

UNIT V

COMMUNICATION : THE BIG WORD TODAY

The word ‘communication’ is ubiquitous. The academics talk about it, the media people talk about it, the industry personnel talk about it. Trainers and training institutes specialising in communication are mushrooming all around you. The buses, the trees, the lamp posts – all beckon you with posters and flexiboards making tall promises. Possession of communication skills is the gateway to job, money and success.

What do we mean by ‘communication?’

Let us start with a simple dictionary meaning of the word.

“the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information”

(The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary)

Read the definition, probably a few times, and ask yourself the following question.

Have I not been doing this always?

The answer is a big **YES**. We have been communicators all along. Think of the connections, friends you have made. It would not have possible had you not communicated well.

So, communication is a not a new subject you have to learn. It is what we have been performing among friends, relatives and in limited social groups. From experience, we know that we do not always succeed in the intended communication. There are times we have observed our communicative behaviour to find out what went wrong and effect the necessary modifications or adjustments.

Now to go back to the question “What is communication?”

Communication can be defined as

1. INFORMATION TRANSFER

Encode – Receive – Decode

The basic assumptions in this category are

1. Language transfers thoughts and feelings from one person to another person.
2. Speakers and writers insert thoughts and feelings into words.
3. Words contain those thoughts and feelings.
4. Listeners or readers extract those thoughts and feelings from the words.

[Steven Axley (1984) qtd. In Eisenberg and Goodal Jr (1997)]

2. TRANSACTIONAL PROCESS

People do not play a single role – of a encoder or decoder.

Clear distinctions cannot be made between senders and receivers.

People play both roles, often simultaneously.

Feedback, information about how a message is received, is valued.

Focus on the person receiving the message and on how the receiver constructs the meaning of that message.

(eg. Group discussion, interactive lecture)

3. STRATEGIC CONTROL

- ❖ Communication as a tool for controlling the environment
- ❖ Choice of strategies appropriate for accomplishing multiple goals

(For example, a lecture in a classroom has to keep the students interested, fulfill its objectives, maintain the focus, ensure good retention etc.)

4. BALANCING CREATIVITY AND CONSTRAINT

This involves maintaining a balance between group role and individual identity.

(For example, your fulfilling the normative behaviour expected of you as a student and at the same time establish an identity as a specific individual.)

These definitions are difficult to understand at an abstract level. But if you develop the art of recognizing these in your experience, in real-life situations, your confidence levels are bound to go up.

The definitions given here are not exhaustive. There can be any number of definitions. The purpose of giving these definitions is to sensitise you to this activity called communication, to show in what way communication can be looked at, perceived and understood.

Types of Communication

- ❖ Intrapersonal - All of us try to understand ourselves and in doing so carry on a conversation with ourselves
- ❖ Interpersonal - understanding others, ability to create and maintain friendships, social skills
- ❖ Small Groups (Group Discussion)
- ❖ Public Speaking
- ❖ Interview Performance
- ❖ Letter, Resume Writing
- ❖ Technical Writing
- ❖ Writing of brochures

We can go on adding to the list. These definitions and types are indicative of how communication is thought about and classified. Think about them, reflect on them and evolve a conceptual ground of your own.

Language, redundant though the statement, is a major tool of communication. But language alone does not make communication, particularly, **speaking**. The following research finding emphasizes this point.

Communication is

58%	Facial expressions
35%	Tone
7%	Actual words uttered

But it should not be misunderstood as language being not so important. Low in percentage, it is nevertheless the cutting edge – the actual performance. The first two items pack meanings and feelings into the words you have chosen for delivery.

Our specific task here is to learn to communicate in English, a language having tremendous professional value in the globalised context. It is the language that dominates the world of business and computers. In the preceding units, we saw how the English language is used creatively and effectively.

The activities, if carried out, would have definitely created a feel for the English language. In the texts we did come across instances of humour, pathos, and evocation of images, feelings, atmosphere etc. We have also glimpsed at selectively communicative situations in some of the texts. More particularly remember and re-remember the interface between you as a reader and the text. You definitely enjoyed those passages for a better grasp of what communication means or involves.

