various forms, such as sarcasm, sulking or withholding information.

### 4. Assertive communication style

A person with this communication style stands up for themselves. They are the type of communicator who knows how to explain and advocate for what they want, the rights of others or their own well-being. Assertive communicators may use hand gestures while communicating non-verbally and they likely have calm or happy facial expressions while speaking.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/quick-guide-australian-discrimination-laws>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gotocourt.com.au/civil-law/nsw/workplace-discrimination/#:~:text=The%20Anti%2DDiscrimination%20Act%201977%20makes%20discrimination%20unlawful%20toward%20job,the%20Act%20and%20is%20unlawful.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://asana.com/resources/communication-styles>

## Communication Methods

There are four main categories of communication styles, including verbal, non-verbal, written and visual.

### Verbal

Verbal communication is the use of language to transfer information through speaking. It is one of the most common types, often used during presentations, video conferences and phone calls, meetings and one-on-one conversations. Verbal communication is important because it is efficient. It can be helpful to support verbal communication with both non-verbal and written communication.

Here are a few steps you can take to develop your verbal communication skills:

- **Use a strong, confident speaking voice** - Especially when presenting information to a few people or a group, be sure to speak loudly enough so that everyone can hear you. Speak in a confident voice and articulate your words, so that your ideas are clear and easy to understand.
- **Use active listening** - The other side of using verbal communication is intently listening to others. Active listening skills are key when conducting a meeting, presentation or even when participating in a one-on-one conversation. Doing so will help you grow as a communicator.
- **Avoid filler words** - It can be tempting, especially during a presentation, to use filler words such as *um*, *like*, *so* or *yeah*. While it might feel natural after completing a sentence or pausing to collect your thoughts, it can also be distracting for your audience. Try practising with a trusted friend or colleague who can call attention to your use of filler words. Try to replace them by taking a breath when you are tempted to *um* and *ah*.

### Non-verbal

Non-verbal communication is the use of body language, gestures and facial expressions to convey information to others. It can be used both intentionally and unintentionally. For example, you might smile unintentionally when you hear a pleasing or funny phrase or piece of information. Non-verbal communication is helpful when trying to understand the thoughts and feelings of others.

If they are displaying 'closed' body language such as crossed arms or legs, or hunched shoulders, they might be feeling anxious, angry or nervous. If they are displaying 'open' body language with both feet on the floor and arms by their side or on the table, they are likely feeling positive and open to information.

Here are a few steps you can take to develop your non-verbal communication skills:

- **Notice how your emotions feel, physically** - Throughout the day, as you experience a range of emotions (anything from energised, bored, happy or frustrated), try to identify where you feel that emotion inside your body. For example, if you are feeling anxious, you might notice that your stomach feels tight. Developing self-awareness of how your emotions affect your body can give you greater mastery over your external presentation.
- **Be intentional about your non-verbal communications** - Make an effort to display positive body language when you feel alert, open and positive about your surroundings. You can also use body language to support your verbal communication if you feel confused or anxious about information, like using a furrowed brow. Use body language alongside verbal communication, such as asking follow-up questions or pulling the presenter aside to give feedback.
- **Mimic non-verbal communication that you find effective** - If you find certain facial expressions or body language beneficial to a certain setting, use it as a guide when improving



your own non-verbal communication. For example, if you see that when someone nods their head it communicates approval efficiently, use it in your next meeting when you have the same feeling.

### Written

Written communication is the act of writing, typing or printing symbols like letters and numbers to convey information. It is helpful because it provides a record of information for later reference. Writing is commonly used to share information through books, pamphlets, blogs, letters, memos and more. Emails and chats are a common form of written communication in the workplace.

Here are a few steps that you can take to develop your written communication skills:

- **Strive for simplicity** - Written communication should be as simple and clear as possible. While it might be helpful to include a lot of detail in instructions, for example, you should review your writing several times to make sure it is as concise as possible for your audience.
- **Don't rely on tone** - Because you do not have the nuance of verbal and non-verbal communication, be careful when you are trying to communicate a certain tone in your writing. For example, attempting to communicate a joke, sarcasm or excitement might be interpreted differently depending on the audience. Instead, keep your writing as simple and plain as possible and follow up with verbal communication, where you can add more personality.
- **Take time to review your written communication** - Setting time aside to re-read your emails, letters or memos can help you identify mistakes or opportunities to say something more simply. For important communications or those that will be sent to a large number of people, it is helpful to have a trusted colleague review your text as well.
- **Keep a record of writing that you find effective or enjoyable** - If you receive a particular pamphlet, email or memo that you find particularly helpful or interesting, save it to use as inspiration for your own writing.

