BSBXCM401

APPLY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE WORKPLACE

BSBXCM401

Apply communication strategies in the workplace

Release 1

Learner Guide

Aspire Version 1.2

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Release 1, version 1.1	October 2020	First release
Release 1, version 1.2	February 2021	Additional content added to Topic 2 to align more closely with Unit of Competency, on pp 30, 31, 33; New question 3 inserted in Practice Task 4 on p 40; New question 3 added to Learning Checkpoint 2 on p 54.

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Before you begin

This Learner Guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBXCM401 Apply communication strategies in the workplace*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this Learner Guide

This Learner Guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the Learner Guide you need to read, and which Practice Tasks and Learning Checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this Learner Guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the Learner Guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	Read each topic in this Learner Guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples	These highlight key learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice Tasks	Practice Tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Summaries	Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning Checkpoints	There is a Learning Checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which Learning Checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table provides definitions for each foundation skill.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Writing	• Develops written texts using appropriate grammar, spelling and punctuation in relevant organisational formats
Navigate the world of work	• Understands responsibilities and complies with legislative, regulatory and organisational requirements
Get the work done	• Uses problem-solving skills to identify and analyse issues or barriers, consider options and develop responses and opportunities for improvement • Uses digital technology to find, record or communicate basic information

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcome		Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1: Prepare for communication	1A	Identifying communication activities, requirements and roles	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1B	Confirming communication objectives	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1C	Selecting communication methods	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 2: Use communication strategies to provide work instruction	2A	Giving a presentation	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2B	Communicating information and instructions	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2C	Communicating and negotiating work requirements	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 3: Facilitate workplace communication	3A	Building relationships and facilitating respectful interaction	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3B	Overcoming communication barriers	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic	Key outcome	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 4: Monitor and support team communication	4A Ensuring communication meets requirements	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4B Providing and seeking feedback	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4C Collating and reporting important information	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic 1 | Prepare for communication

1A   Identifying communication activities, requirements and roles

1B   Confirming communication objectives

1C   Selecting communication methods

1A Identifying communication activities, requirements and roles

Clear and appropriate communication makes it easier to get things done at work.

In a typical office environment, you are constantly communicating with others, including colleagues and clients or customers. On an ordinary day, you probably do at least one of the following, and probably more:

- Talk to others face to face
- Read and reply to emails and texts
- Make and receive telephone calls
- Attend a meeting or training session in person or via phone or video
- Give a presentation
- Write a report
- Fill in a form
- Update information on a database, intranet or website
- Post to social media and respond to others' posts

Almost everything you do at work involves communication, whether you're ordering from a supplier, answering a customer query or persuading your colleagues to adopt a proposal. That means your efficiency and effectiveness at work depend to a large extent on your communication skills. Can you think of any tasks that *don't* require communication?

Example

Managing communication

Doug manages a team at a busy call centre. His role requires him to attend daily briefings with other managers, and to speak directly with finance, HR and payroll personnel, as well as the members of his team. He also deals with calls from customers whose issues are escalated to him. He estimates that he talks to about 40 staff and more than 80 customers a day. His role also involves a lot of written communication, including internal and external emails, file notes and departmental and project reports. He is constantly communicating with others, both verbally and in writing.

Thinking about your audience

To communicate effectively, you need to think about your audience.

The first step in communicating clearly is to consider your audience. Is it just one person, or is it a group? Is it an internal audience, such as members of your team or your colleagues in other departments? Or is it an external audience, such as customers, suppliers or a regulatory body? Is the person you're speaking to a co-worker you know well, or a member of senior management you rarely see? Are you writing to a supplier you've been working with for years, or a prospective client you've never met? Your answers to these questions will dictate how you express yourself – that is, the kind of language you use, and how formal or informal you can be.

Your audience's location is another important factor. For example, if you need to share information with a colleague in the office, you might drop by their workstation. If you need to share information with a group, it's usually quickest and most efficient to send an email. Sometimes a meeting is the most appropriate option, but you may need to give others notice to make sure everyone can attend.

Other factors to consider include your audience's prior knowledge, their literacy skills, their linguistic and cultural background and any physical or cognitive disabilities they may have. Do they have any special needs? You should also consider your audience's preferences: does the person you need to get in touch with prefer emails to phone calls, or vice versa? All of these considerations will help you to decide the best way to communicate.

Your language

Your tone, expression and choice of words should be appropriate for your audience.

Co-workers usually speak informally about day-to-day activities, whether they're communicating face to face, on the phone or via email. In certain situations, though, such as performance reviews or contract negotiations, the communication style we use in the workplace tends to be more formal. Your supervisor may conduct your annual review in a friendly, conversational tone, but such reviews usually have a formal structure, and you'll be asked to sign a form at the end acknowledging what you've discussed.

Communication with external parties, such as clients or customers, is usually more formal. This is particularly true of written communication, especially when you are discussing legal or financial arrangements. Some organisations have strict guidelines about correspondence, and insist on formal greetings and signatures. You may gradually adopt a friendlier, more informal tone as you get to know an external contact well, but this depends very much on context.

The language you use should always be easy to understand. In a business setting, you should choose plain, simple words and avoid long, complex sentences. Communicating clearly and effectively will leave the reader with a positive impression; using technical jargon or unnecessarily sophisticated vocabulary will not. In formal contexts, it's also best to avoid slang. And finally, workplace communication should always be inclusive, avoiding assumptions, prejudice and stereotypes.

Tone

Whether you're speaking face to face or talking on the phone, your attitude and emotions are conveyed not just by your choice of words but also by your tone, which is expressed via the pitch, intonation, volume and tempo of your voice. The same is true of writing: the way you express yourself and factors such as the time you take to respond shape the way the recipient interprets your words. Using the wrong tone can confuse your audience, or send an unintended message.

Technical jargon

Many workplaces use words that are particular to their industry. Almost every job has its own set of special words and ways of describing things. This is called 'jargon', and technical words are called 'technical jargon'. Specialist language can be useful when communicating with people who share your knowledge, but it is best to avoid it when speaking to others from outside your workplace, unless you know they're familiar with these terms. You should also avoid the overuse of abbreviations, as they can create confusion.

Inclusive language

Inclusive language is free from words or phrases that reflect stereotyped or prejudiced views. It includes everyone, regardless of their sex, race, cultural background or other personal characteristics such as age, sexuality or ability. You should always use inclusive, non-discriminatory language in the workplace. For example, you shouldn't start a letter with the greeting 'Dear sir' when you don't know if the person who'll read it is a woman or a man. 'Dear madam/sir' is a better choice.

Your audience's location

Sharing information with colleagues in the same room or on the same floor is usually easy, but you should always be considerate of others. Some people don't mind brief interruptions, but many find them annoying. An email is sometimes a better way to communicate, especially in an open-plan office, where stopping by a colleague's workstation for a quick chat may distract others around you.

Communicating with colleagues who are on the road or working at a different site can be more difficult, and reaching customers and suppliers can pose similar problems. For one-on-one communication, phone, email or video chat may be the best option. You'll need to check if the other person has access to a phone or computer first, and you may need to contact them at a specific time, when they'll be available to talk.

If you need to communicate information to a group, a meeting is sometimes the most appropriate option. This may take some planning. For example, if you need to include staff who work remotely, you need to give them adequate notice and arrange a phone or video connection.

If you deal with people in different parts of Australia or around the world, you also need to think about time zones, ensuring that you make contact during regular working hours unless otherwise agreed.

Your audience's prior knowledge

How familiar is your audience with the information you want to share? If they already know a lot about the subject you're discussing, you won't need to give them much background detail or define any technical terms you use, but when you're sharing new information, you may need to give your audience more. This might mean explaining new concepts, defining unfamiliar terms, describing past events or decisions or outlining future plans.

For example, to remind your team of existing health and safety procedures, you might go over them briefly at your regular weekly meeting. New information, such as important changes to health and safety legislation, might be outlined in an email and then explained in a special meeting for all staff.

Your audience's language background

In the course of your work, you are likely to deal with people from many different language backgrounds, both in Australia and around the world.

Australia is a multicultural country with strong international ties, so you are likely to work with colleagues, customers and suppliers who speak many different languages.

If you are communicating in English, you need to take your audience's English-language communication skills into account. If the person you're communicating with has limited proficiency, you may have to adjust the way that you express yourself to get your message across – for example, by speaking a little more slowly and clearly than you usually would. Keep your voice at its normal volume, though – shouting doesn't make you any easier to understand. When you write, use plain English, avoiding jargon and technical terms, and favouring simple words and sentence structures. Note that communicating well also means listening or reading carefully, to be sure you understand what others are telling you.

In some situations, communicating effectively means using your audience's language to get your message across. For example, if you're the safety officer at a company with lots of Vietnamese speakers, you should make sure that hazard warning signs and posters about workplace safety are written in clear, plain language, in both English and Vietnamese, to be sure that all workers can read and understand them.