On our way to becoming an efficient communicator, it would be helpful to acquaint ourselves with the five basic concepts of emotional intelligence. Today's recruitment processes include measurement of EQ (Emotional Quotient) – the latest being SQ (Spiritual Quotient). One does not become a great communicator by intellect and reason alone. If the feeling component is absent, any communication will fall flat. It is a misconception to treat feelings as belonging only to art and literature. Scientists, engineers and professionals talk about their inventions, designs and subjects with a lot of feeling. It is only when you communicate as a living person with the right set of feelings (the technical term is 'affect'), the task is well completed.

FIVE CONCEPTS IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

1. Self-awareness - recognising emotions in you
2. Self-regulation - gaining control over them
3. Empathy - recognising emotions in others
4. Motivation - rallying feelings and emotions to propel you towards goals
5. Social Skills - knowing how not to offend, making yourself acceptable and welcome, confidence in unfamiliar situations etc.

Learning to communicate better involves all these concepts.

Let us sum up by saying

- ❖ We need to have sufficient stock of language components
- ❖ We need to know the principles of putting them together as meaningful sentences and sequencing them.
- ❖ We need to know ourselves

- ❖ We need to know others
- ❖ We need to make our personality a component of communication
- ❖ We need to know communication is a meaningful game played between speaker and listener, writer and reader
- ❖ We need to know that communication is a participatory process

DO NOT TREAT THE FOREGOING PAGES OF THIS UNIT AS TEXT TO BE LEARNT

TREAT THE WHOLE THING AS A CONVERSATION

THE INTENTION IS TO ENABLE YOU TO CREATE REFLECTIVE MENTAL SPACE FOR OBSERVATION, ANALYSIS & IMPROVEMENT OF YOUR COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOUR

ACTIVITY

This is a suggested activity, not a must.

You may understand the dynamics of communication by reading about a current topic.

Collect newspaper write-ups on India's Nuclear Agreement with the US and the controversy over it between the Congress and Communist parties. The controversy has been on for sometime and reached an impasse. Right now (August – September 2007), things seem to look up as the contending parties have agreed on devising a mechanism to sort out the differences.

Read the news items so far and continue to do so as the process is still active. Especially, concentrate on the statements and counter statements made by leaders from both the groups. You will identify communicative processes that led to conflict and other communicative processes that prompted reconciliation. Communicative skills in this context are negotiation skills as well.

Those of you who complete the assignment can share your observations and findings.

Let us now turn to some academic business.

Communication skills fall under four categories

**LISTENING
SPEAKING
READING
WRITING**

Of the four, listening and reading are capacity builders whereas speaking and writing are performances.

LISTENING

Listening is a receptive skill. It is called thus because to listen we have to respond to language. We listen to people talk in order to make sense of meaningful sounds of language. This making sense is made possible by context, our knowledge of language and the world.

We do not listen to all the spoken texts in the same way.

Some of the spoken text types

- **Announcements**

- at airport
- at railway station
- at sports meet
- at cricket matches
- at exhibitions and tradefair

- **Instructions**

Computerised instructions on phone

- railway enquiry
- ticket status
- accommodation availability
- arrival
- departure

- **Conversations**

- **Stories**

- **Lectures**

- **Advertisements**

We must have knowledge of how language and language features are organized in these types.

Reason for listening also determines the kind of listening.

We might listen for

- gist

- specific information
- detail
- attitude

When we have an interesting speaker delivering a lecture we do extensive listening; we want to listen to the whole thing and understand.

Then there is the concept of active listening.

Active listening is

- paying close attention to what you hear
- working hard to understand it
- reacting to it
- remembering it

Listening is not doing just one thing. It involves doing many things.

- dealing with spoken language, its features and characteristics
- making use of the context and our knowledge of the world
- understanding different text types
- understanding different speeds of speech and accents

ACTIVITIES

1. Make list each of

- Things you enjoy listening
- Things you do not enjoy listening

2. Listen to a newscast (English) each in

- Indian Channel – Doordarshan / NDTV / AajTak
- CNN
- BBC

Compare your listening experiences.

