

CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How: Communication in the Workplace

OALCF ALIGNMENT

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	2
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A2. Interpret documents	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	1
Competency F - Engage with Others	N/A	1

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employment | <input type="checkbox"/> Postsecondary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeship | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School Credit | |

Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adaptability | <input type="checkbox"/> Numeracy |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creativity and innovation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital | |

NOTES: Part four of an eleven-part series on workplace norms for employed learners.

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WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW

Note for practitioners:

This series of **Skills for Success Curriculum Resources** is a beginner's guide to the modern workplace for LBS learners. The goal is to provide essential tools to employed learners, or learners seeking employment, so that they can thrive as employees. This series considers personal development topics ranging from conflict resolution to time management; topics focused on changes in the workplace; and mental health issues like stress management.

The overall focus of the series is on helping employees (or aspiring employees) understand their rights and responsibilities.

These resources are learner-based and activity-focused, with each topic area serving as a mini-lesson, followed by personalized activities. The activities invite learners to respond to lesson material or explore their own ideas on the subject.

The series is divided into eleven sections that can be used separately or in tandem:

- Your Rights in the Workplace
- Adaptability in the Workplace
- Collaboration in the Workplace
- Communication in the Workplace
- Creativity and Innovation in the Workplace
- Problem Solving in the Workplace
- Work-Related Stress
- Time-management
- Conflict Resolution
- Self-Advocacy
- Changes in the Workplace

*This is Section Four, Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How:
Communication in the Workplace*

WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW: Communication in the Workplace

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	4
Introduction	5
Benefits	7
Communication in the Workplace	8
Face-to-Face Communication.....	9
Telephone Communication	13
Written Communication.....	16
Written Communication.....	22
Skills For Success.....	24
Next Steps	25

Overview

Are you currently employed? Are you about to start a new job? There are many things about the modern workplace that you may not know.

This resource series is designed to help you get the most out of your employment.

When you have a job, there are several important questions you should ask:

- What are my rights?
- How can I advocate for myself?
- How should I expect to be treated on the job?
- What are the expectations at a modern workplace?
- What has changed at workplaces over the last few years?
- How can I be my best at:
 - conflict resolution
 - time-management
 - communication

You may also face other challenges on the job. Do you have concerns about:

- stress on the job
- mental health at your workplace

This resource series will consider these topics and more. Participate in the lessons and activities. You will learn to get the most out of the modern workplace.



Introduction

Communication is an essential workplace skill. At work, there are expectations about how you should communicate. Understanding these expectations is very helpful. And developing your communication skills is important.

Why do you need to use good communication at work?

- Problems can be avoided or solved if you are a **good** communicator.
- Problems can arise if you are a **poor** communicator:
 - conflicts with co-workers
 - confusion about roles and tasks
 - increased risk of mistakes and accidents
 - less efficiency
 - lower employer, manager, and customer satisfaction

The good news: communication skills can be learned. This resource will teach you about workplace communication norms. It will help you improve your communication skills.

Soon we will learn more about workplace communication. First let's talk about **your** situation.



Let's discuss!

Answer these questions with your teacher or partner:

- Do you find communicating with others challenging?
- Do you consider yourself to be a good listener?
- Do you ever have trouble getting across what you're trying to say?



Your Goals!

It's time to think about your goals:

1. Are you currently looking for work? Yes ☐ No ☐
2. If so, what sort of work interests you? Discuss with your teacher and partner.
3. How do you think improving your **communication skills** might help you at work?



Optional Task!

Do this now or when you have more time:

- Make a list of five jobs that interest you.
 - Now re-write the list. Put the job you'd like most at the top. Then put the job you'd like second-most. And so on.
 - Write the letter **C** beside any job that involves a lot of customer service.
 - Write the letter **T** beside any job that involves a lot of time on the telephone.
 - Write the letter **W** beside any job that involves a lot of writing.
- Some jobs require specialized communication skills like customer service, telephone service, and writing.

