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# BASIC COMMUNICATION AT THE WORKPLACE

In order to effectively function and work in a BPO, you must possess effective communication skills as most of your work will be dependent on the way you communicate with your customers, peers and colleagues. Effective communication is the key to success in not only the BPO but any industry for that matter.

This lesson will enable you to understand the various facets of communication starting from the various types of communication, soft skills and voice modulation. We will try and explore each aspect briefly to give you a fair idea of using your communication skills effectively.



### OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- use greeting styles;
- explain soft skills as well as hard skills;
- modulate your voice according to the requirement.

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION

Have you ever felt that whatever you wanted to tell someone is not communicated properly? If so, it is because of inefficient communication skills. Apart from the basic



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necessities, you need to be equipped with habits for good communication skills, as this is what will make you a happy and successful social being. This lesson enables you to get a detailed picture of the need and importance of developing communication skills and feel confident and empowered to face any type of situation in life.

Communication is a process where one sets out to convey a message to another person through the medium of words, gestures or pictures. The purpose of conveying the message is fulfilled only when the person receiving it has understood the message fully.

Working on your language would bring you closer to achieving effective communication. The term represents a process whereby, what is said by the sender is received by the other person, understood properly and given an appropriate response to.



As you can understand, speaking the language correctly will not be the only requirement for this process. You would have to listen carefully as well.

All the conversations that we have in our lives are essentially based on these two factors:

- Sending the messaging in a simple and coherent manner
- Receiving, understanding and responding to it in an appropriate manner

The process seems simple enough, and yet communication breaks down so many times because people are unable to follow it correctly.

There are various reasons for the communication to break down. But, most of it can be attributed to distractions and lack of knowledge. The distractions can be in the form of background noise, work pressure, fatigue, personal reasons, faulty equipment, inactive listening and lack of knowledge can be in the form of being unaware of the accent of the speaker, poor technical knowledge, limited vocabulary.

These obstacles in effective communication can be removed through, concentrating, listening more carefully, probing, to better understand the issue, compartmentalising things, taking regular breaks and sleeping well, getting better equipment, practising grammar and pronunciation, familiarizing yourself with the accent, paying attention during training.

## 2.2 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication takes place by exchanging your views to describe your ideas and experiences. Language, in the form of spoken words and sentences, is commonly used for sharing our experiences with others. However, we can also use language in the written form along with other symbols like pictures, colours, signs, sounds and writings to communicate. Communication can also happen through facial

expressions, movements, clothing and so on. Thus communication using spoken English is called verbal communication & communication through other forms such as emails, letters and body language is called non-verbal communication.

We will now explore this further

#### a) Verbal Communication

We use verbal communication for most purposes; some key forms of verbal communication are our day to day conversations, telephone talk, interviews, presentations, group discussions, and meetings.

**Oral Communication** - Oral Communication is more natural and is usually used for responding to a comment / statement. In natural and informal situations, we speak readily without hesitation in order to communicate with others; but in a formal and official situation, many people feel nervous and cannot speak easily. It needs training, practice and skill to speak effectively in a formal situation.

Oral communication occurs in everyday situations . We need to have oral communication in all our daily chores.

#### b) Non Verbal Communication

**Written Communication:** Written communication is used for many purposes. Many types of documents are required for official work. All the written documents have a format and layout which is fixed by the company or the customer. Written communication happens in the form of email, memos, circulars, minutes of meeting etc.

**Body language** – It is believed that sometimes our body talks more than our words and hence it is integral for us to focus on our body language. We consciously may convey a lot by using our facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, clothing and posture, etc.

### 2.3 INTRODUCTION AND GREETING

Let us learn ways of Introduction and Greeting.

**Greeting** is something polite or friendly that you say or do when you meet someone.

Some examples are

- Hello,/ Hi, ...
- Good morning/ afternoon/ evening.
- Good/ nice to see you again.
- I'm glad/ happy/ pleased to see you.
- How are you? - Fine, thanks.
- How have you been? - Very well.
- How are things? - Not too bad, thanks.