3. If you have a DVD of a movie or an episode in a serial in English, play it and listen to the dialogue your eyes closed. Then play it again, this time viewing it and listening. Find out the difference between the two exercises?

It is not possible to do it on the whole movie. You may select a 3 or 5 minute part.

SPEAKING

Speaking is the most used form of communication. It is a productive skill. It is performance. In speaking we express meanings to other people.

What do we do when we speak? Is speaking doing just one thing? Or does it involve doing a number of things. Take a look at the following list.

- pronounce words
- use intonation
- answer questions
- greet people
- ask for clarification
- correct oneself
- take part in discussions
- plan what to say
- change content or style in accordance with listener response
- ask for and give information
- respond appropriately
- start speaking when someone else stops
- persuade
- tell stories
- use accurate grammar and vocabulary
- use tenses
- take part in conversations
- express approval or disapproval
- say comforting, supportive words etc.

Speaking as Performance

There are formal occasions / situations involving spoken performances.

- Group Discussions
- Interviews
- Public Speaking
- Compering
- Lecturing

Formal occasions apart, we do speaking in all kinds of situations – among family, relatives, friends, at the market place etc. We feel at ease speaking in certain situations but develop nervousness and anxiety in others. Why is this so? To become better speakers it is not sufficient to concentrate on the language component alone. All of us need to look at our communicative behaviour as speakers. Speaking in academic, professional spheres especially makes most of us become tongue-tied. What happens here to the ease we command in our social conversations?

Nervousness, anxiety and tension are like slushy football ground. You cannot play on it. If you want play and enjoyment, the ground needs to be in good condition. To convert the slushy ground into proper playing field, it takes hard work and perseverance. Likewise, the three ghosts of the mind – nervousness, anxiety and tension – need to be worked on. Do not try to hide from but face them. And, when can we face them? Not in isolation but in company. Is a football game possible without fellow players and spectators?

The three ghosts combine to produce FEAR – a powerful demon we want to run away from. Most of us think the source of the three ghosts and the demon are external. But on closer examination, we will find that we ourselves are the source, the producers, the creators.

If we have the power to produce something, then it should be possible to bring that something under our control as well.

How to do it?

Best way to tackle fear is to face it. Recognise it, bring it out for your reflection and analysis, identify the sources and for a first step attack the tiniest of the sources to eliminate it. Fear, less by even .001% is a great starting point. We avoid performing because we do not want to fail, do not want to lose. But remember,

You did not learn to walk without falling down
You did not learn cycling without getting your knees hurt
You did not learn to cook without spoiling the dish
You did not learn swimming without gulping a lot of water.

Agreed. Then why do you expect to speak well without committing mistakes. It is natural that all of us commit mistakes and equally natural that we learn from them.

Courage is being unafraid to lose
There is no failure, only feedback

So, face Fear, let him throw you down any number of times but make it a point to get up and have a go again. Fear succeeds only when you decline another go. Be at it, put your trust in your ability to try and try again, you will in the place of the monster now find a steed willing to serve. Recall your first try on a motorbike or a scooter – the wet palms, dry throat, knot in the stomach and the racing in the head. Days, months, years and kilometers and now you are an expert rider. Apply the same principle to your speaking. It will work.

One of the root words for communication is the Latin communicare which means “to share.” You may be a good speaker but the talents will be wasted if you use them only to demonstrate your power. Like the game of football would be meaningless without

spectators, your performance will meet a similar fate. Always carry the attitude to share and it would not be long before you become an accepted, welcome speaker.

Good speaking is always interactive.

What is interaction?

It is the two-way communication.

In this type of communication,

- we use language, and body language to make the listener attentive to what we say
- and also remain alert to feedback, i.e. to check whether they have understood

Some of the interactive strategies are

- making eye contact
- using facial expressions
- asking check questions
- clarifying meaning and understanding

But, can we continue to be energetic on an empty stomach?