### Visual

Visual communication is the act of using photographs, art, drawings, sketches, charts and graphs to convey information. Visuals are often used as an aid during presentations to provide helpful context alongside written and/or verbal communication. People have different learning styles – using different types of communication makes the information more accessible to all. Adding visuals will help a portion of your audience to retain your ideas and information better.

Here are a few steps that you can take to develop your visual communication skills:

- **Ask others before including visuals** - If you are considering sharing a visual aid in your presentation or email, consider asking others for feedback. Adding visuals can sometimes make concepts confusing or muddled. Getting a third-party perspective can help you decide whether the visual adds value.
- **Consider your audience** - Be sure to include visuals that are easily understood by your audience. For example, if you are displaying a chart with unfamiliar data, be sure to explain what is happening in the visual and how it relates to what you are saying. You should never use sensitive, offensive, violent or graphic visuals in any form.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://au.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/types-of-communication>



## Providing Instruction in the Workplace

### Tips To Give Effective Instructions

#### Make Expected Results Clear

Be very clear on what exactly you want from the person, the output or deliverable you expect at the end of following those instructions. This part is most important. Making sure of the outcome is a battle half won. Can you write down or articulate clearly and succinctly what you expect to be done?

Most managers are casual about this part. When they themselves are not clear about the outcome, they will surely transfer the same ambiguity to the listener. Even if the person fails to understand some of your instructions, if they are clear about the expected result, they will rise to the occasion. If you give due credit to their intelligence and ingenuity, you will be pleasantly surprised by the results.

#### Don't Give Too many Instructions

The more instructions, the less the comprehension and the higher the likelihood of non-compliance. The human brain finds it easier to understand and remember anything between two and five points or steps.

So, be it a process or a set of instructions, it is better to restrict them to a maximum of five. Easy-to-understand language and logically sequenced steps will help. If you can write them down and ask your colleague to read them out loud for clarity, it will be a pathway for success.

#### Go Slow

People tend to rush through when giving instructions. They talk almost at the speed of their thoughts. But listening comprehension of people can be low. We speak faster than we can comprehend. You will be surprised how much the listener has missed if you ask them to repeat what you have told them. Keeping this in mind, the instructor needs to drop their speed to 50% of their normal speed.

#### Check Comprehension

It may sound presumptuous but asking the person to explain to you, what they have understood will almost always surprise you with the gaps in understanding or plain misunderstanding. This can also be done diplomatically. We don't need to make the listener feel he is an imbecile. We can always ask if they have any suggestions or doubts.

#### Assure Support

Assure the person that they can always come back to you in case of doubts. People tend to give instructions and assume they are understood and will be remembered perfectly. It is always a good practice to end the session with an assurance that you are available if they hit a rough spot. It is also a good idea to monitor progress, especially in the case of trainees.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://elearningindustry.com/giving-instructions-101-for-managers-and-trainers>

## Facilitate Respectful Communication

### Respecting Diversity

At its core, cultural diversity is about accepting and respecting people's differences and understanding that everyone is unique. The same can be said for communication. To do it well, you need to understand your audience and craft your message in a way that will make the most sense to them.

When the audience is culturally diverse, the challenge is to understand their differences and be sensitive to how your message will be received.

Four ways to communicate better in today's diverse workplace:

1. **Use clear language-** When you are communicating with a culturally diverse audience, keep your language clear, concise and straightforward. Avoid jargon, slang terms, euphemisms and colloquial expressions. For example, you could say, "That sales report was fantastic!" Instead of, "That sales report was a slam dunk!"
2. **Understand differences in body language-** You may be surprised to learn that different cultures have very different practices when it comes to non-verbal forms of communication. For instance, in most countries, people don't greet each other by shaking hands and some cultures find it disrespectful to engage in direct eye contact. Also, some cultures have different comfort levels when it comes to personal space and touching. When in doubt, leave at least one arm's length between you and your colleagues and keep your hands to yourself.
3. **Practise reflective listening or paraphrasing -** When in conversation, paraphrasing or repeating the message back is a good habit to get into. This will help clarify meaning and eliminate issues that may surface as a result of a misunderstanding. The same is true for written communication, paraphrase to clarify any doubts you may have.
4. **Be open and inclusive of other cultures -** Although it is natural to gravitate towards others who share our preferences and traditions, getting to know our fellow colleagues from culturally diverse backgrounds can help build relations and open up your world to new experiences. Bear in mind that they may be new to this country and have challenges of their own as they try to navigate a different language, customs and way of life.<sup>7</sup>

### Cross-cultural relationships

The similarities and differences that exist between you, co-workers and clients may have an impact on your work. Culture plays an important part in shaping a person's behaviours, thought patterns and relationships with others.

