

How to Adapt the Way You Communicate to Different Situations

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To be an effective communicator, you have to adapt the things you say and write to fit different contexts. This means that you'll need to adjust your communication style to fit your audience. In the workplace, this means going out of your way to be clear, respectful, and professional. If you are dealing with an emotionally charged situation, concentrate on validating the other person's feelings, rather than inserting your own opinions. If you are communicating with a large group of people or giving a presentation, you can adapt by sticking to a clear structure, emphasizing key points, and working the audience to keep their energy and attention.

Method
1

Method 1 of 4: Adjusting Your Communication Style



1 Match your vocabulary to the audience. It's important to be able to speak in different registers, including some that are formal and others that are informal. At work or in your professional life, it's likely important that you appear educated, knowledgeable, and polished. However, your friends may expect to see a casual side to your personality. Changing your vocabulary to fit the situation can help you better connect to people.

- Make sure that you use words that the other person will understand.
- For example, street talk and slang may be appropriate for talking with friends, but they can hold back your career if you use them in the workplace. Similarly, using big words and professional language at work can make you appear more intelligent, but it could be off-putting and alienating if you use that language with your friends.



2 Mirror the language and gestures of the person you're speaking with. Reflecting the person's mannerisms can help them feel at ease. It also makes you more persuasive. You can copy their gestures, posture, or word choice.^[1]

- Mimic just a few of their gestures and word choices. If you do too much, then it might be off-putting to the person.
- Don't mirror a person when it would not be seen as appropriate. For example, if you are a man talking to a female who is holding a purse, it's not a good idea to hold your arm at your side as though you are also holding a purse.



3 Vary your tone to fit the situation. Tone can tell the listener a lot about the situation. You may use a serious tone while discussing matters in the workplace, an encouraging tone while evaluating an employee, or a casual tone while out with friends.

- When you adjust your tone, make sure that your nonverbal and verbal communication match, which will show sincerity. For example, a firm, serious tone would be undermined if you were smiling and slouching. A serious tone would pair better with a stern face and limited gestures, while an encouraging tone would pair well with nodding and gesturing.

Method 2 of 4: Dealing with Employees and Coworkers



1 Schedule face-to-face meetings for new or complicated topics. Go with in-person meetings even if you feel like you could address the topic in an email or newsletter. That way, you will give people an opportunity to ask questions, and they have a chance to clarify when necessary.^[2]

- For instance, you might think that you can explain new rules for employee breaks properly through an email or by posting the rules in the breakroom.
- If you hold a face-to-face meeting with your employees, however, you can be sure that everyone understands the rules and can be held accountable.



2 Address issues with subordinates in one-on-one meetings. Avoid calling them out in front of other employees, since this can create resentment. Emails can be misinterpreted, so it is best to not attempt to address employee problems in this manner, either. Instead, schedule a meeting where you can talk privately.[3]

- Be sure to use words that are understood by the individual.
- Open the meeting with something like “Frank, I wanted to meet with you to talk about a couple of issues I’ve seen in your performance lately, and how we can work on them.” That will establish a firm, but forward-looking tone, instead of an overly critical one.
- Write a summary of the meeting afterwards, and email it to everyone involved. This adds another level of clarity to the communication.



3 Use social media professionally. Avoid airing personal complaints or confidential information about work via social media. In short, keep things professional. If you typically use social media just to connect with friends, this might mean changing both the tone and content of your posts.^[4]

- Keep workplace social media posts positive and concise: "Hey Seattle, come on down to Tom's Sports for 20% off all equipment today!"
- If you interact with coworkers, employees, or customers via social media, steer away from personal attacks, venting, complaints, and inappropriate images.
- Assume that anything you post online can be seen by the public.
- Many people like to keep separate social media accounts--one for personal use, and one for professional use.



4 Review what you want to convey if you are not communicating in person. Read over an email or text before you hit “send.” If you have got to talk to someone over the phone, jot down a couple of notes about what you want to say, before you make the call. Communication that does not take place face-to-face can be difficult to interpret, because you do not have context clues like tone and facial expressions. Make sure you are being completely clear:

- If you are writing in the workplace, put the main point of your email in the subject line or if in a text, put it right at the top. The recipient will appreciate you saving their time by being direct.
- Use the email subject line carefully. Avoid vague or obvious subjects, such as “Message about work.” Instead, use specific titles like “Meeting with Bill Wyman on November 16th!”
- If you’re talking on the phone, use clear verbal cues like “So, Natasha, the reason I’m calling is to talk about the declining sales figures” and “Andre, I want to make sure I understand. Could you go over the pitch again?”



5 Set aside time for small talk, if you are introverted. Go out of your way to use small talk, so that people feel familiar and comfortable talking with you in any context. Even if you are an introvert and small talk does not come naturally to you, it is not difficult to find ways to have neutral chats with people.[5]

- Stick to neutral, non-controversial topics. For example, you could talk about popular television shows, food, or that old standby, the weather.
 - For instance, try something like "hey, what did you think of that last episode of Game of Thrones?"
- If you are in a superior or management position, using small talk will help your employees feel like you can relate to them and are approachable. Using small talk to chat with a manager or boss helps to establish a bond, making it easier to talk about more complex or serious matters later on.

Method 3 of 4: Dealing with Emotionally Charged Situations



1 Use “I” rather than “you” statements. Rephrase the things you want to say so that they focus on how you feel or think, rather than what another person has done. That will keep them from feeling attacked. For instance:

- At work, you could say something like “I remember learning this as a new employee” instead of “You’re not understanding how this works.”
- Similarly, avoid telling a friend “You get upset too easily.” Instead, say something like “I feel like this is something you really care about.”



