Effective communication

What it is:

It's about exchanging information between individuals or groups — effective communication is about sending and getting back clear information with different audiences. It involves listening, understanding and responding appropriately to others and being able to participate effectively in group discussions.
In simple terms it involves

Input  Thinking/processing  Output

Why is this important?

Because we are all doing it all the time — it is how we make sense of our world and create our view of the world. It is our relationship with ourselves and with others.

A clear understanding in how to communicate well means less stress, frustration and time wasting. Yet again, we are all unique and the message that is sent and received will vary with different people.

Think about the differences in how you communicate with:
- adults; teachers, lecturers and employers.
- peers — friend and foe

What are the benefits of applying effective communication techniques?

- Better success at job and university interviews
- Getting your points understood with colleagues and friends
- Understanding others — a two way street
- Negotiating with parents and others

Effective communication is the most important social skill you can develop. It allows you to negotiate, persuade and influence opinions.

Communicators don’t wave a big stick — people listen, respond to their ideas and do what is asked of them. And employers, universities and colleges love this.

It is no accident that crimes of violence are often carried out by inarticulate people who have to throw themselves around to get noticed. It is also no secret that victims are often the same people — they lack the negotiating skills to change their situation.

So you think you are being understood...

I told her that an hour ago

I’m not doing that!

Agreed on what?

She’s not listening

So we’re all agreed then

Good communication is rarely a natural skill and requires understanding and above all practice.
So how are we communicating?

- Talking
- Listening
- Body language
- Written language

Verbal communication:
This may include your use of voice, volume, language, speed, pauses, humour as well as bringing your own style to the delivery and how you relate to the audience.

Listening
Listening is not the same as hearing – listening is consciously processing and remembering whereas hearing can be background noise. Active (good) listening means letting your team/audience know you are listening and may involve taking notes.

Body language
Body language is far more important than most people realise. If we say one thing and our body says another, you will appear insincere. Your expressions and movements show your understanding or confusion.

Written language
Basic grammar is important and if you can’t spell then use a spell checker. Use paragraphs and key words to emphasise your meaning. Be tidy! Decide if a letter, email or text is most relevant to clear understanding.

Research by Birtwhistle in 1970 showed that in communicating to a group of people, 55% of impact is determined by your body language (posture, gestures and eye contact), 38% by your tone of voice and only 7% by the actual words spoken.

Think of a simple sentence – “I love my Mother’s apple pie”. Repeat it six times, with the emphasis on different words. Notice how by changing the tone of voice, loudness and timbre you can change the meaning. Then add gestures, look up or down, be still or active, breathe fast or slow.

Identifying “common language”
It is well known that peer groups form their own common language. This includes teenagers, social clubs, in fact any organisation.

Groups tend to shift their language to suit the majority eg a predominantly male group may isolate the women in their group simply by language. The same occurs for a teenager attending a work interview where use of teenage slang language may alienate the interviewer.

Parents and teenagers often have the same problem and must identify a common language before they can communicate.
"When it comes to body language, there are some who have better vocabularies than other."
Doug Larson

So how do you think you can fix this problem?
- Be aware of this common language barrier and ensure you are clear in your meaning – this may mean checking that the other party understands your meaning.
- Avoid slang.

If communication is important eg with parents or potential employers, you can:
- Read newspapers with an adult language.
- Listen to other radio channels eg BBC Radio 2 or 4.
- Actively listen to adults speaking.

If you use too much slang, you may isolate other cultural groups and miss out on the strengths of getting a diverse mix in your team.
See the sections on Teams and Valuing Difference.

Listening is a very important part of communication
"You have two ears and only one mouth – so you should listen twice as often as you speak."
Here is an easy memory aid to help you improve your listening skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Link</th>
<th>Indicators – focus on the topic – before the lesson begins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicate</td>
<td>Listen for the main points in the introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signal</td>
<td>Signal words – listen for the emphasised words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take</td>
<td>Take part – be actively involved in the session – it helps you retain information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquire</td>
<td>Enquire – asking questions keeps your attention focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Notes – take notes – you remember more if you write it down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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How to make it easy to listen
Listening and good communication take practice. Spend some time watching people you respect as good communicators. What body language do they use, what patterns of speech? Try out some of these skills with friends and relatives.

Remember that you are communicating all the time. This is true even when we are not speaking. Our non-verbal communication, how we look, behave and react to situations speaks volumes!
See section on Brand and Image.

"The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause."
Mark Twain