Cultural values, norms and beliefs provide a framework for people to make assumptions about and respond to their circumstances. Culture also strongly influences perceptions and expectations.

Cultural perceptions and expectations will directly impact on the way you work with each client and co-worker. Failure to recognise cultural differences may cause potentially serious problems when you are dealing with others in the workplace.

Every society or culture has its own expectations of the role of service providers and clients. This influences:

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<sup>7</sup> <https://wellbeing.lifeworks.com/au/newsletter-content/effective-communication-in-a-culturally-diverse-workplace/#:~:text=When%20you%20are%20communicating%20with,%2C%20euphemisms%2C%20and%20colloquial%20expressions>

- The way a client relates to the service provider.
- The way workers relate to clients and co-workers.
- Expected professional behaviour.
- The way in which a service is being provided.
- The people who may be involved in the process.

## Cultural Barriers to Communication

As humans, we grow with a certain mindset and have an understanding of the world around us. It is mostly our surroundings and the people we surround ourselves with that teach us their thoughts and beliefs. Therefore, people have different ways of thinking and understanding, owing to their cultural influences. It can give rise to communication barriers between people from different cultures. As it is one's culture that gives rise to the communicational barrier, they are known as **cultural barriers of communication**.

There are six main factors that lead to communicational barriers:

- **Ethnocentrism:** The belief that one's culture is superior to another's.
- **Stereotyping:** preconceived notions about others.
- **Psychological barriers:** the way we subconsciously react to a situation.
- **Language barriers:** Not being able to fluently speak and understand a team's language.
- **Geographical distance:** Building a connection within the team becomes strenuous when the members are only connected virtually.
- **Conflicting values:** Communication between people can become strenuous when one's values and practices are disturbed.<sup>8</sup>

## Resolving cross-cultural misunderstandings

Community and services organisations need to consider the diversity of their client's values, beliefs and cultural expectations. To work effectively with culturally diverse clients, you will need the appropriate knowledge and skills.

- Be aware of your own cultural background/experiences, attitudes, values and biases that might influence your ability to assist clients from diverse cultural populations. It is essential that you correct any prejudices and biases you may have regarding different cultural groups.
- Educate yourself wherever possible to enhance your understanding and to address the needs of culturally diverse clients. This may involve learning about cultural, social, psychological, political, economic and historical material specific to the particular ethnic group being served.
- Recognise that ethnicity and culture may have an impact on a client's behaviour.
- Assist clients to become aware of their own cultural values and norms and facilitate discovery of ways clients can apply this awareness to their own lives and to society at large, as well as within the organisation.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/business-studies/organizational-communication/cultural-barriers/#:~:text=Cultural\\_barriers\\_prevent\\_people\\_from,languages\\_beliefs\\_or\\_values](https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/business-studies/organizational-communication/cultural-barriers/#:~:text=Cultural_barriers_prevent_people_from,languages_beliefs_or_values)

- Respect the client's religious and/or spiritual beliefs and values.
- Work to eliminate biases, prejudices and discriminatory practices.
- Provide information in a language that the client can understand.
- Provide information in writing, along with oral explanations.

Specific needs that may need to be addressed include areas where cultural expectations could affect relationships with clients and co-workers include:

**Family involvement:** Some Western societies focus on individualism and therefore any involvement of family members requires approval by the client. However, in cultures that encourage interdependency, the client and/or their family may have an expectation that family members are included in the process.

**Body language:** There can be significant differences between cultures in how people interpret facial expressions or what they consider to be an appropriate degree of personal space or eye contact.

**Gender preferences:** Some cultures may have particular rules regarding appropriate interactions between males and females. It is therefore important to consider the issue of gender preferences when planning service delivery.

It is very important that workers learn to be innovative and flexible when working with people from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, any service delivery may need to be developed and reviewed in collaboration with the client's community as well as the client.

Organisations providing services to the community, have an obligation to develop policies, procedures and standards of practice that aim to eliminate bias and discrimination in their service delivery.

It is important to look for strategies at both the service level and the individual level. Below are some effective strategies for eliminating bias and discrimination.