Your audience's cultural background

Culture shapes the way we communicate with others.

Culture influences our interactions with the people around us – how we look at each other, how close we stand, how often we touch each other, how we speak to each other. It shapes our ideas about status, gender, and the relationship between society and the individual. To communicate effectively, you need to consider both your audience's cultural background and your own. How are they similar, and how are they different? To get your message across, you need to negotiate these differences sensitively, showing respect and courtesy.

Here are some cultural differences you may encounter in the workplace:

Eye contact	Many Australians see direct eye contact as a sign of respect, a way of making it clear that someone has your attention and that you are open and honest. In some other cultures, you show respect by looking down or away. Direct eye contact is considered aggressive. **Tip** ▪ Do not assume a person is being rude because they avoid making eye contact with you
Touch	In Australia, shaking hands is a common way of greeting a customer, client or business associate. It has long been a tradition among men, and many women now greet business associates in this way too. In some cultures, touching others is not seen as appropriate, particularly in interactions between women and men. Touching a person's hand, hugging them or putting an arm around their shoulder may seem friendly to you, but it can cause offence. **Tip** ▪ Do not show offence if someone does not shake your hand
Respect for authority	In Australian workplaces, the relationship between managers and their employees is often quite informal. Staff can generally communicate directly with people in more senior positions. In some cultures, strict hierarchical protocols limit employees' contact with those in more senior roles. When employees do interact with management, they speak formally and are expected to show deference. **Tip** ▪ Find out about the accepted protocols before doing business with people from other cultural backgrounds
Gender relations	In Australia, it is common for women and men to work together and to do the same jobs. Some industries and professions are still dominated by female or male workers, but there are no formal barriers to a woman becoming a miner, for example, or a man becoming a nurse. Workplaces in some other cultures may intentionally segregate the sexes, and some roles may be seen strictly as men's jobs or women's jobs. **Tip** ▪ Be understanding of co-workers from other cultures in which segregation between women and men is common
Privacy	Australians tend to be quite social in the workplace. They openly share information about their personal lives and families. In some cultures, talking about such things in the workplace is considered inappropriate, and personal questions may be seen as intrusive. **Tip** ▪ Respect other people's right to privacy

Taking credit	Australians want credit for their work and achievements. This is considered reasonable and appropriate.
	In some cultures, insisting on taking credit for your work is seen as rude and arrogant; the individual is a member of a team, and the individual's achievements are seen as the team's achievements.
	Tip
	• Make sure that both individuals and their teams are given credit for their work, and be careful about claiming credit for your contribution to a team effort

Your audience's abilities

If your audience includes individuals or groups with physical or sensory disabilities, you might need to change the way you communicate to meet their needs. If you're a receptionist, for example, and one of your colleagues is deaf, you might email them instead of calling to let them know that a guest is waiting for them at the front desk. Other similar examples might be holding meetings in rooms with wheelchair access or preparing a large-print version of the company's procedures manual for staff who are visually impaired.

You can also tailor the way you communicate for those with cognitive or learning disabilities. Accommodations designed for employees who face such challenges often benefit their co-workers too. For example, if you make a training video for an employee with dyslexia rather than giving them a printed handout, you can use the video to train other employees in the future.

If you work with colleagues who have physical or cognitive impairments, it is likely that your organisation has already developed communication strategies to meet their needs. It is your job to learn these strategies and use them consistently to support your colleagues' inclusion in the workplace. You may find that these strategies are also useful in communicating with others outside your organisation. It's up to you to establish what your audience's needs are, and how you can best meet them.

Your audience's preferences

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who then says, 'Send me an email'? They don't want to rely on their memory and prefer to have the details you've discussed in writing, as a record or reminder. Others prefer not to deal with any more written correspondence than they have to and prefer to keep email to a minimum.

Such preferences are highly subjective. Some people like to receive detailed information in writing before a meeting, so they can properly digest it and be ready to discuss it. Others prefer not to read anything beforehand, so they can listen to everyone else's opinion before deciding what they think. Some people get a lot from onscreen presentations, while others find them distracting and prefer to focus on what the speaker is saying. Some people prefer a text to a phone call; others prefer a phone call to a text. You will get to know the preferences of individual colleagues as you work with them.

> **Example**
>
> ### Considering your audience's needs
>
> Leila's manager appears at her desk. 'I need you to coordinate an all-staff meeting in 30 minutes. It looks like we've won that tender, and I need to let everyone know so we'll be ready to start as soon as the contract is signed.'
>
> Leila nods and responds, 'That's great! I'll get the conference room ready, and we'll get the field team to call or video-conference in. Will you brief Neil before or after the meeting?'
>
> Neil, the finance manager, is hearing-impaired, and Leila knows there won't be time to put together written information for him before the meeting.
>
> 'I'll talk to him now,' her manager replies. 'I'd like him to attend the meeting, but I'll also follow up with him afterwards. Thanks for reminding me. I think that takes care of everyone's needs. Well done!'

Thinking about context

Thinking about your audience is important, but you also need to think about context – not just who you're communicating with, but what and how and when and why. For example, sensitive subjects, such as an individual's performance at work, are best discussed face to face, but official warnings about unsatisfactory performance should always be given in writing.

Context includes factors such as:

- Your situation or setting
- The nature of the information
- The urgency of the information
- The response you need from your audience
- Your availability to answer questions
- Your organisation's requirements

Situation/setting

The situation in which you will share information with others often dictates how it should be communicated. If the setting is a conference, for example, you would prepare lecture notes, and possibly put together a visual presentation to accompany what you say. If you're training new employees, you might start by demonstrating how to do a task or showing a video and then reinforce this information by giving the trainees verbal instructions as they practise doing the task themselves.

The nature of the information

The way that you communicate depends to some extent on the nature of the information you need to share. Simple information can be conveyed verbally, but complex information is better put in writing, so that the recipient can refer back to it. Highly confidential information, such as customers' credit card numbers or the details of commercial deals, should only be communicated by secure means that cannot be intercepted.

Timing/urgency

If a message is urgent, it is usually best to make a phone call or talk to the appropriate person face to face. You can follow up with a clearly written email or memo to others who need to know. For example, if broken equipment poses an immediate threat to health and safety, you should warn staff who use it without delay and put a sign on the equipment warning others. It is only after the immediate danger has been averted that you should write a report for management about the potential hazard.

Desired response

Do you need a response? If so, let your audience know, and tell them how soon you need it. Other people are focused on their own projects and deadlines, so you can't just assume they'll get back to you straightaway. When you need an answer urgently, make that clear. In such cases, it may be best to speak face to face or over the phone rather than sending an email. Some people only check their email once or twice a day, or even once every few days.

Availability

Communication isn't a one-way street. Are you available to answer your audience's questions? If so, let them know how and when they can contact you. If you're away from the office, for example, but still available to take calls, make sure you include your mobile phone number when sending email. If you're not available, you could include a short note at the end of your email stating the days you work and giving contact details for a colleague who can deal with urgent queries in your absence.

Organisational requirements

Most organisations require their employees to communicate certain kinds of information in specific ways. For example, the minutes taken at a monthly meeting might need to be circulated to all staff the next day. Such requirements are usually documented in policy or procedures manuals. Guidelines for dealing with customers may be outlined in a code of conduct. Some organisations also have protocols determining which staff members can communicate directly with major clients or regulatory bodies.

Example

Communicating complex information

Justin has just seen the sales figures for last month and is extremely concerned. The situation seems urgent, so he calls his manager. When she answers, he tells her there is a problem and begins reading out the sales figures. Justin's manager stops him and asks him to send her an email with the sales figures so she can look at them before they discuss the situation. Justin agrees. On reflection, he realises that there are too many numbers to take in over the phone. He also knows that his manager likes to consider all the facts before discussing a problem with others. He makes a note of it: next time, instead of calling her straightaway, he will send her an email with the sales numbers first and ask her to call him as soon as possible to discuss them. The situation is worrying, but it doesn't qualify as urgent.

Communication roles

Your job description outlines the routine tasks that are an everyday part of your role, but your duties don't end there. You have another role to play as a communicator – several roles, in fact. It's important to understand these roles, so you can make a meaningful contribution to your team and the organisation as a whole. Effective communication is a shared responsibility.

Owner, producer and audience

Broadly speaking, there are three roles you can play at work: owner, producer and audience.

The owner sets tasks for others. It's the owner's responsibility to communicate what they want from the producer. In this context, 'owner' doesn't mean the owner of the business – it just means the person who decides what others will do or produce.

The producer is responsible for carrying out tasks according to the owner's requirements. The producer is often part of a team and has to communicate with other team members to achieve their goal.

The audience is the recipient of the producer's work. It is the audience's responsibility to engage with the producer's work, and sometimes to communicate their response to it. For example, if your supervisor asks you to write a report and send it to the general manager, your supervisor is the owner, you are the producer and the general manager is the audience.