Benefits

Benefits of Good Workplace Communication

There are many advantages to using good communication at work. Good workplace communication helps avoid trouble. It also helps to foster a positive work environment. When co-workers and managers communicate well, everyone wins. Here are some of the benefits of good workplace communication:

- **Reduce and manage conflict.** Good communication prevents a lot of conflict. It also helps to put an end to conflict more quickly.
- **Grow relationships between co-workers and managers.** Good communication means respect and consideration for each other. It helps relationships develop and thrive.
- **Understand roles and responsibilities.** Good communication prevents confusion about duties. It means asking questions and avoiding mistakes.
- **More collaboration.** Good communication helps staff to work together better. It improves efficiency and fairness.
- **More creativity and innovation.** Creativity is born from sharing ideas. Innovation comes from putting minds together.
- **Increased job satisfaction.** Feeling heard and understood is essential to employee satisfaction.



Communication in the Workplace



Reflect!

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. What are some problems that might result from poor communication at work?
2. What are some benefits of good communication at work?
3. How important is it to you to be listened to at work? Discuss with your teacher or partner.
4. Have you ever had a hard time communicating with a co-worker? How did this make you feel? Discuss with your teacher or partner.
5. Have you ever had a hard time communicating with a boss? How did this make you feel? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Face-to-Face Communication

Types of Communication

Let's look at three important ways to communicate at work. We will discuss tips for excelling at each.

1. Face-to-Face Communication.

We sometimes forget how important this is! Workplace interactions matter. How you communicate determines your relationships with co-workers. It affects how your boss sees you. It affects customer satisfaction.

- Try to communicate face-to-face **as much as possible**. Especially about important matters!

Here are some tips to be a great face-to-face communicator:

a. Listen Carefully

When communicating with co-workers, bosses, and customers:

- be alert and engaged
- stay focused on the exchange
- avoid distractions like cell phones
- ask for clarification if you are confused

b. Watch for Non-Verbal Cues

Communication is not just about the words. Watch for other cues like:

- smiles or frowns
- nodding or shaking head
- body language (see more below)

c. Use Confirming Signals

Show that you understand what is said by:

- meeting the speaker's eyes
- smiling
- nodding
- giving a thumbs up

➤ Remember: if you don't understand, ask questions.



Optional Task!

Do this now or when you have more time:

- Have a conversation with a teacher or partner.
- Talk about what you both did on the weekend or any other topic.
- When you have finished, work together to complete the check list below.

Did you:

- ☐ stay alert during the conversation?
- ☐ avoid distractions and focus on what was being discussed?
- ☐ watch for non-verbal cues like smiling and frowning?
- ☐ watch your partner's body-language?
- ☐ occasionally meet the speakers eyes?
- ☐ smile, nod, or give a thumbs up to show you understood?
- ☐ ask questions if you didn't understand something?

- Which of these communication methods felt most natural?
- Which do you need to improve?
- Discuss with your teacher or partner.

d. Adjust Your Communication Style to the Situation

Speaking at work is different than chatting with friends. There are certain expectations. You should try to be **professional**. This means:

- being polite
- not swearing
- not interrupting and waiting for your turn
- speaking without too much emotion
- asking for the chance to speak and saying thank you

You should also use the appropriate communication type. For example, your boss may want shift-change requests by email. Stick to these rules. Choose face-to-face communication when:

- you have a pressing question
- there is conflict to address
- there is an urgent situation to attend to

e. Pay Attention to How You Speak

There are strategies when you do speak face-to-face at work:

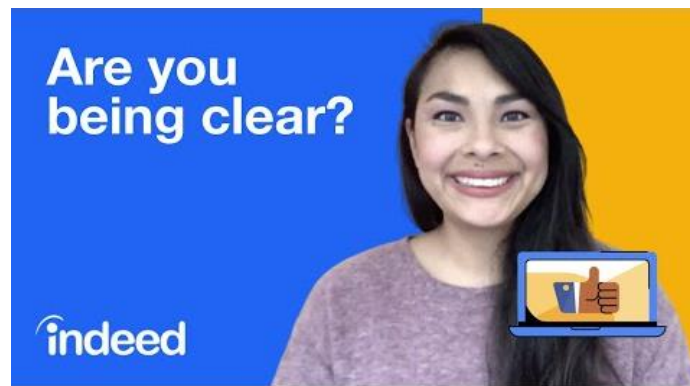
- speak slowly and clearly
 - speak at a loud enough volume
 - make eye contact and smile
 - don't cross your arms—this can make you seem angry or closed-off
- Sometimes nerves make us speak too loudly or too quickly. Before speaking, take a deep breath. This is calming. Then speak with confidence.



Reflect!

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Watch the video below. It reviews these workplace communication strategies.
2. Complete the fill-in-the-blanks questions as you watch.