#### **Engaging with CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) clients and co-workers**

Key issues when you are engaging in direct contact with CALD clients and co-workers include:

- Finding out the individual's preferred language and engaging an interpreter if required.
- Developing a cultural understanding by acknowledging all three layers of cultural factors (and individual culture).
- Artifacts: These "artifacts" are at the surface, those aspects (such as dress) which can be easily discerned, but are hard to understand.
- Espoused Values: Beneath artifacts are "espoused values" which are conscious strategies, goals and philosophies.
- Basic Assumptions and Values: The core, or essence, of culture is represented by the basic underlying assumptions and values, which are difficult to discern because they exist at a largely unconscious level. Yet they provide the key to understanding why things happen in a particular way. These basic assumptions form around deeper dimensions of human existence such as the nature of humans, human relationships and activity, reality and truth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [https://thebusinessprofessor.com/en\\_US/management-leadership-organizational-behavior/three-levels-of-culture-explained](https://thebusinessprofessor.com/en_US/management-leadership-organizational-behavior/three-levels-of-culture-explained)

- Being sensitive to the individual's gender preferences.
- Being conscious of physical contact, especially with those of the opposite sex.
- Being aware of differences in eye contact or handling belongings.
- Consulting the CALD person regarding their religious practice and making appropriate arrangements for them.
- Being aware of bereavement ritual or funeral practices.
- Being aware of differences in communication styles.
- Being aware of differences in interpretation of meanings.
- Clarifying the similarity of and differences between the provision of services in the person's country of origin and Australia.

## Challenges to Communication in the Workplace

Barriers to communication can be evident when people are in a face-to-face situation. Clues which indicate a barrier to getting the message across may include:

- Unreceptive attitude: minimal eye contact, folded arms.
- Several meetings/interviews about the same issue.
- Lack of engagement – uncommunicative.
- Heavy breathing.
- Fidgeting/nervousness.
- Puzzled facial expressions.
- Finger tapping on the table.
- Shrugging shoulders.
- Hands shaking.

In addition to barriers present in face-to-face interactions, there may be other barriers such as:

- The organisation's structure.
- The workplace culture.
- The organisation's policies and procedures.
- The cultural heritage of the workers.
- The emotions of staff.

### Organisation's Structure as a Barrier

Workers in organisations with a hierarchical structure may sometimes find it difficult to have their questions answered promptly due to the fact that their supervisor may need to liaise with others in higher levels in order to provide answers.

This in turn may lead to:

- Delays in providing the most appropriate services or products for clients.

- Due to the number of people involved in the process, the original message or query may be distorted or wrongly interpreted.

In organisations, depending to a degree on their size, physical barriers may also impact upon communication in the sense that the hierarchy may be located on the top floor while other staff are accommodated on the lower levels.

### Workplace Culture as a Barrier

Whilst sociologists have written about organisational cultures based on different dimensions, Handy (1995) described four (4) types of organisational cultures as:

- **Club culture:** This culture is based on personalities with power and influence coming from a central source, usually the founder or leader. These organisations are really clubs of likeminded people where personal contact is more important than formal liaison.
- **Role culture:** The underlying presumption is logic and rationality. Bureaucratic organisations have formal structures and well-defined rules and procedures. The structure defines the authority and responsibility of individual managers.
- **Task culture:** Management is seen as completing a series of projects or solving problems. Task cultures usually have matrix structures or are organised as project teams. The principal concern is to get the job done and performance is judged by results.
- **Existentialist Culture:** An existential culture is found in an organisation whose purpose is to serve the interests of the individuals within it. These organisations are characterised by management having lower status than professional work. Management can only happen with the consent of the managed and the organisation's success depends on the talent of the individuals.<sup>10</sup>

### Policies and Procedures as a Barrier

The policies and procedures of organisations are to be written so that they are applicable to everybody and in a manner and language that is easily understood and practicable.

Barriers relating to policies and procedures may include:

- Not everybody may have access to them readily.
- They may be written in language that is not easily understood.
- They may change without everybody in the workplace aware of the changes.
- What the policy/procedure dictates may not be possible by certain members.

### Language as a Barrier

Not being able to fluently speak and understand a team's language can be frustrating. Not being able to communicate well in a foreign language can also make those team members hesitant to participate in conversations or voice their opinions. In such cases, the team must make an effort to communicate in a manner that accommodates the speakers of foreign languages. This involves speaking clearly, in a

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<sup>10</sup> <https://motamem.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Gods-of-Management-Charles-Handy.pdf>

measured pace (but not so slow as to be condescending) and using more recognisable words. It is also appropriate to avoid local phrases or slang.<sup>11</sup>

Language barriers may take different forms. Although two people may have English as their first language, they may still have difficulty in being understood due to other factors, such as:

- Accents and dialects.
- Commonly used turns of phrase (idioms) from different English-speaking countries or different regions within a country.
- Slang.
- Acronyms and industry jargon can have completely different meanings from one industry sector to another.