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In a BPO whilst talking to the customer you might have to follow a scripted greeting, such as – Hi, thank you for calling XYZ(Company Name), my name is Anupama, how can I help you?

**Introduction:** Post the greeting; you must introduce yourself in a formal setting. There are a few things to be kept in mind, especially when appearing for an interview.

1. **Name and Location:** I am XYZ (name) and I am from (name of city), the city of (describe your city in a word or two). I relocated to Mumbai (place where you completed your studies) for my studies and looking forward to joining ABC BPO as fresher customer service executive (mention the position you applied for).
2. **Educational qualification:** I am an undergraduate in the second year of B.Com. I have completed HSC from PQR School with 80% from CBSE.
3. **Work Experience:** Mention work experience, if any but if you are a fresher, you can skip this part.
4. **Family:** Few lines about your family (keep it short): I am the eldest son to my parents. My father is a self-employed and my mother is a home maker.
5. **Personality traits:** Positive approach, politeness at handling even the adverse situations will be an advantage for this job. I am a quick learner willing to get exposed to new challenges.
6. **Hobbies:** I am an enthusiastic football fan. Apart from this, I find gaming, music, and debates interesting. I hope I portrayed myself well. Thank you.
  - a. **Things** to be kept in mind while greeting someone and introducing yourself-
    - Greet people politely with a smile and maintain eye contact.
    - Stay relaxed and answer the questions with confidence, but never jump on answering if you do not understand the question.
  - b. Mention if you are unsure of anything that has been asked.
  - c. Speak with clarity and select your words wisely.
    - Never use negative sentences or words such as “ I do not like indoor games”. Instead go for – “I prefer outdoor games more”.
    - Be fluent and take good care of grammar and pronunciation.
    - In a BPO, your communication skills and display of courtesy matters a lot so maintain a humble tone throughout. Stay positive and answer the questions in a professional yet enthusiastic tone.
    - Body language portrays more about you than what you speak. Sit upright; maintain eye contact, lean forward for emphasis but never backward. Do not look down.

## 2.4 SOFT SKILLS

First of all let us understand the term Soft Skills.

Soft skills are usually the 'HOW' of executing your job, so technically you may know what needs to be done or what you need to say, however how you do it is depicted in the soft skills. These are the skills which characterise your relationship and behaviour with other people and your approach towards life and work, which is why these are also known as: 'people skills', 'interpersonal skills'.

'Hard skills', on the contrary, is a phrase usually used to describe job-specific skills. Professional skills like IT skills, accountancy, medical expertise or other skills that can be taught and are tangible and can be easily assessed.

Ironically, for many people, soft skills become the hardest skills to develop as they are very subjective in nature.

### The Relative Importance of Hard and Soft Skills

Job-related expertise is vital in any profession. However, over the last twenty to thirty years, understanding has grown that the soft skills may ultimately be more important in determining levels of success.

Hard skills are the basic minimum necessary in order to operate in a particular job. However, success in your career may depend on how you relate to other people and to work.

Let us take an example.

Imagine you are a company producing something, Let us say cars. You come up with a revolutionary new technology. Your cars are suddenly much better than others and your profits go up.

But, after a while, your competitors get hold of the technology or they develop alternatives. Suddenly, all the cars are same again and your profits are suffering. You still need the new technology, but you also need a new competitive edge.

Hard skills are like your technology: anyone can acquire them, with training, and they are necessary. Without them you will not be able to operate in the workplace. Soft skills are your unique selling point and give you a competitive edge in the workplace, and perhaps even in your personal life.

Let us now take a look at the most important Soft skills.

It's hard to judge which of the soft skills are most important, but this list is broadly what employers mean when they talk about good soft skills and the skills which are most likely to enable you to build constructive working relationships with others, or to be a constructive and helpful employee.