What are four questions to improve your communication skills? Fill in the blanks for each question:

How do I _____?

What does my _____ say about me?

Where am I _____?

Why is _____ an important part of communication?

3. How could you improve in these areas? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Telephone Communication

2. Telephone Communication

Answering the phone is not the main duty of all jobs. But it may be required sometimes. Telephone communication often involves customers. It can involve angry customers. It's important to get it right.

Here are some tips to be a great telephone communicator:

- a. **Answer Promptly.** Customers are often calling with a question or a complaint. Don't leave them waiting!
- b. **Give a Professional Greeting.** When answering the phone, you represent your company. Give a greeting that is clear, friendly, and polite.
- c. **Listen Even More Carefully!** Phone reception is not always clear. Pay close attention. Ask questions or ask the speaker to repeat themselves.
- d. **Have a Positive Demeanour.** Work phone calls may involve emotional customers. They may be confused or angry. They may have been placed on hold and be impatient. Stay positive and don't respond to negative emotions.
 - Even angry customers do not have a right to be bullies. If emotions escalate, put the customer on hold. Contact a manager for assistance.
- e. **Give a Professional Sign Off.** Thank the caller for their time. Wish them a good day. Leave them with a positive impression of the company.





An Example:

An auto-mechanics boss said all staff must answer the phone if it rings more than twice. Usually the office manager answers the phone. But the office manager is off. The phone rings three times and a mechanic answers as instructed. On the other end is a customer. This is their conversation:

Mechanic: Good morning. Thank you for calling Northern Autoshop. How can we be of service to you today?

Customer: I brought my car in yesterday and you said it would be ready by now! I have to drive to Toronto soon! When will it be ready?

Mechanic: I'm very sorry for the inconvenience. Please give me a moment to check your records on the computer. I see here that your vehicle is being worked on right now. Would you mind if I put you on hold? I will speak directly to the mechanic working on your vehicle. I'll get an accurate time for you.

Customer: Fine.

Mechanic: Hello? I spoke to the mechanic. I told them that you are in a rush. They said they would be finished within the hour.

Customer: Ok, fine. I will come and pick it up now.

Mechanic: Perfect. We look forward to seeing you. Thank for calling Northern Autoshop.



Reflect!

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

- a. Read the example above about the mechanic.
- b. As you read, go through the checklist of good telephone skills below. Tick off each one the mechanic accomplishes. Did the mechanic:

answer the phone promptly?

give a professional greeting?

listen carefully to the customer's needs?

maintain a positive demeanour?

give a professional sign-off?

- c. Do you ever answer the phone at work? Do you always use good telephone communication skills?
- d. What phone skills would you like to work on? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Written Communication

3. Written Communication

Many jobs will require you to participate in written communication. This is a different kind of skill from oral communication. It can be intimidating to put your words down on paper. **The good news:** there are many resources to help you.

Here are some common forms of written communication at work:

- **Emails.** Emails can be useful for communicating about schedules and setting up meetings.
- **Memos.** Are a form of inter-office letter. They are usually written by managers.
- **Complaints.** If customers or co-workers have concerns, they may have to write them in a form.
- **Record-keeping.** Some jobs require that you record information:
 - Secretarial work involves recording client appointments and details.
 - Delivery work can involve recording drop-off times and routes.
 - Warehouse work can involve recording deliveries that have arrived.
 - Many jobs require recording customer information.

Here are some tips to be a great written communicator:

a. Be Clear and Concise

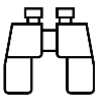
The number one rule of writing is **clarity**! Use simple words and short sentences. Be polite but direct.

- It's a good idea to have a trusted colleague read over your important emails for clarity. Do they understand your meaning? If so, good to go!

b. Use a Professional Style

Using appropriate tone and language is even more important in writing. Try to avoid sounding casual or emotional.

Use polite greetings like **Hello** or **Good afternoon**. Use polite sign-offs like **Thank you** or **All the best**. Then leave your name.

**An Example:**

In this example a retail worker at a bookstore is emailing a co-worker. The retail worker is hoping to switch shifts with the co-worker. The email is below:

Hey,

I need some time off on the weekend. You owe me for when I switched shifts with you. Don't say no or I'll be mad. Write back soon.

**Reflect!**

1. Do you think the email uses a professional style? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. What rules of professional style does it break?

