



# Education that's transforming lives and communities


## Communications – Resource guide

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# Overview

## Description

This **Communications** guide will serve as a resource to provide learners with the skills needed to feel confident when communicating at work to different audiences and in different settings. This guide is ideal for individuals looking to elevate their professional skills in order to grow their career.



## Introduction

Effective communication in a business environment is important because it allows us to:

- Build stronger interpersonal relationships.
- Be more effective to the team.
- Positively impact customers and the end result.
- Ensure we are understood.
- Adapt to a virtual work environment.

Workplace communication can be challenging because it may require you to communicate across different groups and layers, within a large structure, through several modalities. You may also have to keep up with communications at a fast pace and in a more formal manner than with other types of communication.

This resource guide includes exercises and resources for the following:

- Using effective verbal communication
- Writing with confidence
- Keeping a balance between listening and message delivery



# Use effective verbal communication

## Be aware of body language

Body language accounts for 55% of how your total message comes across. When communicating with others, be aware of body language in these ways:

- Use good posture to show that you're engaged.
- Use appropriate gestures, such as nodding your head in agreement, to show you're listening.
- Be aware of your facial expressions, and make eye contact, when possible.

When meeting virtually, keep the following in mind:

- Download **Zoom**® or whichever web conferencing tool you are using well before the meeting to allow time for the download to complete.
- Ensure a professional background by checking your video space and removing clutter and distractions.
- Use an external webcam, if possible, so you can position it to your advantage.
- Position your laptop and chair so you are looking as close to eye-level as possible into the webcam.
- Place yourself no closer than three feet away from the webcam.
- Look at the camera and try to maintain eye contact as well as possible. It may help to have a photo just above your camera so you have something to look at.

## Use appropriate tone of voice

Using the appropriate tone of voice can make a huge difference for how well your message resonates with your audience. Here are some tips for speaking in a way that is easy to follow:

- Speak at a moderate pace.
- Pause between sentences.
- Speak clearly and at an appropriate volume.
- Watch your filler words.
- If you aren't sure how your voice sounds, record your calls and listen back or ask a friend.



## Record your voice

The box below contains the amount of words you should be able to read in 30 seconds based on the average rate of speaking. Set a timer and read the text. See if you finish too early or not in time. Also take note of if you pause between sentences and avoid filler words.

Workplace communication is one of the most important aspects of a thriving business. The recent change to primarily virtual work across numerous industries has redefined the function and form of workplace communication.

Workplace communication is much more than conversations. It is about the exchange of information through multiple different mediums. Employees share ideas and businesses communicate strategies and goals through communication, both formal and informal.

Source: Firstup – Workplace communication: It’s more important than ever

## Use welcoming words

Inclusive language is a way of conversing that allows all people to feel acknowledged and respected. The tables below show ways that you can use inclusive language.

## Use people first language

Use language that honors people’s humanity above their ability or social status.

Less empathetic	More empathetic
Victim	Person who has experienced...
Wheelchair-bound	Person who uses a wheelchair
Mentally ill	Person living with a mental health condition
Homeless person	Person without housing
Prisoner, convict	Person who has been incarcerated

Source: Inclusive language guidelines – American psychological association





## Use inclusive wording

Here are some ways we can make everyone welcome by being conscious of the specific terms that we choose when speaking.

Less inclusive	More inclusive
You guys, ladies and gentlemen	Everyone, folks, friends
He/him/his or she/her/hers, when describing a generic or hypothetical person	They/them/theirs
Minority	Specific name of the group you are referring to, person of color, BIPOC
The elderly, seniors	Older adults, people 65 years and older
Special needs	Person with a disability
Honey, sweetheart	Call people by their individual names

Source: Inclusive language guidelines – American psychological association

For more details on using inclusive language, visit [Inclusive Language Guidelines \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org/inclusive-language-guidelines).

**Note:** Throughout this resource guide, there will be several journaling activities. Keep a document with all of your answers so that you can refer back to it as you continue on your career journey.

If you would like to record your answers directly into this guide, use the **comment** feature if you are viewing the document in **Adobe® Reader®** or the **type text** feature if you are viewing in a web browser.

To use the comment / type text features, simply click the button on the toolbar and then stamp the textbox onto your page to type.




**Journal prompt:** Name two more inclusive terms that you would like to start using instead of the less inclusive versions.



## F.O.R.D. model

The F.O.R.D. principle is a tool for engaging in better conversations. It can be used in almost any situation because it involves topics that everyone can relate to: family, occupation, recreation and dreams. Simply choose one of these topics to start a conversation and form a connection more easily. Now let's look at some of the specific questions you can ask with this tool.