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**1. Communication Skills**

Communication skills are always at the top of the ‘essential skills’ list in any job advertisement. People with strong communication skills can build relationships, listen well, and vary their communication to suit the situations and to enhance the outcome. Communication skill also enables to form new client relationships in an official environment, communicate ideas, and conduct reviews and increase business as well as revenue for companies.

**2. Decision making**

If you want to succeed it is important to have the ability to make quick and correct decisions. Sometimes the actual plan does not even matter; what matters is the decision you have made considering the situation.

**3. Self-Motivation**

If new are self-motivated you move ahead by yourselves. You do not need close supervision or constant push, you are good to work with because you are generally positive about life and look for opportunities in situations. It also helps in developing your personal resilience and adaptability to change.

**4. Leadership Skills**

Display of leadership skill does not necessarily depend on a designation, leadership can be displayed in your day to day interaction with your colleagues or peers, someone who can influence and guide people in the right direction displays effective leadership skills.

**5. Team-Working Skills**

If you are a team player, you need to have good communication skills, particularly good listening skills, together with an ability to build rapport with others. A good team player does not think about his/her victories and failure, for him/her it’s the team’s performance that matters.

**6. Creativity and Problem Solving Skills**

Creativity and problem-solving skills are highly valued because they are hard to develop. There are many people who believe that creative thinkers are born, not made, and there are certainly some people who find these skills much easier. But, like other skills, you can develop them if you wish.

**7. Time Management and ability to work under pressure**

Many would say that these two skills, which often go hand-in-hand, are more an attitude than a skill. However, they can also be developed and honed. Highly valued by employers, they are also very useful for organising a family or a team, and for making sure that the job gets done.

The list of soft skills is not exhaustive and any aspect related to human behaviour and relationship can be considered as a soft skill which when developed can create better association and camaraderie between people leading to overall improved relationships which in turn improve the quality of work.



## INTEXT QUESTIONS 2.1

I. Match the following

1.	Influencing and guiding people	a	Time management
2.	Using creativity to solve problems	b	Leadership skills
3.	Listening skills to increase rapport	c	Decision making
4.	Being able to make quick and correct decisions	d	Communication skills
5.	Managing time effectively	e	Team working skills

### 2.5 FLUENCY AND FIRST LANGUAGE INFLUENCE

We have covered soft skills; we need to find out the importance of fluency and the impact of First Language Influence.

**English** is not a simple language. The letters do not always represent the same sound. For instance,

- The **letter 'c'** in the word **cut** gives us the **'k' sound**
- The **letter 'c'** in the word **certain** gives us the **'s' sound**

That is why it is said that **English is not a phonetic language**. There is no one to one relationship between spelling and sounds unlike Hindi which is a phonetic language. The same letter may represent different sounds while different letters may represent the same sound. Some words have the same spelling but differ in pronunciation, for instance,

- **Read** [Present tense, rhymes with 'reed']
- **Read** [Past tense, rhymes with 'red']

Therefore, you cannot rely on the spelling of the word alone to understand the pronunciation of the word. Speaking correctly and fluently would make one sound, better, crisper, clearer, confident and more professional.

To achieve this, you must focus on the following areas –

- Pronunciation
- Grammar
- Modulation
- Rate of Speech
- Pause Management

You do not have to copy any accent. Instead, the effort would be to work towards speaking a language that can be easily understood by everyone across the globe,



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adopting any one particular accent would render you incomprehensible to the people who follow the other accents.

Therefore, your aim should be to ensure that you move from one stage of the speaking English i.e. with FLI (first language influence) to the other.

What are these two stages?

- **First Language Influence (FLI)** – The speaker applies the rhythm, syntax and phonemes of his native tongue, and therefore may not be very clear to the listener.
- **Global English** – The speaker is comprehensible to everyone, regardless of the accent, and is nice to listen to.