### Examples of common Idioms

We use idioms every day in our communication with others, even though we don't give it a second thought because they may come to mind very easily. In some cases, they may explain a situation or set of circumstances better than if we were to describe it.

Listed are twenty idioms that Australians may frequently use:

- Everything but the kitchen sink.
- Actions speak louder than words.
- Can't judge a book by its cover.
- Don't cry over spilt milk.
- Curiosity killed the cat.
- Every cloud has a silver lining.
- Stubby short of a six pack.
- Not the sharpest tool in the shed.
- Feeling a bit under the weather.
- Hit the nail on the head.
- It takes two to tango.
- Missed the boat.
- Each picture paints a thousand words.
- It's a piece of cake.
- Pull the wool over someone's eyes.
- Take it with a grain of salt.
- Straight from the horse's mouth.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/business-studies/organizational-communication/cultural-barriers/#:~:text=Cultural%20barriers%20prevent%20people%20from,languages%2C%20beliefs%2C%20or%20values>.



- Method to the madness.
- See eye to eye.
- Stole someone's thunder.

## Effective Communication with Individuals with Disabilities

Words can have a powerful effect. When talking to a person with disability, or speaking with someone about disability, it is important to use suitable language and terminology.

When practising disability etiquette, staff with disability feel more comfortable and work more productively. Here are some tips.

The basics:

- **Ask before you help:** Adults with disabilities are independent people. Treat them as one and offer help only if the person needs it.
- **Be sensitive about physical contact:** Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Avoid patting a person on the head or touching their wheelchair, scooter or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.
- **Think before you speak:** Always speak direct to the person with a disability, not to their companion, aide or sign language interpreter. Talk to them as with anyone else. Respect their privacy. Consider if it is necessary to ask about the disability. If it isn't, then don't.
- **Don't assume:** People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Don't decide for them about engaging in activities.
- **Respond graciously to requests:** When people who have a disability ask for an adjustment to their workplace, it shows they feel comfortable enough to ask for what they need. If they get a positive response, they will be a more productive and happy worker.<sup>12</sup>

### Communicating with people with physical disabilities

- Remember that someone's personal space can include their wheelchair and crutches. Don't touch or push a person's wheelchair, and don't move their crutches or walking stick without their permission.
- When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair, try to find something to sit on to be at eye level with them.

### Communicating with people with a vision impairment

- When you meet people who have a vision impairment, always address them by name and introduce yourself.
- Speak clearly and in a normal voice – there is no need to raise your voice.
- Remember that people with vision impairment cannot rely on the same visual cues as people without a vision impairment. Make sure you verbalise any thoughts or feelings.
- If a person is accompanied by a guide dog, do not pat it, feed it or distract it while it is in a harness. A dog in a harness is working to support its owner.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://services.anu.edu.au/human-resources/respect-inclusion/disability-communication-etiquette>

- When you enter or leave a room, say something to alert them to your presence and make sure that the person who has a vision impairment will not be embarrassed by speaking to an empty space.

### **Communicating with people with a hearing impairment**

- Gain the person's attention before speaking. Try a gentle tap on the shoulder, a wave or some other visual signal to get the person's attention.
- Face the person directly and maintain eye contact.
- Make sure your mouth is visible – don't cover it with your hand or any other object as you talk.
- Look directly at the person while speaking and don't speak too fast or too slow.
- Don't exaggerate your mouth movements – this will only make it more difficult to lip-read.
- Use short sentences.
- Keep your volume at a natural level – don't shout.

### **Communicating with people with an intellectual disability**

- Make sure you have the person's attention before you start talking. Try using their name or making eye contact.
- Keep your questions simple and your answers easy to understand.
- Remember that your body language is important because people with an intellectual disability often rely on visual cues.
- Be prepared to use visual information or to get visual information from people with an intellectual disability.
- Be specific and direct. Avoid talking using abstracts, acronyms, metaphors or puns.<sup>13</sup>

### **Terminology**

When you're describing someone who has a disability, use 'people first' language - Put the person first. Don't make the disability the person's defining feature. If you are unsure of the correct words to use, don't be afraid to ask the person with disability. They will appreciate your openness and it may help to make them feel more comfortable.<sup>14</sup>

## **Giving and Receiving Feedback**

We are continually receiving and giving feedback, both explicitly through oral and written language and implicitly through gestures and tone of voice. It is important to distinguish feedback from evaluation. Feedback is a formative assessment tool that uses descriptive, constructive and non-judgmental language. Evaluation is a summative assessment tool that judges outcomes and allows for comparison against a standard of performance.