It's likely that you play all of these roles at different times. You might even switch between them in the course of a single day at work, depending on the tasks you are engaged in.

Which of these roles have you filled recently? Can you give examples from your own experience? Which role are you most comfortable in? And which do you think is the most important?

Roles within groups

In 1948, scholars Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats published an influential paper called 'Functional Roles of Group Members' in the *Journal of Social Issues*. In this paper, Benne and Sheats identified and named ten different roles people play when working on a task as part of a group. Each of these roles has a slightly different way of communicating with the other members of the group, as follows:

Role	Description	Example
Initiator/coordinator	Initiates the discussion, identifies different ideas being discussed and brings them together	'Rajit's feedback justifies Jeremy's proposal for a new process.'
Information seeker	Seeks clarification/information needed to solve a problem, fills gaps	'We need to find out exact pricing and availability before we proceed with that idea. I'll come back to you all with that information.'
Information giver	Communicates relevant, appropriate information to the team in an authoritative manner	'It may not be as big a problem as you think it is. The last five years of data show that sales are always down by a similar percentage in that quarter.'
Opinion seeker	Encourages input and investment by asking others for their opinions	'Cam's idea is interesting, but it's bound to have an impact on your teams. What do you think about it?'

Role	Description	Example
Opinion giver	Makes quick assessments, gives honest opinions, addresses issues that others may want to avoid	'It sounds like a great idea, but I don't think it's practical. Customers aren't ready to move exclusively to online purchasing yet, even if it means lower prices.'
Elaborator	Explores and expands on others' ideas, drawing them together and offering clarity	'If we took Simone's idea one step further and incorporated Rashid's suggestion, we could manufacture the product more quickly and reduce costs.'
Evaluator/ orienter	Evaluates ideas objectively and clarifies the position of the team, establishing direction	'Well, we've all had a chance to have our say and I think we've come up with two solid options. Tony and I will investigate them both on the basis of what we've agreed today.'
Energiser	Motivates and encourages others to contribute and remain focused on achieving the task	'Fantastic – we're making great progress. Now let's write down our thoughts on the problem and stick them on the wall.'
Facilitator/ technician	Facilitates team discussion by organising meetings and addressing communication needs	'Please find attached the agenda for the meeting in the conference room at 2pm today. For those attending via video conference, the meeting link is below.'
Recorder	Records ideas and discussion to ensure ideas and plans are captured	'I can confirm that the following actions were agreed to during this meeting …'

How many of these roles do you play? Which one do you identify with most strongly? Are there any roles here that you wouldn't feel comfortable taking on?

These questions are more important than you might realise, because all of these roles are crucial to a group's success in achieving its goals. If you can identify gaps in your team – roles or positions that need to be filled – you can take steps to fill them. For example, it might mean taking on a new role yourself – such as energising others – or perhaps bringing in an information seeker, opinion giver or evaluator from outside the team.

Example

Communication roles

Kyle receives an email from his manager asking him to set up, facilitate and take minutes from the sales team meeting today as she will be unable to attend. Kyle responds to the email, confirming that he will do this. He then books the meeting room, checks it has video-conferencing facilities for the field sales team and sends an email to the sales team with a meeting link and agenda. Kyle tells the team that he will be facilitating the team meeting today as the managing director is unable to attend.

Practice Task 1

Question 1

List five ways that you communicate with others at work.

Question 2

Think of a task you do at work. How does it require you to communicate?

Question 3

Think of a typical day at work and give examples of when you fill the role of owner, producer and audience. How do each of these roles require you to communicate?
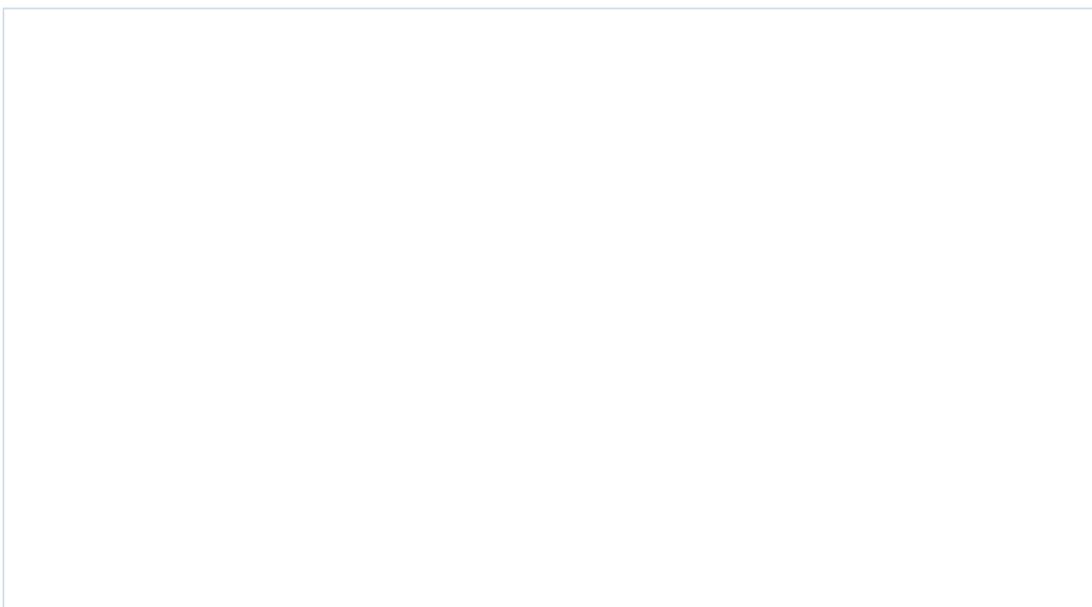
1B Confirming communication objectives

To communicate effectively, you need clear objectives.

Before you communicate, you need to establish your objective. It is difficult to communicate effectively if you haven't identified the result you're aiming for. What is it that you want to achieve? For example, if you tell someone how to do a task, you want them to follow your instructions and do it correctly. Your objective is for them to complete the task successfully.

Sometimes you might have several objectives. Imagine, for instance, that you have to talk to a team member who hasn't been performing well. You want to find out what's causing the problem, but you probably have other objectives too, such as helping them to find a solution, or making sure that they know they can ask for support when they need it.

SMART objectives

Management experts often talk about setting 'SMART' goals: making your objectives specific, measurable, attainable and realistic, and giving yourself a clear time frame in which to achieve them. You can use the SMART principles to define and clarify your objectives at the start of a project or task.

Specific	Clearly define what you want to achieve
Measurable	Decide how you will know when you've reached your goal
Attainable	Choose a goal you know you can reach
Realistic	Take your knowledge, time and resources into account
Time-framed	Set a firm deadline

Example

Setting SMART goals

Imagine that you're the sales director of a small company. You want to cut back the range of products your company sells so you can focus on selling more of your most popular products. You decide to write a report identifying your company's most profitable and least profitable products as a starting point for discussions at next month's sales meeting.

Before you start work, you think about your objectives – giving your team the facts and getting them thinking about which products to keep and which to cut. Then you think about how you're going to achieve these objectives – by researching, writing and sharing your report. Your notes might look something like this:

Specific	• Use last year's sales figures to identify our most profitable and least profitable products • Write a report listing these products, including any relevant customer feedback
Measurable	• Identify the ten most profitable and ten least profitable products • Keep the report to two pages, so the sales team will actually read it
Attainable	• I have the information I need and can ask the finance manager for help in analysing the sales figures
Realistic	• I already have the figures, and there's plenty of time to analyse them • Block out one afternoon next week to draft the report
Time framed	• Finish draft by end of next week • Circulate the report the week before the meeting

Asking the right questions

When someone asks you to write an email or make a phone call, they should make the purpose of that email or phone call clear. If they don't, it's up to you to clarify what the objective is. To find out, you need to ask the right questions. Focusing on the desired outcome is the best way to do this and will help you to structure your message.

Questions you could ask include:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What result do we want?
- What response do we need?
- What do we want our audience to understand?

Another advantage of this process is that it makes you more aware of the wants and needs of others. It is important to consider what outcome the audience wants from the communication. For example, if you are preparing to run a brainstorming session to identify improvements to team processes, the desired outcomes may include active participation by all members, innovative ideas, and suggestions for implementation. The audience will want the opportunity to have their ideas heard.

Using outcome-based thinking helps you to be clear about this from the start. The outcomes you are looking for become a reference point for you to evaluate your communication during or after the exchange. You can adapt and adjust your message throughout the process.

Example

Communication objectives

Enrico receives an email from his manager asking him to put together a 'standard' presentation about their company, products and history for her to use at client meetings she is attending in the Middle East next month. Enrico considers her request and realises he doesn't have enough information to complete the task effectively. He prepares questions for his manager about the audience and the outcomes she hopes to achieve, including:

- Who are the clients?
- What is the focus of the meeting?
- How long should the presentation be?
- How much technical information is required?
- Do you need handouts?