FLI could be of two types:

- **Mother tongue influence** – Is the influence of one’s first language [or native tongue] on the other languages that you acquires later. For instance, people from a certain region in the country who swap the ‘sh’ and ‘s’ sounds in words [sugar, sure] would be a result of the mother tongue influence.
- **Regional Influence** – Is the influence of the region on one’s language. This happens when someone from region A moves to region B and adopts the language speaking style of the latter region. For instance, if I were to move to US today, and a few of the sounds changed in a few months, or I started using slang or vocabulary indigenous to the USA, then my language would have been influenced by the region.

Reducing FLI or first language influence can be achieved through,

- Neutralizing the influence of the mother tongue and the regional influence, on the language.
- Speaking in a manner that can be understood by everyone across the globe.

While one tries to become more proficient at speaking correctly, it would be advisable to keep in mind that,

- Correcting your language is a process and not an overnight activity.

Hence, if the progress shown initially is minimal, you should not get frustrated. Instead, **you should remain patient** and keep at it, because as the adage goes, **“practice makes perfect”**.

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## 2.6 VOICE MODULATION

Moving on from fluency we will learn the significance of voice modulation.

Let us understand the concept of voice modulation.

The way we change the manner in which we speak and our volume according to the situation that we are in, is called modulation. We modulate on the basis of,

- Who we are talking to
- The context of the conversation (what meaning we are trying to imply)
- The words that we are using
- The emotion that we want to convey

Usually, the following factors help you to modulate his or her voice:

- Volume
- Pitch [The first and the second points help in applying stress]
- Tone
- Pause management
- Rate of speech

### Need to modulate

Modulation is important because,

- It lends weight to what you are saying
- Makes it more real
- One doesn't sound robotic
- Makes you sound less monotonous and more human

### Process of Modulation

One of the most important things to do in order to modulate effectively is to use stress in the sentence. We do not stress each and every word in a sentence because it would seem like we are shouting. We choose the words that we want to emphasize based on,

- The meaning we want to convey
- The emotion we want to convey

There two types of words that you must keep in mind while modulating

- **Content Words:** words that carry the main content or meaning in a sentence. These are the words that we emphasize usually when we modulate. These *words consist of nouns, pronouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs.*



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- **Function Words:** words that do not really carry the main content or meaning in a sentence. They are in the sentence to make it grammatically correct. Their exclusion would make the sentence grammatically incorrect, but may not necessarily affect the meaning. These *words consist of articles, prepositions, conjunctions.*



## INTEXT QUESTIONS 2.2

- I. Fill in the blanks from the options given below:
- FLI is a short form of \_\_\_\_\_.
    - mother tongue influence
    - regional influence
    - first language influence
    - foreign language influence
  - English is a \_\_\_\_\_ language.
    - phonetic
    - non-phonetic
    - artistic
    - phonemic
  - \_\_\_\_\_ is influence of the region on one's language.
    - father tongue influence
    - regional influence
    - first language influence
    - mother tongue influence
  - Correcting your language is a \_\_\_\_\_ and not an overnight activity.
    - instant
    - process
    - overnight
    - long
  - \_\_\_\_\_ influence of one's first language [or native tongue] on the other languages that one acquires later.
    - first language
    - regional
    - mother tongue
    - environmental
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## WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

In this lesson you have understood the meaning as well as the importance of communication. You are aware of the various types of communication i.e., verbal communication and non-verbal communication. You are also familiar with the term soft skills and the difference between soft and hard skills. You have learnt the ways to modulate your voice.



## TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Explain communication and its process.
2. Give details about the importance of voice - modulation.
3. Describe soft skills in detail.
4. List out the most important soft skills and their key attributes.
5. Write short notes on
  - a. mother tongue influence
  - b. self- motivation
  - c. team working skills
  - d. body language



## ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

### 2.1

- I. 1. b
2. e
3. d
4. c
5. a

### 2.2

- I. i. c. first language influence
- ii. b. non-phonetic
- iii. b. regional influence
- iv. b. process
- v. c. mother tongue



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