Providing iterative feedback is preferable as this provides the recipients the opportunity to improve before participating in the next activity and before a formal evaluation. Effective feedback is achieved

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.afdo.org.au/resource-communication-with-people-with-disabilities/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://services.anu.edu.au/human-resources/respect-inclusion/disability-communication-etiquette>

by establishing a positive interpersonal relationship between the person(s) providing feedback and the recipient(s) as this creates an environment that fosters development.

## Receiving Feedback Effectively

**Listen to the feedback given** - This means not interrupting. Hear the person out and listen to what they are really saying, not what you assume they will say. You can absorb more information if you are concentrating on listening and understanding rather than being defensive and focusing on your response.

**Be aware of your responses** - Your body language and tone of voice often speak louder than words. Try to avoid putting up barriers. If you look distracted and bored, that sends a negative message as well. Attentiveness indicates that you value what someone has to say and puts both of you at ease.

**Be open** - This means being receptive to new ideas and different opinions. Often, there is more than one way of doing something and others may have a completely different viewpoint on a given topic. You may learn something worthwhile.

**Understand the message** - Make sure you understand what is being said to you, especially before responding to the feedback. Ask questions for clarification if necessary. Listen actively by repeating key points so that you know you have interpreted the feedback correctly. In a group environment, ask for others' feedback before responding. As well, when possible, be explicit as to what kind of feedback you are seeking beforehand so you are not taken by surprise.

**Reflect and decide what to do** - Assess the value of the feedback, the consequences of using it or ignoring it and then decide what to do because of it. Your response is your choice. If you disagree with the feedback, consider asking for a second opinion from someone else.

**Follow up** - There are many ways to follow up on feedback. Sometimes your follow-up will simply involve implementing the suggestions given to you. In other situations, you might want to set up another meeting to discuss the feedback or to resubmit the revised work.

## Giving Effective Feedback

Prioritise your ideas. Limit your feedback to the most important issues. Consider the feedback's potential value to the receiver and how you would respond – could you act on the feedback? Also, too much feedback provided at a single time can be overwhelming to the recipient.

- **Concentrate on the behaviour, not the person** - One strategy is to open by stating the behaviour in question, then describing how you feel about it and ending with what you want. This model enables you to avoid sounding accusatory by using "I" and focusing on behaviours, instead of assumed interpretations. Example: "I haven't seen you in class in for a week. I'm worried that you are missing important information. Can we meet soon to discuss it?" Instead of: "You obviously don't care about this course!"
- **Balance the content** - It is important to provide the recipient with balanced feedback regarding their strengths and their opportunities for growth. Providing feedback on strengths acts to identify and reinforce the learning, skills and behaviours that the recipient should continue engaging in. Providing feedback on opportunities for growth and improvement with actionable and tangible methods of implementation enables the recipient to make necessary changes.
- **Be specific** - Avoid general comments that may be of limited use to the receiver. Try to include examples to illustrate your statement. Also offering alternatives rather than just giving advice allows the receiver to decide what to do with your feedback.

- **Be realistic** - Feedback should focus on what can be changed. It is useless and frustrating for recipients to get comments on something over which they have no control. Also, remember to avoid using the words “always” and “never.” People’s behaviour is rarely that consistent.
- **Own the feedback** - When offering evaluative comments, use the pronoun “I” rather than “they” or “one,” which would imply that your opinion is universally agreed on. Remember that feedback is merely your opinion.
- **Be timely** - Seek an appropriate time to communicate your feedback. Being prompt is key since feedback loses its impact if delayed too long. Delayed feedback can also cause feelings of guilt and resentment in the recipient if the opportunity for improvement has passed. If your feedback is primarily negative, take time to prepare what you will say or write.
- **Offer continuing support**- Feedback should be a continuous process, not a one-time event. After offering feedback, make a conscious effort to follow up. Let recipients know you are available if they have questions, and, if appropriate, ask for another opportunity to provide more feedback in the future.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/catalogs/tip-sheets/receiving-and-giving-effective-feedback>