Enrico requests a meeting with his manager to discuss the presentation to confirm her requirements and the communication objectives of the presentation.

Practice Task 2

Question 1

Explain why SMART principles are used when creating communication objectives.

Question 2

Consider what questions you might need to ask if you received the following request from your manager: 'Please invite all staff to a meeting on Friday afternoon.'
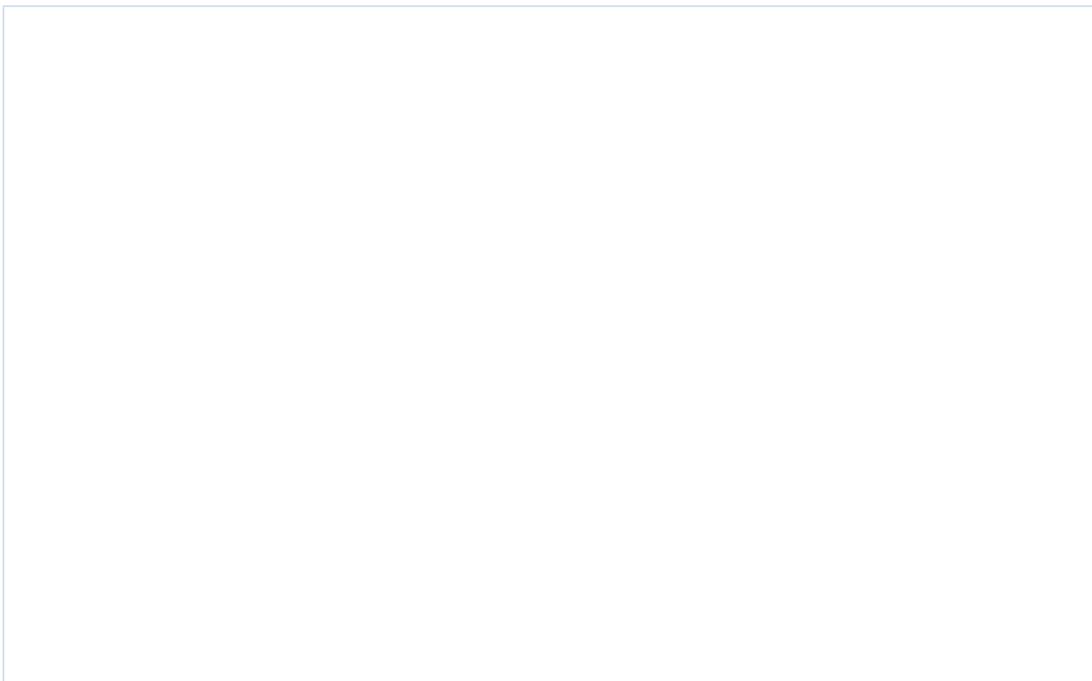
1C Selecting communication methods

Your choice of communication method will largely depend on your purpose, as well as your audience and their needs.

Selecting the most appropriate way to communicate requires judgement. For example, conveying an important message to a team member via email is appropriate, but you may decide to speak to them personally too, to ensure they have read and understood the email and are prioritising your request.

The most appropriate type of communication depends on:

- The purpose of the communication
- The complexity and importance of the information you need to convey
- The preferences and needs of your audience

It also depends on an organisation's requirements, which may dictate the approach staff use to communicate in specific circumstances.

Comparing communication methods

It is important to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each communication method.

Communication is more than just speaking and writing. Different methods have different advantages, such as opportunities for non-verbal communication, and for two-way interaction, including exchanging ideas, consultation and negotiation. There are likely to be a range of communication methods available to you in your workplace.

Verbal – individual

- **Examples:** face-to-face contact, telephone conversations
- **Advantages:** clear message; direct and instant; provides opportunity for interaction
- **Disadvantages:** inconsistency of message across similar exchanges; message may be misunderstood if communication skills are poor; time-consuming, no record to refer back to

Verbal – group

- **Examples:** meetings, discussion groups
- **Advantages:** sends consistent message; provides opportunity for questioning and sharing; provides chance for agreed approach
- **Disadvantages:** time-consuming; cumbersome; different personality types can dominate or withdraw

Written – electronic

- **Examples:** emails, intranet postings, social media posts, instant messages
- **Advantages:** quick and efficient; sends consistent message; is visually effective
- **Disadvantages:** cannot be sure message is read; message may be misinterpreted

Written – open

- **Examples:** display notices; instruction sheets; system documentation; reports, minutes or newsletters
- **Advantages:** sends consistent messages; provides a record; reaches a wide audience
- **Disadvantages:** no opportunity for response; impersonal; cannot be sure message is read; production time and costs involved

Written – targeted

- **Examples:** file notes, letters
- **Advantages:** can be carefully worded; is direct; allows for confidentiality; is a clear record
- **Disadvantages:** too formal and impersonal; does not encourage discussion

Presentation

- **Examples:** exhibitions, speech, small and large group presentations
- **Advantages:** visual as well as verbal; captures interest
- **Disadvantages:** usually one-way communication only; not always correctly interpreted; no clear record; uncertain whether message is understood and accepted by all parties

Choosing the appropriate communication method

How do you choose the most appropriate communication method for each task? Sometimes you will be told what to do. For instance, your workgroup might use a certain template to prepare minutes from meetings. You might be told to email these minutes to other people or file them on the network drive, rather than print them out.

At other times you will have to make up your own mind. For example, should you send an email or go to see the person? Should you write a formal letter or email? Is a detailed report with an executive summary and recommendations required, or is a short two-page update using a progress report template sufficient?

Ask questions to decide on the best method:
▪ Who are you communicating with? (Audience)
▪ Why are you communicating with them? (Purpose)
▪ Do you need a response immediately? (Urgency)
▪ Do you need a record of the communication? (Organisational requirement)

Complying with organisational requirements

Organisational requirements may determine the method of communication you must use in the workplace.

Many organisations have protocols or guidelines outlining how communication with internal and external audiences should be handled. They may include the compulsory use of:

- Letterhead stationery
- Email signatures including your full name, title and contact details
- Templates (for reports, customer correspondence, etc.)
- House style
- Formal language
- Legal disclaimers

You can confirm and clarify your organisation's requirements by speaking with colleagues or your manager, consulting policies and procedures or reviewing previous communications.

Example

Responding to customers

Peta returns to her desk after lunch and reads an email from her customer service manager. It says: 'Mrs Bridge called and wants to confirm the price and installation times for the curtains she wanted.'

Peta sighs. It is company policy to ensure that phone calls are returned by a call and not an email, but Mrs Bridge likes to chat, and Peta has a very busy afternoon and can't afford to spend 15 minutes talking to Mrs Bridge. Peta quickly finds Mrs Bridge's email details and sends her the information she requested.

Two hours later, the customer service manager calls Peta. 'I've got Mrs Bridge on the phone and she's upset that you haven't returned her call. Did you not see the email I sent you?' Peta tries to explain, but her manager cuts her off. 'We have the policy for a reason, Peta. I'll transfer Mrs Bridge through to you now.'

Practice Task 3

Question 1

Consider the scenario in the previous example. Why do you think Peta's employer has a policy about returning phone calls?
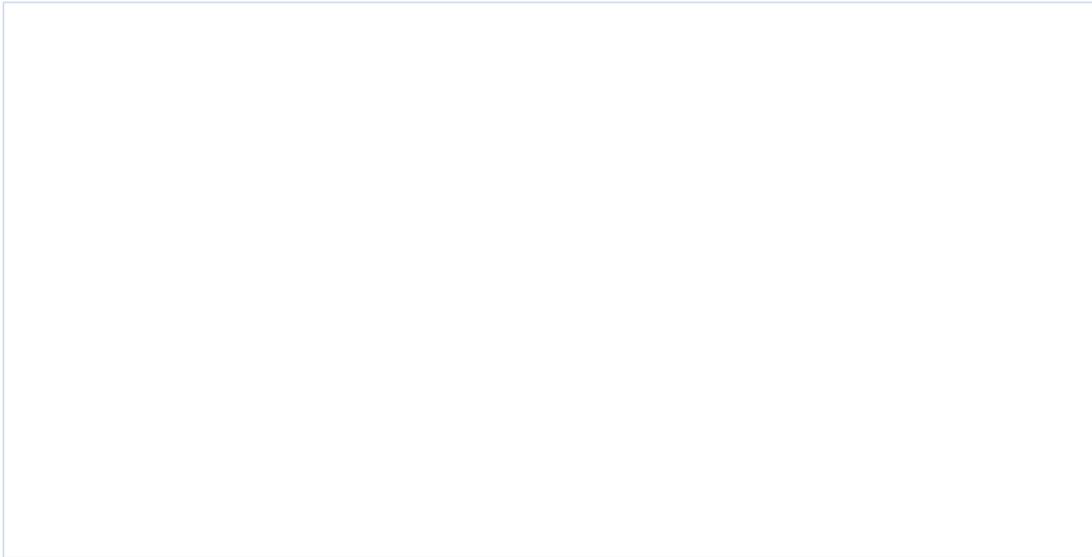
Question 2