Here is an email written in a more professional style:

Good afternoon Quinn,

I would like to request a meeting with you **at your earliest convenience**. I have a few questions I would like to ask you. **I would be grateful for a few moments of your time. Please let me know what time works for you.**

Thank you,
Blake

The phrases in bold are professional language that is commonly used:

- **At your earliest convenience.** This means as soon as possible.
- **I would be grateful for a few moments of your time.** This is a polite way to ask for a meeting from a superior.
- **Please let me know what time works for you.** This is a professional way to ensure you get a response.

Now try to re-write the email on the previous page using a more professional style:

c. Make Good Use of Email Subject Lines

Most people focus on the body of an email. But don't forget about the subject line. The subject line should be:

- clear
- accurate
- informative

A subject line shouldn't be too general. Put in enough information. That way the reader knows why you are emailing and the key details.

A **bad** subject line for a meeting request:



Subject: **Meeting**

A **good** subject line for a meeting request:



Subject: **Meeting requested at your earliest convenience**

Try to come up with your own subject line. Imagine you are emailing a co-worker. Imagine that you are requesting the co-worker switches a shift with you. What is a good subject line?

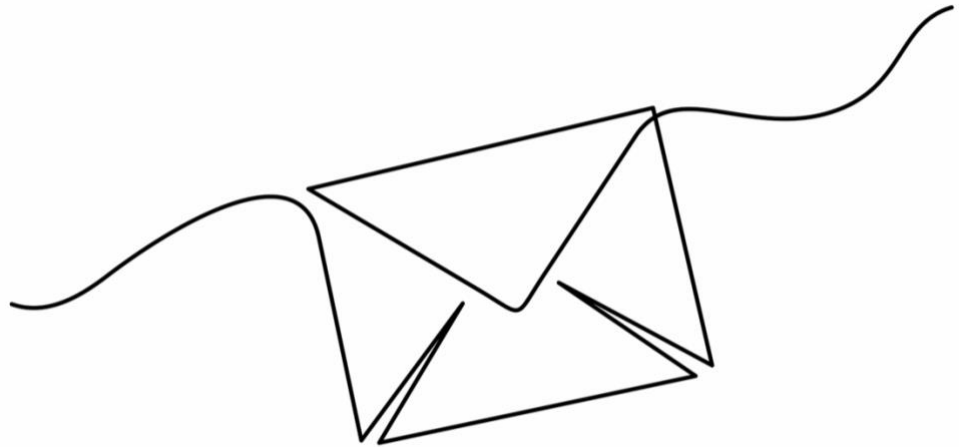
d. Proofread

Always be sure to proofread important written communications. You can use an app to proofread all your written texts, including emails. One of the best proofreading apps available is Grammarly. It is free to download here:

<https://www.grammarly.com/>

e. Keep Email Communication to a Minimum

Remember that face-to-face communication is often better. Emails can be impersonal. They are more likely to lead to miscommunication. They shouldn't be overused.