NO

- For your horse to be swift, you need to feed and take care
- For your mobike to run efficiently, you need to fill it with petrol and maintain
- For your dining table to be meaningfully functional, you need the storeroom stocked, stove and vessels ready

So you need to build capacities. Collect

- words
- phrases
- idioms
- clauses.

You have your stock.

Then acquaint yourself with the principles of putting together the items – ability to make sentences. Grammar. Recipe.

Then follow link sentences, elaboration and the final output – the full meal.

Initially we require more time to do this. But practice, from this point onwards, takes you to the stage of being fluent and accurate.

FLUENCY is the ability to

- recall the language items needed to convey your idea
- put together these items effectively
- deliver them with good impact

ACCURACY is the use of

- correct form of grammar
- vocabulary
- pronunciation

Activities

1. We cannot speak on what we do not know or what does not interest us. Make a list of which you can speak on and what interests you most.
1. Develop your ideas, thoughts of your own on the items in your list and form sentences to convey them. Speak them aloud. Of course, initially it is difficult to speak them aloud in others' presence. Try it facing the mirror or say it to a tree. Or to your pet dog, if you have one. He might think his master's top box needs repair but he is not going to love you less on that count.

Jest apart, these can serve as good rehearsal sessions that can prepare you for the real world. Move from single sentences to more of them (linked to the main idea) and when you have enough for 2 or 3 minutes, make a presentation in the class.

READING

Classes, lectures, assignments, homework, revision and examinations. Think of books and reading, the next moment your mind is assaulted by thoughts of these. Somehow, the wholesale perception of 'reading' as a mere academic exercise has associated it with drudgery, slogging, boredom etc. So much so, we have successfully

dislocated 'reading' from the natural world. The result, we are sceptical of printed texts offering us enjoyment.

Let us shake ourselves out of this attitude and take a look at Reading.

Reading is our conversation with the world.

Reading is making sense of things.

When we look at a beautiful

Mountain

River

Flower

we say 'WOW.' And this 'wow' is the expression of our reading and making sense of those. So, do not forget, great writings are a record of such 'wows' and were written with the intention to share them. The writers have packed their joy, sense of wonder, serious thoughts, reflections etc. into those written words. They want you to share them, but on condition that you respond with your effort.

Reward means nothing if offered on a platter.

If you want gold, you should be willing to dig.

Which would you prefer?

Dropped on a mountain top by a helicopter

or

Your trekking your way to the mountain top

Which of the two can give you experience and educate you?

We know the answer? Don't we? So, do not shy away from texts that can empower you.

- Reading, like listening, is a receptive skill
- Reading involves making sense of texts

To make sense successfully we need to understand language at

- word level
- sentence level
- text level

Learning and education are a process of socialization and hence we need knowledge of the world also to understand what is conveyed by language.

What is a text?

It could be a postcard, a letter, an advertisement, a note, a poem, a short story and so on.

Most texts that we have to negotiate can be defined as a series of sentences. In this series sentences are connected to one another by

- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Knowledge of the world

Look at the following sentences.

On a visit to his sister at Chidambaram, the boy was surprised to find the drinking water very tasty. He found out that she had brought the Siruvani water a day earlier from Coimbatore.

To find the answer to the question why the water is tasty we require the knowledge of the world – **Siruvani water is tasty.**

And also to understand why the visiting brother is surprised, we again need the knowledge of the world – **Chidambaram ground water is not tasty.**

This requirement of knowledge of the world to see connections between two sentences is known as COHERENCE.

Grammatical links also enable this connection. In the second sentence 'he' refers to the boy and 'she' to his sister. This is known as COHESION.

COHERENCE & COHESION are two key concepts in reading.

TYPES OF READING

1. Reading for specific information or Scanning

Eg.

- looking for an ad. in the education column in a newspaper
- looking for a number in a telephone directory

2. Reading for gist or Skimming

This is done to get a general idea of a book.

Eg.

- leafing through a book in order to decide whether to buy it or not
- a teacher quickly assessing whether a book is fit enough to be kept in a library

3. Reading for detail

Here you spend attention and time on every sentence to get the meaning of every word.