Identify two examples of how communication methods in your workplace differ between internal and external audiences.
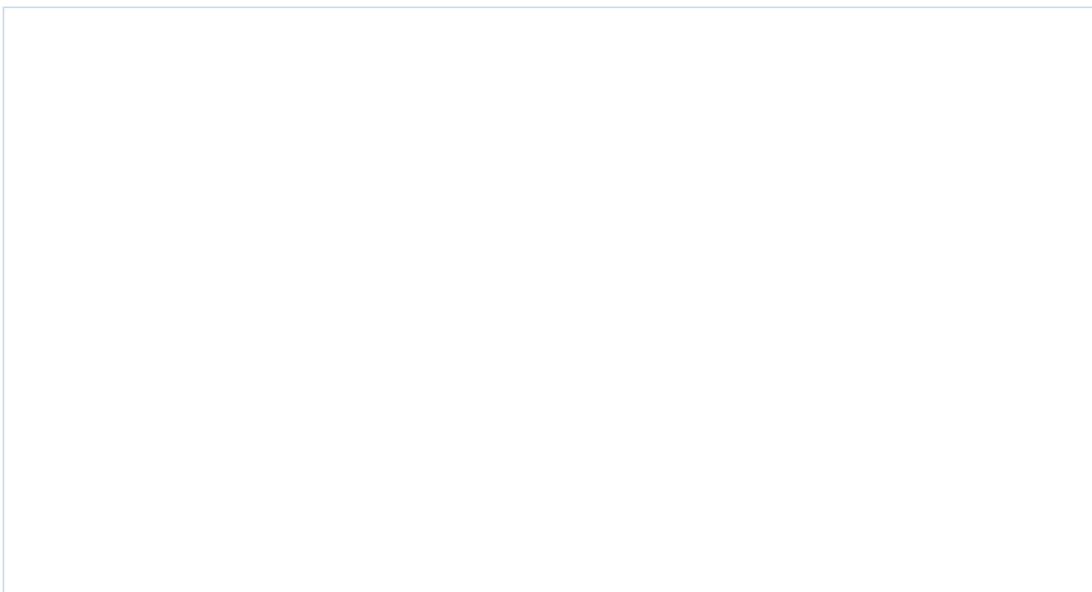
Question 3

Your organisation has a culture focused on continuous improvement. You have identified a process that could be improved to save the business money and time. You want to share your idea with your CEO. What are two things you need to consider before contacting the CEO?

Summary

- Most work activities require communication
- You need to think about audience and context in order to communicate effectively
- Your role as a communicator is likely to vary from activity to activity
- Communication objectives should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable and realistic, with a clear time frame
- Before communicating with others, you should clarify your objectives by asking yourself what outcome you want to achieve
- To choose the most appropriate communication method, you need to consider the purpose, complexity and importance of the information and the needs of your audience, as well as your organisation's protocols or guidelines

Learning Checkpoint 1

Prepare for communication

Read the case study and answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Brianna has been asked to lead the team planning the end-of-year function for staff and major clients. There are 5 people on the team, including Brianna.

Her manager has given them a date and a budget and asked them to put together a proposal for her to approve before any details are shared with other employees.

1. List five different ways in which Brianna and her colleagues might be required to communicate as they are planning the function.

2. Prepare an agenda for Brianna's first planning meeting with the team. Include five items that will be discussed.

3. What information might be required in the team's proposal?

4. What communication roles would be needed in this scenario? What roles might Brianna play, and why?

5. What is the team's communication objective? What questions could they ask to ensure their objective is SMART?

6. What communication method should the group use to present their proposal?

7. Brianna's manager has asked her to give a presentation on the team's proposal to four managers who will make the final decision about the function. What are four things the team should consider when planning their presentation?
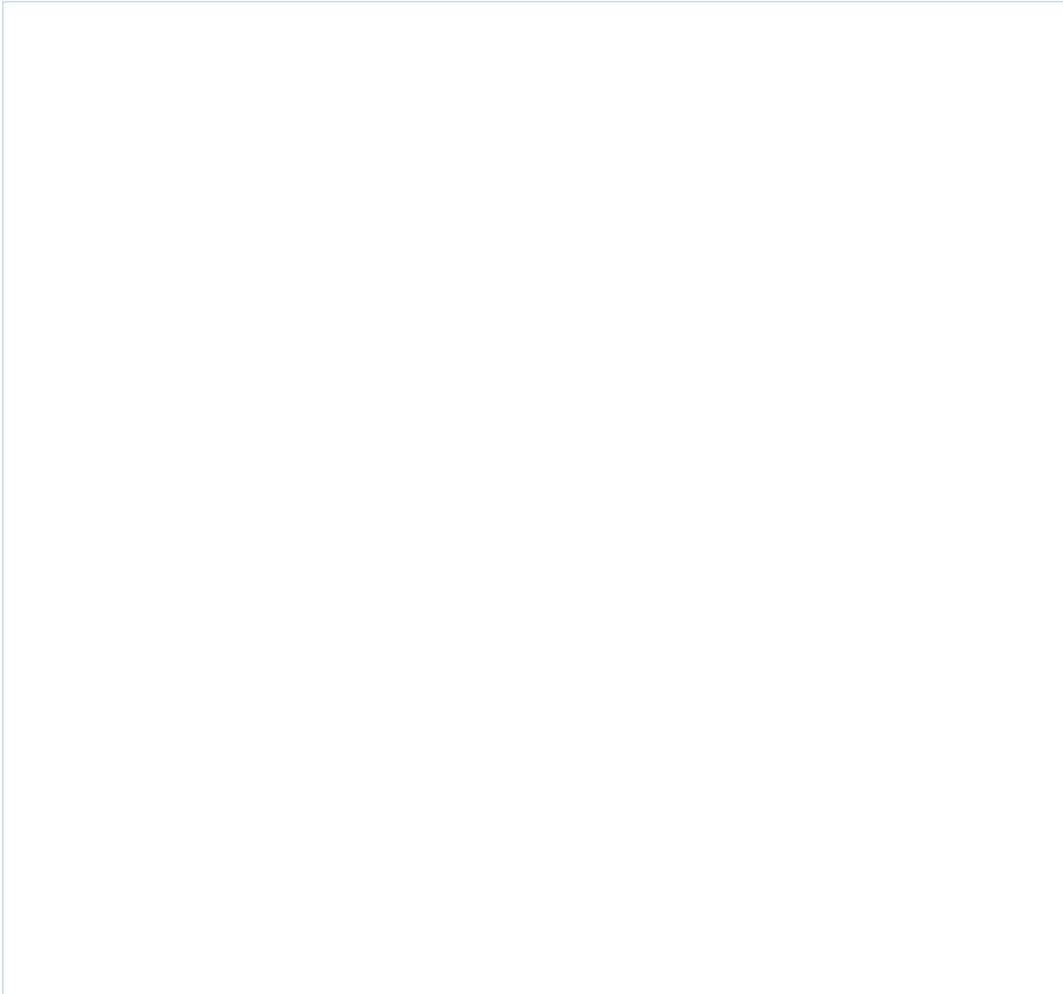
Topic 2 | Use communication strategies to provide work instruction

2A   Giving a presentation

2B   Communicating information and instructions

2C   Communicating and negotiating work requirements

2A Giving a presentation

Any presentation, whether it's a formal training session or an informal talk in front of a small team, must be well structured and appropriate for its audience.

A successful presentation leaves an audience with a clear understanding of its content and a positive impression of the speaker – but being an expert in your field does not make you an expert presenter. To get your message across, you need to be a good communicator as well.

Effective presenters choose appropriate material and adapt both their content and their approach to the needs of their audience. Like most communication skills, presentation skills can be learned and then developed through practice.

Types of presentations

Your audience determines the type of presentation that is appropriate.

Presentations can take many forms. Sometimes you need to present information to others within your organisation – for example, at an informal team meeting or in-house training session. At other times you may need to address an external audience in a more formal setting, such as a professional conference. Different forums often require a different approach.

External forums

An external forum is one in which you address an audience of people from outside of your organisation, such as customers, representatives of other companies, community members or conference participants.

There are many kinds of external forums, including formal presentations, workshops and panel discussions.

Formal presentations

A formal presentation requires research, preparation and the ability to present material confidently. Formal presentations are usually scripted, planned and have a clear structure. They are suitable for providing information to groups – at meetings, for example, or at lectures, conferences, seminars, open days or information sessions. The use of visual aids such as images, tables and charts help to enhance information and engage the audience. There may be handouts provided to the audience and the presenter may use a set of notes to refer to during the presentation. Many presenters allow time for questions at the end of the presentation.

Workshops

A workshop is an interactive presentation that usually combines some formal delivery of content with audience participation through questions and guided activities. Workshops are suitable for audiences whose members have similar levels of knowledge about a topic. They provide an opportunity to learn by 'doing', rather than simply listening.