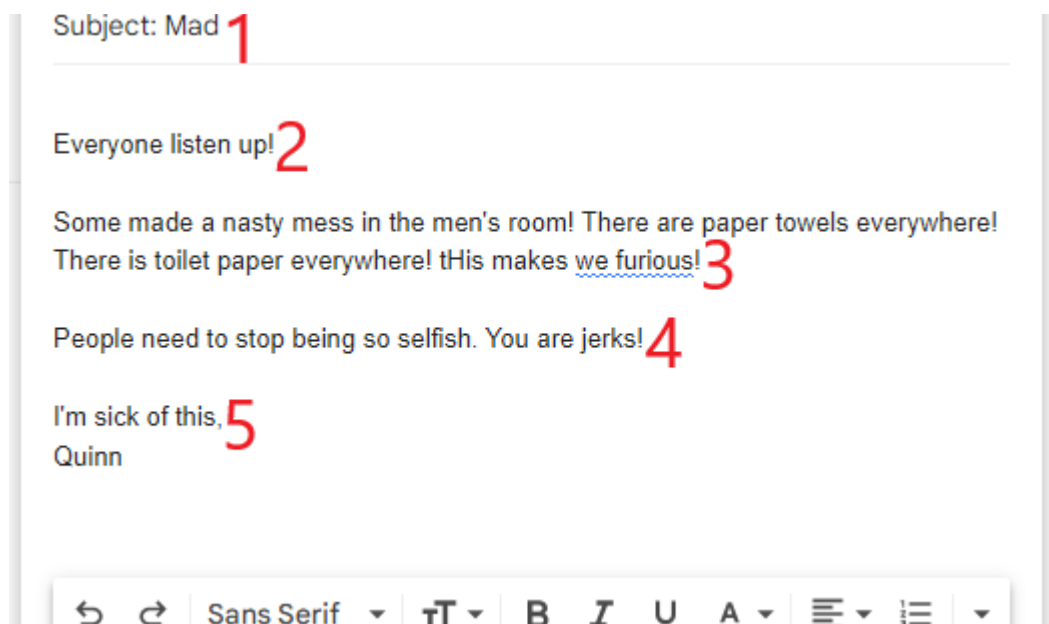




Reflect!

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

Below is an email with several mistakes in it. Can you explain them?



Mistake 1: _____

Mistake 2: _____

Mistake 3: _____

Mistake 4: _____

Mistake 5: _____

- Do you think this is a good thing to send an email about? How else could you address this issue? Discuss with your teacher and partner.

Written Communication

4. Other Communication Keys

Here are some other keys to being a great communicator:

a. Ask Questions. When in doubt ask questions:

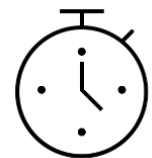
- Ask your boss or co-workers for guidance if you are confused.
- Ask customers for clarification if you don't understand their concern.
- It is always better to ask than to make a mistake.

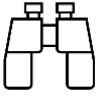
b. Ask for Feedback. To understand how you are doing at work, ask for feedback. Take criticism with an open heart. Use it to improve your performance.

c. Ask for Help When You Need It. It's important to set boundaries in life and at work. If a task seems too difficult, ask for help. Especially if you are at risk of injury or missing a deadline.

d. Be Prompt in Your Communications. Don't let issues linger. If you have a concern or a question, ask as soon as you can. Just be sure it is a convenient and appropriate time for your boss or co-worker.

e. Take Time to Plan Important Communications. Unless it is urgent, take a little more time to get important messages right. Plan what you are going to say. Ask a trusted friend to read or listen to your message first.



**An Example:**

A manager gives a fast food worker instructions. The company has started selling onion rings. The manager explains how they are cooked and served. The fast food worker listens carefully. But they are confused about something. To be sure they don't make mistakes, they promptly ask a question: **“Can you show me the container we use to serve the onion rings?”**

The manager points out the proper container. The fast food worker meets the manager's eyes. The fast food worker smiles, nods, and gives a thumbs up. The fast food worker has understood the lesson. They make no mistakes making the onion rings. The manager is very pleased. The worker gains confidence in their abilities.

**Reflect!**

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Read the example above about the fast food worker.
2. How did the fast food worker use good communication skills?
3. What was the result? Discuss with your teacher or partner.
 - Using good communication skills at work has another important result: it makes you more **confident!**

Skills For Success

Skills for Success and Communication

The **Skills for Success** (SFS) are the everyday skills Canadians need for work, learning and life. Several SFS are required to improve your communication skills:

- **Communication.** Good communication at work helps you:
 - avoid conflicts and confusion
 - develop good relationships with co-workers
 - gain confidence in your role
- **Collaboration.** Good communication leads to more and better collaboration at work. This helps to strengthen work relationships.
- **Creativity and Innovation.** Good communication allows for ideas to be shared and listened to. This promotes creativity and innovation on the job.
- **Problem Solving.** Good communication helps problems get solved. The problem can be identified and solutions can be worked out.
- **Reading and Writing.** Reading and writing are key to developing your communication skills.



What are your strongest SFS? Which do you most need to work on?
Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Reflect!

Learn more about the Skills for Success here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html>

Next Steps

Are you still struggling with communication in the workplace? There are many more resources available to help you. Some are listed below:

- **OpenLearn** offers a free online workplace communication course. It is for more advanced learners. It is free but you will have to make an account:
<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-business/effective-communication-the-workplace/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab>
 - **edapp** offers free communication training for employed people:
<https://www.edapp.com/course-collection/free-communication-training-for-employees/>
 - **LinkedIn** has several tips on developing workplace communication skills:
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/effective-communication-workplace-8-tips-help-you-become-lee>
- Also see the other resources in this series: **Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How**