Components	When to use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Occupation</li> <li>• Recreation</li> <li>• Dreams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social events</li> <li>• Family functions</li> <li>• Business situations</li> <li>• Networking events</li> </ul>

FORD contains universal principles that make it useful in almost any conversation.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any siblings?</li> <li>• How did you two meet? (If you are meeting a couple for the first time)</li> <li>• How old is your child?</li> <li>• How is your [sister, brother, mother and so on] doing since [event that happened]?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Recreation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you do for fun?</li> <li>• Have you ever watched (or read) [popular show/book]?</li> <li>• What are you up to this weekend?</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Occupation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you do for a living?</li> <li>• How do you like working at ...?</li> <li>• What's your favorite part of your job?</li> <li>• What made you interested in becoming a ...?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dreams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you hope to be working in the next few years?</li> <li>• Where would you like to travel?</li> <li>• What's something you'd like to try in the future?</li> <li>• Would you ever consider trying [particular hobby or activity]?</li> </ul>

Source: How to Use the F.O.R.D Method (With Example Questions) – SocialSelf



**Journal prompt: Choose a couple of questions from the F.O.R.D. method that you will use the next time you have the opportunity.**

### Send a clear and concise message

When performing any type of communication, we should focus on the main point that needs to be communicated, then give the purpose and an action that the recipients need to take.

When composing a message (verbal or written), keep this framework in mind:

The point

What is the most important piece of information that needs to be communicated?

The purpose

What is the purpose for the communication?

The plan

What are the next steps that recipients need to take?



# Write with confidence

## Business writing best practices

Here are some checklists for creating quality writing:

During writing:

- Focus on the main points you want to communicate and be brief. Be clear about what the recipient needs to do and give a deadline.
- Be concise and bold the parts of your message that are important.
- Make sure the language is clear and self-explanatory.
- Keep your audience in mind when deciding how formal you want your style to be.
- Avoid jargon and spell out acronyms.

After writing:

- Always check your spelling. Use spellcheck, but also know that spellcheck doesn't always catch everything. For example, it may not catch words that are spelled the same but have two different meanings.
- Check your capitalization and punctuation to promote clear meaning in your writing.
- Proofread by reading your writing out loud or asking someone else to proofread it for you.
- Check all numbers, dates and names in your writing. Double check if you are unsure.
- Check your tone. With written communications, you will not be able to rely on tone of voice to convey your attitude, so read over all of your writing to make sure the tone does not sound upset or unnecessarily emotional.

## Email dos and don'ts

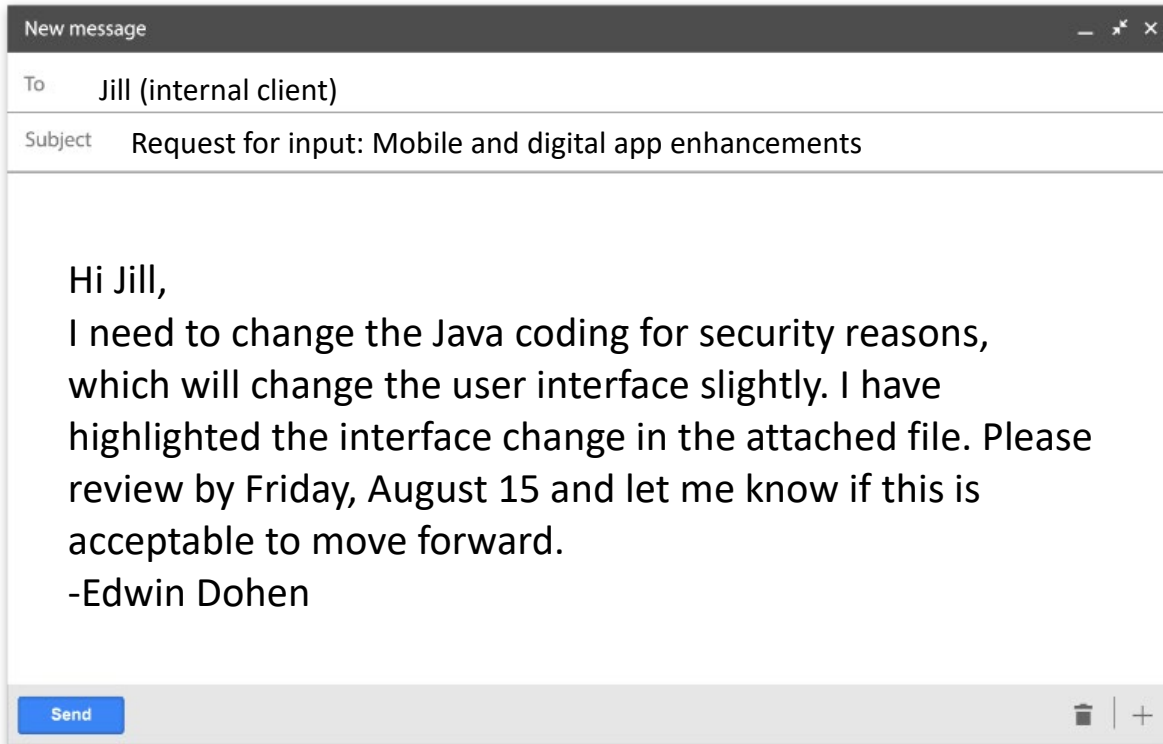
Do	Don't
<b>Do</b> use a personal greeting and closing in your email.	<b>Don't</b> reply all when you want to respond to just the sender.
<b>Do</b> read your email over as if you have just received it before sending it out.	<b>Don't</b> send an overly long email.
<b>Do</b> put the action you want your recipients to take in the subject line.	<b>Don't</b> use complicated language and jargon.