Panel discussions

A panel discussion is a group presentation at which several professionals discuss a specific topic and respond to questions from a host or from the audience. Panel discussions work well at conferences, allowing representatives of different organisations to present current research findings or share their experiences and opinions with each other and with the audience.

Internal forums

An internal forum is one in which you address an audience of people who are part of your organisation, such as management, staff members, support workers or volunteers. Even when you present to an audience you are familiar with, such as team members, you are representing the organisation, so you must be professional and well prepared. It is essential that you understand the audience and their needs and present the information appropriately.

There are many types of internal presentations. For example, you might:

- Explain the organisation's communication policy at a team meeting
- Hold an in-house workshop to train staff in the use of new software
- Demonstrate a work instruction for a procedure for evacuation during a fire
- Outline your organisation's standards and expectations at an induction session for trainees
- Present a formal proposal to senior management for approval

Planning your presentation

Before drafting your presentation, it helps to draw up a plan. Important questions include:

- What is my central message?
- What are the main points I need to cover?
- How much time do I have?
- How will I capture my audience's attention?
- How will I begin and end the presentation?

Once you have a basic plan, you need to research your content so that you'll be confident speaking about it – try to do this well beforehand. Then you need to consider the audience you'll be presenting to, their needs and expectations, and the communication method or medium that will suit them best. The final step in planning your presentation is to order your content, taking care to structure it logically – at which point you'll be ready to rehearse!

Any information you include in your presentation must be correct and up to date. Research your topic using reliable sources. Thoroughly researching your topic means you will fully understand it, have something valuable to share with your audience and be able to answer their questions.

Thinking about your audience's needs and expectations

Knowing your audience will help you tailor your presentation for maximum effect.

There is much more to delivering a presentation than speaking clearly. To communicate effectively, you need to find out about your audience. Who are they? And what do they hope to gain from your presentation?

Important factors to consider include your focus and pace, and any cultural protocols you should observe. In Australia, for example, speakers often begin with an 'acknowledgment of country', recognising the traditional owners of the land on which the gathering is being held.

You should also think about any needs a particular audience may have. Providing the necessary support may take some degree of preparation, so it's worth thinking about this question ahead of time.

Focus and pace	Your content should be tailored your audience, whether they are beginners with no knowledge of a subject or experts in the area you are discussing. Your delivery also needs to be adjusted accordingly. This means:
	▪ Taking listeners' prior knowledge into account when choosing your content, so it is not too basic or too complex
	▪ Using language that they will find familiar and explaining any terms or concepts that might be new to them
	▪ Speaking at a comfortable pace, pausing to check for comprehension and reinforcing key points as needed

Cultural protocols	Greetings, introductions and the order in which people speak may be dictated by protocol, and your audience will expect you to follow the usual custom. It is useful to know certain details in advance, including: ▪ The full name of anyone you will be introducing or interacting with, and how to pronounce it correctly, as well as their current title ▪ The appropriate way to welcome others to the stage (with a handshake or an embrace, for example) ▪ Whether the audience are welcome to ask questions during or after the presentation
Audience needs	Before making your presentation, consider any needs your particular audience has and how you can address them. For example, this might mean: ▪ Preparing handouts in large print or languages other than English ▪ Checking that a facility has an audio induction loop system, or working with a signing interpreter ▪ Checking the location has suitable facilities such as access to the room and no stairs. ▪ Simplifying complex ideas, and matching visuals and spoken content closely to accommodate people with cognitive impairment

Preparing visual aids

Well-prepared visual aids can improve an audience's understanding of your presentation's content.

Many speakers incorporate visual elements into their verbal presentations to draw the audience in and keep them engaged. An image can often communicate an idea more powerfully than text, and complex information, particularly numerical data, is often best conveyed visually.

Programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Prezi allow you to create 'slide shows' that incorporate images – such as illustrations, photographs, diagrams and charts – as well movement and sound. You've probably seen many presentations created using these programs, so you should have a good sense already of what works and what doesn't. Have you ever heard a presenter apologise to their audience, saying that they know a slide is hard to read? The solution is simple: if you know a slide is hard to read, don't include it in your presentation!

It can be reassuring to have a slide show to refer to, which is one reason that they're so popular, but you should limit the information you include on each slide, including only key phrases and essential points. Your slides should be a prompt, reminding you of what you want to say, not a script that you read out word for word.

You should also judge your use of images, video and audio content carefully, making sure that they really do add something to your presentation and aren't just a distraction. In some cases, it's more effective just to talk directly to your audience, or to choose another more suitable format for your presentation. At a workshop, for example, you can give a practical, hands-on demonstration while your audience gathers around to see what you're doing up close.

Tips for preparing a slide show
• Limit the number of slides, so you don't overwhelm your audience
• Create a template to ensure your presentation is formatted consistently
• Add your organisation's logo and the date of your presentation to the header or footer
• Keep the text brief, including only key phrases and essential points
• Use large type and plenty of white space, to make your slides easy to read
• Acknowledge your sources and credit them appropriately

Ordering your content

Presentations, like stories, should have a clearly signposted beginning, middle and end.

If a presentation is logically organised and clearly structured, it is easier for an audience to follow. All good presentations include an introduction, a body and a conclusion.

The introduction is your opportunity to grab the audience's attention, and to introduce yourself, your topic and the aim of the presentation.

In the body, you communicate your ideas or information, ideally covering a maximum of four or five points. These points should be ordered logically and the connection between them should be clear. If your audience already knows something about a topic, this is a good starting place. Starting with the known and moving on to the unknown helps your audience to process and retain the new information.

In your conclusion, you summarise your main points and bring them together. Don't just trail off at the end with a comment such as 'Well, that's about all.' Be clear and confident, so that the audience's final impression of you is positive.

Some presentations include a section at the start devoted to 'housekeeping' – basic information about the schedule or venue. If you have materials for distribution, you might hand them out at the start too. It's a good idea to decide beforehand how and when you will hand them out, so that you can organise others to help you if you need it.

You should also decide in advance if you will answer audience questions during your presentation or allocate time at the end. Sometimes you may wish to make yourself available to answer further questions or hand out information to interested members of the audience after the presentation has formally concluded.

A typical 'running order' for a presentation	
Introduction	- Introduce yourself, unless your audience already know you well - Greet the audience and briefly explain what your presentation is about
Housekeeping	- Tell the audience when breaks are scheduled, where refreshments will be served and where they can find the toilets and emergency exits - Let the audience know about any assistive technologies or services that are available, such as the provision of an Auslan interpreter - Tell the audience if they should feel free to ask questions throughout or save them until the end
Body	- Give your presentation, making your points clearly and concisely - Answer questions from the audience, where appropriate
Conclusion	- Summarise your main points and share any conclusions they have led you to - End with a clear, decisive statement about the importance of the information you've just presented and how you hope the audience will be able to apply it - Thank the audience for their attention
Question time	- Invite questions, making sure you take them from a range of people - Repeat the questions so everyone in the audience knows what was asked - Keep your responses brief - If you can't answer a question, say so; if possible, refer it to someone else who can
Finishing up	- Thank the host or organiser - Pack up your equipment - Answer questions from individual members of the audience and/or hand out further information

Rehearsing your presentation

Rehearsing your presentation is the best way to build confidence: it allows you to time yourself, so that you won't have to rush through it on the day – or even worse, finish early. It also allows you to refine your material and prepare for audience questions.

If possible, you should try to rehearse at the actual venue – whether that's the break room at work or a conference centre with a professional sound and lighting system – to make sure you're familiar with the set-up and equipment and will have everything you need.

Timing yourself

Timing your rehearsal can save you from running short or going over time in front of an audience.

First, confirm how much time you have to speak, then look at your plan and decide how long you'll need to discuss each point. If you spend too long on any one idea, you may run over time, or the audience may become bored and restless. Make sure you factor in time for questions, too, either during the presentation or at the end.

Next, check the clock and write down the time, or start the stopwatch on your phone, then run through your presentation out loud. Remember that your slides are just a prompt to remind you of what you want to say. Your audience will be able to see the slides, so you don't need to read them out.

When you get to the end, check the time again. How long did you take? Did you fill the available time comfortably, leaving some room for questions? You may find that you need to revise your plan, adding or cutting material to bring your presentation to the appropriate length.

Refining your material

Rehearsals are a final opportunity to improve your presentation before you deliver it. Rehearsing will help you identify opportunities to improve your presentation. As you practise, listen for:

- Problems with flow, structure or logic
- Any jargon, terms or expressions that may confuse the audience
- Where you can pause to emphasise a point
- Where to include 'signposts' for your audience, using words such as *next*, *another thing to note*, *on this slide you can see*, *however* and *finally*

Perhaps try recording yourself and listening to it afterwards, or ask a friend to be your audience and give you feedback on your content and delivery. Did you speak too slowly or too fast? Did you sound confident? Is there anything you could do better, or want to do differently? Keep practising until you feel confident of your material and can speak without relying too heavily on your notes.