- reading a letter from a dear friend from whom you have not heard for a very long time

3. Extensive Reading

This involves reading long pieces of text.

Eg.

reading stories, articles, novels

Here you do not pay uniform attention. Your interest varies, you concentrate on some while skipping others.

4. Intensive Reading

When we do a poem or a shortstory in a class, we are asked to pay close attention to the language used. We are asked to look for all the words pertaining to a topic or theme or work out the grammar of a sentence. In poetry we look for similes, metaphors and other such figures of speech. These activities make us understand how language is effectively employed and identify working models for us.

This type of reading is not so much treated as a sub skill under reading. It is more a language learning activity.

Activities

1. Make a list of difficulties you face as a reader to find out the reason for them – whether a difficulty relates to word level, sentence level or knowledge level.
2. If confronting a full printed page is demanding, you may start with comics. They are bound to equip you with vocabulary, comprehension to tackle text.

3. Assign 30 minutes to one hour a day to reading newspapers. An advice most given and heard but never practised. Reading of newspapers gives you knowledge of the world without which your comprehension and understanding will remain low.

WRITING

Like speaking, writing is a productive skill.

We write to convey ideas / messages.

So, writing involves a writer, a message and a receiver.

Writing progresses from

- letters to words
- words to sentences
- sentences to paragraph and so on

There are several written text types

- single words
- sentences
- notes
- addresses
- paragraphs
- instructions
- letters
- e-mail
- precis
- reports
- essays
- orders
- articles
- monographs
- books etc.

Writing is not one whole skill. To learn to write, one has to practise carefully a number of related subskills.

For example, to be accurate in writing, you have to

use words correctly (correct spelling)
write legibly
use punctuations appropriately

- select apt words for conveying the idea

ensure grammatical correctness
form and join sentences correctly
link sentences to form a logically coherent paragraph

In addition to accuracy, writing must communicate idea / message successfully. For example, if you want to communicate your experience as a child of the huge banyan tree in your village, you will start recording your feelings, information and ideas on your subject. You may start with a description, remember the games you played under the tree, how you felt at home and secure under its shade etc. Information, feelings, ideas you have now, and as a next step you need to organize them, sequence them in such a way that the writing captures the essence of your experience. The third step is making sure that the writing carries the appropriate tone and style.

The stages in the writing process

brainstorming

Think and recollect as much as possible on the subject

Note-making

The size of the tree
Its appearance

- at dawn
 - at noon
- at dusk
during rains
when swayed by the winds

The sound by

winds swaying it
raindrops falling on it

- The people who regularly spent time under it during specific hours.
The games you played
Your playmates
Incidents, feelings and emotions associated with the tree
Reflect on how the images have stayed with you all these years
Assess how the memories of the tree have served as a source of comfort

State the relationship between you and the tree at this very moment of writing.

Sequencing, organizing ideas

Out with the first draft

Editing

- Check whether your writing captures your experience
Look for inadequacy of expression and improve
Remove redundancy (excessive repetition)
Feel for flow and recast sentences that do not have it

Edited draft (if you are not satisfied you can once again edit and go in for another draft.)

Proof-reading (carefully checking for mistakes in accuracy)

Writing, as in the case of speaking, will become a resident facility only by constant practice.

You become a good speaker by speaking, speaking, speaking,

You become a good writer by writing, writing, writing,

Activities

Read the newspaper, identify items of your interest, and as a response form one sentence of your own on each item and write them down.

At the next stage, make and collect related ideas for each of the sentence and develop them as paragraphs.

Read the letters to the editor column in newspapers. You will come across a variety of tones and styles. For example you may have letters that are

humorous
indignant
angry
indictive
admiring etc.

Observe the choice of vocabulary and syntax for the effect intended to be created. You may use the good letters as working models.

Model Questions

1. Bring out the importance of communication in today's world. (100 words)
2. Explain LSRW. (200 words)

Remind yourself yet again, the foregoing pages are not to be treated as examination stuff alone. They are tips in helping you recognise how language works and how you can work it.

March ahead as confident, successful communicators

ALL THE BEST