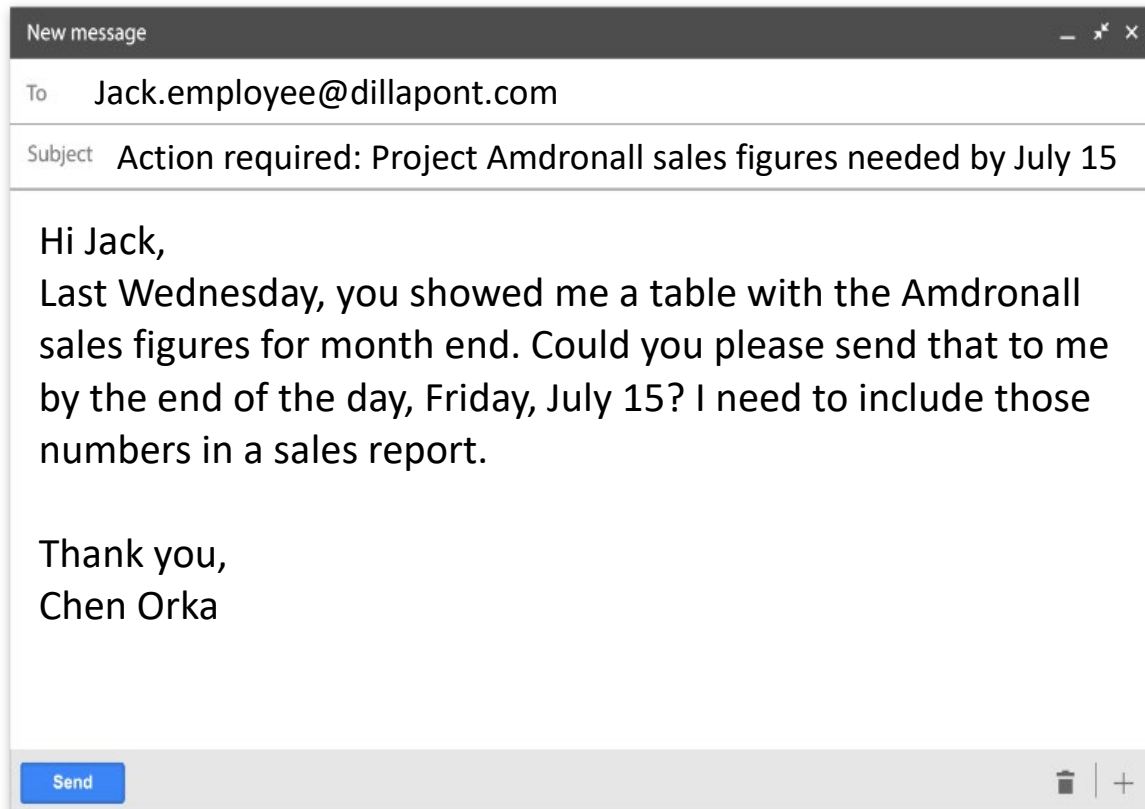


## Email examples across industries

### Technical:



### Sales:





## Email examples across industries, continued

Customer service:

New message

To Juan (Client)

Subject Your recent experience at our online store

Hi Juan,  
I am so sorry the product you purchased through our online store did not meet your expectations. Based on the information you have provided, you are eligible for a refund if you return the item to the store. Please see attached for instructions and reply to this email if you have any questions.