Preparing for questions

You should always provide time for questions, to allow your audience the opportunity to interact. Some people feel let down if they are not given a chance to comment or pose questions to the presenter.

Before you rehearse, write a list of questions you think the audience might ask, and try to answer as many as you can in the time available. You could even ask colleagues to suggest some possible questions to help you prepare. You may not anticipate every question you'll be asked, but having a few responses prepared will make you feel more confident.

Where appropriate, you could even ask your audience to submit written questions in advance, so that you can give them some thought ahead of time.

When to provide time for questions

Some presenters prefer to have an audience ask questions throughout their presentation

- Others prefer to present uninterrupted, and to answer questions at the end
- You may need to take a flexible approach, depending on the content of your presentation and your audience's needs

How to invite questions

To avoid confusion and unwanted interruptions, it's best to let the audience know at the outset when you'll be taking questions

- Let listeners know what to do if they have a question, such as raising their hand or signalling to an attendant for a microphone
- People who are shy or reluctant to speak in front of a group may find it less intimidating to submit questions on a slip of paper, or to write their questions on a whiteboard during a break in the presentation

Visiting the venue

It's helpful to rehearse at the actual venue, so you can make sure you're familiar with the facilities and equipment and gauge how long it will take to set up and pack away your materials – especially if you're presenting somewhere other than your workplace, where it might be difficult to find solutions to last-minute problems.

Large venues usually have a speaker's lectern from which a range of devices are controlled. It helps to do a run-through at the lectern to make sure you have everything you need and know which buttons to press or menu options to select.

For example, you might need to check that you:

- Have the right cables or drives you need to connect your laptop or load your presentation
- Know how to operate the data projector
- Can turn the lights up and down and switch between screens or slides as needed

It's also wise to check that the text on your slides can be seen and read easily from the back of the room, and to make sure you're aware of any assistive technologies available, such as an audio loop or closed captioning display devices.

Being well prepared on the day of your presentation is important, not least because it makes you feel more confident. In the end, though, it's your delivery that decides whether all your careful planning pays off. Confidence comes with practice, but there are guidelines you can follow and techniques you can use to give yourself the best chance of connecting with your audience and getting your message across.

Final preparations

Make a list the night before of everything you need, and check that you have it all before you leave for the venue. Always arrive early, so you can set up your equipment and check everything is working. Keep work health and safety principles in mind: don't try to move heavy equipment by yourself, and make sure that cords are taped down and equipment does not block walkways or exits. You should also be aware of the emergency exits and evacuation procedures, particularly if it is your role to point them out to the audience.

Some people prefer to present from behind a lectern, so they don't have to worry about tripping over or dropping things. Others prefer to move around the stage. Whatever your preference, make sure you have your notes in easy reach, so you can return to them if you need to, and have a glass of water close by in case your throat gets dry.

Connecting with your audience

Think back to the last time you watched a skilful presenter. How did they make you feel? What was it that left an impression on you? The answer is, more often than not, the way they engaged with their audience.

The most important tip is to remember to face the listener. Don't look down at your notes, or at your slides – just glance back at them when you need to. Looking at your audience as you speak shows them that you genuinely want to communicate – that you care that they're listening and value their attention.

Tips for connecting with your audience
▪ Use gestures and body language effectively
▪ Don't overdo hand gestures; use them sparingly, to emphasise key points
▪ Make eye contact and smile at various audience members to reach out and engage them from the start
▪ Refer to your notes only when you need to

- Speak slowly and modify your voice so everyone can hear, especially if you are not using a microphone

- Check that the audience understands what you are saying by observing their facial expressions; try to gauge their attention, and watch for signs that they are becoming restless

- Let the audience know that you welcome their questions

Example

Giving a presentation without sufficient preparation

Pat has booked a trainer to deliver training to her team. The training company sends materials in advance. On the morning of the training session, Pat sets up the meeting room and prints out the materials ready for the trainer. The team are all there on time, but the trainer is 20 minutes late. Pat accepts her apologies – sometimes things happen that are beyond our control, and she gives the trainer the benefit of the doubt. The trainer, who seems disorganised and flustered, takes another 20 minutes to set up. She has brought a laptop with her but doesn't have a cable she needs to connect it to the projector in the meeting room. While Pat is on the phone to IT, trying to find a solution, she hears the trainer mutter under her breath about how the room is arranged and the training materials have been collated. Pat is annoyed, and her team are clearly growing restless. When the trainer finally starts, it takes some time before the team's attitude shifts and they become fully engaged. The training session is useful, but Pat decides afterwards not to work with that company again.

Practice Task 4

Question 1

Describe three things you can do to meet your audience's needs when delivering a presentation.

Question 2

Experienced presenters say giving a presentation is like telling a story – you need a beginning, a middle and an end. Why is it important to structure your presentation?

Question 3

Which of the following statements relate to meeting the needs of everyone in the audience? Tick all that apply.

- ○ Practice pronouncing the names of people you need to introduce.
- ○ Researching relevant cultural protocols you need to be aware of.
- ○ Printing all hard copy documents one sided and in large font.
- ○ Using as many visual images as written words in the presentation.
- ○ Checking the suitability of a venue such as access to rooms and facilities.

Question 4

Develop a list of do's and don'ts for preparing and delivering a presentation using visual aids. Include five of each.

2B Communicating information and instructions

Clear communication prevents confusion and ensures that workplace tasks can be carried out safely, efficiently and without error.

When sharing important information or giving instructions to others at work, you can ensure that your message is clear by:

- Including only the relevant detail
- Using plain language, short sentences and consistent terminology
- Avoiding abbreviations, technical terms and jargon that your audience won't know
- Providing demonstrations, diagrams or illustrations, where this will help

To ensure your message is well received, you should choose your words carefully, using inclusive language and the appropriate tone. This is especially important when instructing someone how to do something or providing feedback. It might help to prepare by rehearsing what you want to say in advance or writing a draft.

These rules hold true no matter how you choose to communicate, but you should also give some thought to the best way to get your message across. Sometimes verbal communication is most effective; at other times, it's better to write things down. Either way, the final step is to seek feedback, to make sure that the person you are communicating with has understood what you are telling them.

Written or verbal communication?

The decision to communicate verbally or in writing depends on a combination of factors.

Context is always important in deciding whether to communicate verbally or in writing. As discussed in topic 1, this means considering your audience, the nature of the information you need to convey, your aim or purpose in communicating it and any time constraints that apply. If you are making first contact with a colleague or a customer, for example, it may be best to speak to them directly or over the phone, to establish an immediate connection. If you are giving someone detailed instructions about a long-term project they'll be working on, it may best to do so in writing, so they can refer back to your instructions as needed.

Examples of common ways to communicate verbally and in writing are set out in the table below. As you read over them, think about which methods might be most appropriate for different audiences and different kinds of information. What aims or purposes are the various methods suited to? Which would you use if you needed to communicate information quickly? Which would you use when accuracy is more important than speed?

Verbal communication methods	Written communication methods
▪ Face-to-face conversation ▪ Phone call ▪ Voicemail ▪ Informal discussion ▪ Formal meeting ▪ Video conference ▪ Podcast ▪ Product demonstration	▪ Email/letter ▪ SMS text/instant messaging ▪ Note (for example, a telephone message) ▪ Group chat ▪ Report ▪ Newsletter ▪ Blog post ▪ Written instructions/procedural manual

Verbal communication

Verbal communication is only effective if a speaker uses clear language that suits their audience's needs.

Verbal communication is effective and fast. Two people can exchange information and respond to each other instantly. Most importantly, verbal communication allows us to ask questions if we do not hear or understand what has been said. One distinct advantage that face-to-face verbal communication has over written communication is that it is accompanied by body language, which helps to get your message across. Giving a demonstration while talking your audience through what you're doing can also be an extremely effective way to help them learn information and master new skills.

Many people think verbal communication is the easiest way to communicate, but this is true only when the speaker is clear and chooses their words carefully. Good communicators also listen carefully, look at the people they are talking with, and confirm that they've been understood rather than making assumptions.

Body language

- Be aware of nonverbal cues you give your audience through your posture, facial expressions, eye contact and gestures
- Pay attention to your audience's body language to gauge their interest and engagement

Active listening

- Focus carefully on the words said to you
- Don't interrupt
- Make eye contact and nod to indicate you understand

Confirming understanding

- Be aware of nonverbal cues you give your audience through your posture, facial expressions, eye contact and gestures
- Pay attention to your audience's body language to gauge their interest and engagement

Written communication

The advantage written communication has over verbal communication is that it serves as a permanent record that the user can return to whenever they need.