2 Bond with whoever is upset. Even if a person is making you upset, or you are just trying to be a mediator between two parties, do everything you can to find common ground in emotional situations. If it situation is emotionally charged, forging bonds helps to prevent people from feeling the are under attack. This can also prevent a person from going on the defensive.^[6]

- Stress partnership in the way you phrase things. For example, use phrases like "we can do it," or "we are in this together."



3 Show empathy for the other person, instead of criticism. Sometimes, when people are upset, they need to vent and for someone to just hear them out. Show that you take their concerns seriously and are willing to try and understand what is going on. This means you will have to adapt the way you communicate, to focus more on reflecting what the other person is saying.^[7]

- Try saying things like "I'm definitely hearing why you're upset," or "you were right, that would be irritating to anyone."
- Avoid saying things like "You shouldn't really be upset about this" or "I don't understand why this is bothering you," even if that is how you actually feel.



4 Go out of your way to show respect. Defusing an emotionally charged situation requires you to acknowledge the value and worth of other people, so that they do not feel powerless or invalidated. Share statements that express what others have done well, or the rights and powers they have, like:^[8]

- "You've really be working hard on this, haven't you?"
- "I think you've been handling this with a lot of patience."

Method 4 of 4: Communicating with Large Groups



1 Tailor your presentation to fit your audience. It's important to know your audience so that you can shape your message to fit them. You should know who will be in the audience, a bit about their background, and why they're attending your presentation. The more information you have, the better you can shape your presentation.

- For example, if you are presenting to a group of executives that are above you on the company hierarchy, then your language should be professional and polished, with jokes or slang left out. However, you may want to include jokes, slang, and simple language if you're speaking to a group ranked below you, as this can help ease any tension in the room.
- Be aware of the background of people in the audience to make sure that you don't use language or examples that are offensive.



2 Map out what you want to say. To communicate clearly with a large group, you need a plan for what to say, unlike when you are having an informal talk with a few people. Otherwise, you will risk losing the attention of your listeners. Plan out:^[9]

- The key points you want to emphasize. For instance, if you are introducing your company's new 3-point sales strategy, plan to get slightly louder when you mention each point for the first time.
- Moments when you might want to slow down (such as to introduce new or complicated information).
- Natural places in your talk when you can pause, such as after introducing each point of a three-point sales strategy. This gives time for the information to sink in.



3 Signpost key points in your talk. Use key phrases to help outline the major points in your talk. It can be hard to follow oral presentations, but these “signposts” help your audience keep up. Good phrases to draw on include:^[10]

- "Moving on..." (to introduce a new point).
- "As I stated previously,...." (to remind the audience of your main point).
- "To wrap things up...." (to let them know you are nearing the end).
- Tell people when you will be answering questions. You could say, "Please save your questions until the end, and I'll make sure they're answered."



4 Create visual aids to emphasize key points. Put together a simple slideshow. Use the slideshow as a way to emphasize key points, not to explain them in detail. Otherwise your audience will just look at the slides instead of paying attention to what you are saying.^[11]

- Use only a small amount of text or visual material per slide. For instance, if you are outlining three goals for your organization's upcoming year, make a slide that says "Goal 1: Boost membership 10%."
- That is enough information to remind the audience of the point you want to make, but not so much that they will stop paying attention.



5 Interact with your audience. Include pauses in your presentation, asking and encouraging people to ask for questions, if they need clarification on any of the presentation. You can also address people in the audience directly, either by name or by looking them in the eye. This helps make the presentation more engaging, holds the audience's attention, and increases the amount of information they take away from your talk.^[12]



Community Q&A

Question

What do good listeners do?



Community Answer

Good listeners are present, make eye contact, and let go of the need to speak while the other speaks. Being present means actually paying attention, rather than texting, answering calls, looking at a menu, or otherwise being distracted.

Helpful 17 Not Helpful 1

Question

What roles do revision, editing, and proofreading play in clear workplace communication?



Community Answer

When you are emailing your coworkers, it is important that you proofread your message for spelling and grammatical errors. Use a spellcheck tool for this. Before sending the message, read it to yourself to identify any awkward sentence structures, or confusing sentences.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 0

Question

Why is non-verbal communication important for me to be an effective employee?



Community Answer

Non-verbal communication is important because gestures, facial expressions, and body language are all part of how people express themselves, especially when they might feel uncomfortable using their words (such as in an office setting). Learning non-verbal communication can help you build better relationships with bosses and fellow employees since you will be more attuned to their needs, likes, dislikes, etc.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 1

Question

Can you explain what is meant by the term "professionalism" within the beauty industries?



Community Answer

Professionalism usually indicates something neutral, sophisticated, and otherwise, well, professional. Examples include a smooth, finished face; a nude lipstick; and classic winged eyeliner.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 4

Question

List two ways in which you might adapt your communication strategies while speaking to clients who may speak little English?



Community Answer

You can use hand signals or motions and simpler language, without a lot of big or uncommon words.

Helpful 7 Not Helpful 6

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This article was co-authored by **Trudi Griffin, LPC, MS**. Trudi Griffin is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Wisconsin specializing in Addictions and Mental Health. She provides therapy to people who struggle with addictions, mental health, and trauma in community health settings and private practice. She received her MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Marquette University in 2011. This article has been viewed 496,669 times.

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