Arianna Rudz  
Senior Customer Representative

Send

Manufacturing:

New message

To Johan.employee@traktorone.com

Subject Requesting a shipment of part 123456 to the Bristol warehouse

Hi Johan,  
Due to a parts shortage, we are requesting that a shipment of 12 cases of part 123456 be transported from your facility to the Bristol warehouse. I've copied my supervisor, who approved the transaction. Please deliver the parts by the end of the week to avoid delays in production.

-Aarav Hammad

Send



## Brush up on grammar

There are also some ways that you can build your writing skills over time. For example, to gain a sense of what written communications should look like, read other communications that you receive and collect examples of good writing. Try out some of these resources to improve your grammar:

- [Grammar Girl](#) contains podcasts and articles to answer common grammar questions.
- [5 Minute English](#) provides short, engaging practice lessons for learning English as a second language.
- [Dave's ESL Café](#) offers grammar lessons and idiom lists for learning English as a second language.
- [Grammar Monster](#) provides quizzes, games and lessons to improve common writing errors.

**Journal prompt: What grammar concepts do you often stumble with when writing? List them and search for them on one of the grammar resources above.**



# Balance between listening and message delivery

## Active listening

Remember these two concepts when practicing active listening:

- Seek to understand the substance of what the other person is saying.
- Identify and understand the other person's emotions and feelings.

This is what active listening looks and sounds like:

### Non-verbal cues

- Focus attention on the other person and clear away distractions.
- Be aware of body language.
- Sit straight up in your chair.
- Make eye contact and smile, when possible.
- Nod your head to let the other person know you are listening.

### Voice/tone

- Use an optimistic and/or positive tone of voice.
- Confirm by repeating.
- Ask questions.
- Don't interrupt except to ask for clarification.
- Listen for changes in the other person's tone of voice.

**Journal prompt: What are some ways that you already practice active listening? What are some ways that you would like to improve?**



## Message delivery

You might need to use message delivery skills when you are sharing information with a customer, searching for a job or presenting information to your colleagues.

It's important to reflect on the intention of the communication so that you can use the correct level of formality and move in the right direction.

## Connect with your audience

When delivering your message, research your audience ahead of time. Use what you learn to customize your message. Engage and empathize with your audience by doing the following:

- Use inclusive language.
- Understand their goals and needs.
- Share why it's important for them.
- Speak with enthusiasm.
- Understand your audience may be busy and have competing priorities.
- Ask the audience questions and reserve time for them to ask you questions.

## Best practices for interviews

Here are some ways you can prepare for an interview ahead of time:

- Practice your answers ahead of time rather than winging it.
- Practice expressing yourself with confidence and using body language that expresses confidence.
- Rehearse at home.
- Go through all of your questions in advance.
  - Use a mirror or record yourself.
  - Watch your filler words.
- Use peers or trusted partners to proofread or give feedback.
- Learn how to ask a clarifying question or buy yourself some time to think through questions you hadn't anticipated.
- Practice listening and then restating the question to let the other person know you heard the question.
- Use objection handling skills to address concerns with empathy.





## Elevator speeches

Here is a template you can use to create your elevator speeches.

Topic	Consider including	Examples
About you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional and some personal facts</li> <li>Roles you've held and what organization they were with</li> <li>Where you're located</li> <li>Memorable metric</li> </ul>	"Hi, my name is Enrico. I'm currently taking some customer service courses through my local community college. As a part of a school project, I shadowed a customer service representative at a call center and learned all about the field."
Your skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your unique strengths and skills</li> <li>What you'd like to improve on</li> <li>What you're currently working on</li> </ul>	"I'm great with people and have volunteer experience helping natural disaster survivors at a local shelter."
What you're looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career opportunities</li> <li>Making a new connection</li> </ul>	"I was excited to learn about this opportunity, as I've always loved helping others and would like to make customer service my full-time profession."

See full elevator speech examples on [Indeed](#).

Do	Don't
<b>Do</b> make your elevator speech sound natural and effortless.	<b>Don't</b> rush through your speech.
<b>Do</b> write and rewrite your speech, making it better each time.	<b>Don't</b> focus your speech too much on yourself and not enough about why it matters.
<b>Do</b> practice your speech.	<b>Don't</b> forget to update your speech with new details as you gain skill and experience.



**Journal prompt: Write an elevator speech.**

## Toastmasters

Toastmasters is an international organization that helps people develop speech-giving skills. Visit the [Toastmaster's website](#) to learn more and to find out if they have a location near you.

**Journal prompt: What is one action you would like to take to continue improving your communication skills?**