

## 14 Proven Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills

Estimate the attention span of your audience, then cut it in half. That's a good length for your presentation.

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[Successful leaders](#) are able to meaningfully communicate with others.



mentored the senior [leadership](#) team of [GE](#) to new heights. [Jeff Bezos](#) is known for articulating the [Amazon](#) ethos clearly to employees and the world. All of these leaders possess outstanding leadership skills.

Here are 14 ways you can improve your [communication skills](#) in order to become a more effective leader.

## 1. Learn the basics of nonverbal communication.

One [study](#) found that nonverbal communication accounted for 55 percent of how an [audience](#) perceived a presenter. That means that the majority of what you say is communicated not through words, but through physical cues.

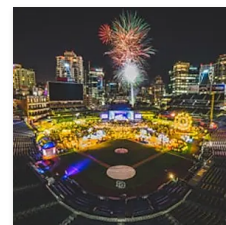
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To communicate clearly and confidently, adopt proper posture. Avoid slouching, folding your arms or making yourself appear smaller than you are. Instead, fill up the space you are given, maintain eye contact and (if appropriate) move around the space.

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In 1990, a graduate student at [Stanford University](#) was able to prove that presenters overestimate how much listeners understand. In a [study](#) that became known as "the tappers and the listeners," one set of participants was asked to tap the melody of 120 famous songs. The other participants were asked to guess what song was being tapped.

Tappers estimated that 50 percent of the songs tapped would be correctly identified. In reality, only 2.5 percent of songs were correctly identified. This study shows that it is important to communicate clearly, and to over-communicate when sharing new ideas. As this study indicates, it is likely that the audience will fail to absorb as much as you expect.

### **3. Avoid relying on visual aids.**

Steve Jobs instituted a rule at Apple that [banned all PowerPoint](#) presentations. Similarly, [Sheryl Sandberg](#) instituted a PowerPoint ban at Facebook. Both leaders realized that PowerPoint presentations can hinder rather than help communication.

Be prepared to use words, compelling storytelling and nonverbal cues to communicate your point with the audience. Avoid using visual aids unless absolutely necessary.

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### **4. Ask for honest feedback.**

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members of your team is critical to becoming a better communicator. If you regularly solicit feedback, others will help you to discover areas for improvement that you might have otherwise overlooked.

## **5. Engage the audience in discussion.**

Regardless of how compelling the speaker is, all audiences have limited attention spans. To become a more effective communicator, make presentations and discussions interactive.

Ask the audience a question, encourage people to call out their thoughts during a brainstorming session or at the very least ask hypothetical questions to stimulate the audience.

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## **6. Start and end with key points.**

Think back to the "tappers and listeners" study mentioned earlier. Clear communication is of paramount importance. To ensure that the audience understands the key takeaways from a presentation, reiterate key points at the start and finish. This can also be accomplished by providing attendees with a one-pager that includes key points the audience should consider throughout the presentation.

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A common framework used by business experts, [like those at McKinsey](#), is the purpose, importance, preview (PIP) approach to presentation introductions. Following this approach, the speaker first states the purpose of the presentation, and then shares why presentation is important by reviewing implications and possible outcomes.

Finally, the presenter gives a preview of the topics that will be discussed. This framework is a useful way to get audiences excited about the presentation, helping them to focus on your message and on key takeaways.

## **8. Record important presentations for posterity.**

It can take a good deal of time and energy to communicate effectively. In cases where you may need to give the same presentation multiple times, consider recording it and sharing it in the future.

Platforms such as [Wistia](#) and [Zoom](#) allow speakers to record themselves delivering a presentation. These video-recording platforms allow presenters to edit the video to make it more engaging and helpful. They also provide admins with metrics about viewer engagement.

Recorded presentations can be especially helpful for communicators who need to regularly provide training in a company that is hiring employees quickly.

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comedians are certainly effective communicators. Comedians including Chris Rock and Dave Chappelle are able to host compelling 90-minute comedy shows, in part because they have [mastered the art of timing](#).

Great comedians, like all great communicators, are able to feel out their audience to determine when to move on to a new topic or when to reiterate an idea.

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## **10. Get comfortable speaking extemporaneously.**

When lawyers present a case in front of the United States Supreme Court, they typically speak extemporaneously. That is to say, the lawyers write down a series of topics they intend to discuss, but they do not memorize what they would say word for word. This method of communicating allows the lawyers presenting a case to cover all of the necessary points, while giving them flexibility as to how to communicate based on audience reaction or questions.

Business communicators should consider adopting an [extemporaneous speaking style](#). It takes practice, but it will allow for more natural communication, and can help with audience engagement.

## **11. Get to know your audience.**

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audience is different, and will have different preferences and cultural norms that should be considered when communicating. A good way to understand expectations is to ask members of the audience for examples of good communicators within the organization.

**Related:** [10 Ways to Engage Your Audience During an Important Meeting](#)

## **12. Add novelty to improve audience retention.**

A [recent study](#) revealed that people generally retain more information when presented with novel, as opposed to routine, situations. To help audience members retain information, consider injecting some sort of novel event into a presentation. This might be something funny, or something that simply catches people by surprise.

## **13. Focus on earning respect instead of laughs.**

It can be tempting to communicate with others in a lighthearted way; after all, this can be a good way to make friends in a professional setting. But remember that the most successful communicators are those who have earned [respect](#), rather than laughs. While telling a joke or two to warm up an audience can be effective, avoid ending a presentation with a laugh.

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want to connect with others. To communicate effectively, first listen to what others have to say. Then you can provide a thoughtful answer that shows you have taken those ideas into account.

## Conclusion

Communicating clearly is one of the most effective skills you can cultivate as a business leader. Remember to communicate using nonverbal and verbal cues. Listen carefully to what others have to say, and over-communicate in novel ways to ensure the content of the conversation sticks with the audience.

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