Written communication is much more likely to be effective if it is clear and concise. Try to limit yourself to one idea per paragraph. Make your paragraphs and sentences short, and keep your language simple. Don't say: 'Pursuant to our discussion at yesterday's meeting, I herewith furnish a preliminary version of the report.' Instead say: 'I'm enclosing a draft of the report we talked about at the meeting yesterday.'

Where it's appropriate, you can use images or graphics, such as screenshots, charts or diagrams, to make your point clearer. For example, the instructions that come with flat pack furniture are illustrated with drawings to help users understand how to assemble it. This may be especially helpful for readers with learning or cognitive disabilities.

Leaving lots of white space can also make text easier to read, so don't try to crowd too much onto the page.

Writing clearly

- Never use an unusual word or a technical term if a familiar word will do
- Break long, complex sentences up into two or three short, simple sentences
- Keep paragraphs short: no longer than five or six lines

Writing concisely

- Think carefully about what your audience needs to know
- Say exactly what you mean in the fewest words possible
- Avoid repetition and unnecessary or irrelevant information

Seeking feedback

When a worker misunderstands an instruction, it can result in lost productivity, or even put their own and other workers' safety at risk. You should always make sure someone understands the basics and has retained this information by seeking feedback before you move on to more complex information or instructions.

You can seek feedback by asking questions, or inviting the person to paraphrase what you've just told them, explaining it to you in their own words. If you're giving them instructions, try asking them to demonstrate how to perform the task you need them to do. In a formal training situation, you could ask trainees to participate in a role-playing exercise, or give them a quiz to test what they've learned.

Example

Sharing information with a team

Tia is the payroll officer at a small business. Management recently decided to implement a new financial system and Tia is in charge of updating their payroll processes. The new system means a few small changes for staff in the way they submit leave requests. It is important for staff to understand the new system so that their leave balance and pay will be accurate.

Tia decides to present the changes a month in advance at the upcoming staff meeting. She prepares a PowerPoint presentation, along with a detailed handout that includes screenshots and step-by-step instructions for submitting leave requests. In order to be well prepared, Tia asks a colleague from another department to look over her handout to ensure it is clear and will be understood.

Her colleague recommends some minor changes based on her experience with a team often reluctant to adopt new technology. Tia gratefully accepts the feedback, makes the changes and feels prepared to present the information to staff.

Practice Task 5

Question 1

When deciding whether to give verbal or written instructions, what are three things you need to consider?

Question 2

What are the advantages of communicating instructions verbally rather than providing them in writing? Tick all that apply.

○ It is faster than communicating in writing.

○ Your audience can ask questions and get immediate answers.

○ Most people prefer to talk, rather than reading a document.

○ Your audience's body language helps you to gauge if they've understood.

○ It's easier to be concise when you speak than when you write.

Question 3

How can you ensure you have effectively communicated instructions for a task to a new trainee?

Question 4

Which of the following statements are correct? Tick all that apply.

○ Word choice is far more important when writing instructions than when delivering them verbally.

○ You should avoid using abbreviations that your audience won't know.

○ Asking a person to paraphrase what you have said is a useful way of checking that they've understood you.

○ Your tone can influence how your message is received.

○ A paragraph should ideally be around 15 to 20 lines.

2C Communicating and negotiating work requirements

The aim of negotiating is to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement.

Negotiations are an important part of daily work life and require effective communication skills. When discussing the allocation of tasks and resources, you need to agree on the following:

- A clear understanding of the tasks to be done
- The standard to which they must be done
- Who will do the work
- The resources these workers will need
- A realistic deadline

A lack of clarity about any of these questions can lead to stress and conflict in the workplace. The SMART principles discussed in topic 1 are useful here: if you clarify your objectives *before* taking on a task or project, you can anticipate potential problems that may arise and negotiate solutions.

Because production standards, staffing levels and resources are often fixed, the time frame in which a task must be completed may be the first or most obvious focus for negotiations about what can be achieved, and when it can be achieved by.

When conflict does arise, communication is the key to finding out what caused it; negotiation skills come into play again when determining how it can be resolved.

Negotiating time frames

Schedules and deadlines are usually negotiated with your team leader, supervisor or manager. Different areas within the same organisation often have competing priorities and experience different demands on their workers and resources, so agreeing on time frames can be difficult, especially when you have to take the needs of a customer or client into account, as well as the capabilities of external suppliers.

Agreeing on a time frame should be done carefully, considering what can be realistically achieved within a set period of time. Underestimating the time required to complete a task can create unnecessary stress and put workers' health and safety at risk.

Factors to consider when negotiating time frames
▪ The scope of the task/project
▪ The number of workers required
▪ Current workload
▪ Competing priorities
▪ The cost of completing the task/project
▪ The cost to the organisation if the task/project is not completed on schedule
▪ The start date
▪ The midpoint or milestones
▪ The finish date
▪ How much can realistically be done in the given period
▪ The relevant supervisors' and managers' level of support for the task/project

Confirming that instructions have been understood

Communication is a two-way process: a message is sent by one participant and received and interpreted by another. Sometimes, though, the receiver misinterprets the sender's meaning or intention.

There are many factors outside of your control that may influence a person's interpretation of your message. For example, they may lack background knowledge that they need to understand what you are saying. Our physical and emotional state also influence how we take in, process and react to information: a tired or stressed listener may react differently to one who is relaxed and well rested. Prejudice and bias can also come into play.

Checking that a message was not just received but correctly interpreted is an important part of efficient communication. You can't control how someone interprets your message, but you can provide clarification. To be sure the other person has understood, ask them a few questions. If they can't answer easily or quickly, you may need to offer further explanation.

Questions that confirm understanding:
▪ Could you please explain what I've just told you?
▪ Could you please repeat that back to me in your own words?
▪ What does that mean to you?
▪ Could you please outline the steps you need to take?
▪ What steps do you need to take next?
▪ Could you please summarise the main points for me?
▪ How would you explain that to someone else?

Example

Confirming understanding

Lisa is a hardworking member of Kim's team. She is eager to do a good job, but she's reluctant to ask for help when she doesn't understand instructions, which sometimes causes problems and is frustrating for both Kim and the team.

One day Kim asks Lisa to compile each state's figures for the monthly sales report. Kim explains the process and demonstrates it on screen. She asks Lisa if she has understood and if she can prepare the figures by the end of the day. Lisa says she understands, and that she can have the job done on time, but Kim thinks she looks and sounds unsure.

To confirm that Lisa has really understood, Kim asks her to demonstrate how to compile the figures for the Victorian team. Lisa is flustered and doesn't know where to start. Kim smiles reassuringly, tells her not to worry and talks her through each step again. When they have compiled the figures for Victoria, Kim watches as Lisa compiles the figures for Tasmania on her own. Kim pays close attention and prompts Lisa only when she needs help. Lisa appears much more confident at the end of the training session, and she produces the figures for the national report without any errors by the end of the day.

Clarifying reasons for a conflict

Ineffective communication often leads to conflict. To find out how and why conflict has arisen, you need a full understanding of the situation from the perspectives of both parties involved. Remember that each party may see things differently, and that neither may be seeing the full situation, particularly if they have competing priorities.

The following techniques can help you to identify the source of a conflict and start to work towards a resolution. They can be used not just to understand conflicts but to seek information about any workplace situation that requires clarification.

Prompt

Encourage both parties to explain the situation, speaking to them separately if necessary, and prompting them to share freely if they hesitate.

Don't interrupt

Interruptions can be frustrating or confusing, so save your questions until the person has finished speaking. If you finish listening to everything they have to say, you may find they've told you all you need to know and that you don't need to clarify anything else. Jot down reminders for yourself if needed.

Ask questions

Asking direct questions can help you to fill in specific details you need to understand the bigger picture. For example, you might say something like: 'I'm confused about the sequence of events. Can you tell me again what happened first?'

Reframe the situation

Reframing means changing the way a situation is perceived, viewing an event, interaction or behaviour from a different point of view. It is a complex communication technique that takes time and practice, as well as a certain degree of calm and level-headed thinking in potentially difficult situations.

Practice Task 6

Question 1

Provide two examples of questions that would help to confirm that your instructions have been understood.

Question 2

Which of the following statements are correct? Tick all that apply.

○ Competing priorities are a common source of conflict in a team.

○ Factors outside of your control may influence your audience's interpretation of your message.

○ Reframing involves seeing a situation from another perspective.

○ If you deliver your message clearly, there is no need to check if you've been understood.

Summary

- Presenting information effectively requires planning
- Rehearsing or writing a draft can help you refine a presentation's content, structure and delivery
- Whether you are speaking or writing, being clear and concise is the best way to get your message across
- To be sure you have been understood, you need to seek feedback
- Negotiation skills can be used to avoid or resolve stress and conflict at work

Learning Checkpoint 2
Use communication strategies to provide work instruction

Part A

Read the case study and then answer the questions below.

Case study

Louis is the office manager at a medium-sized accounting firm. They have just received a new machine that can photocopy, print and scan. IT have set up access to the machine on everyone's computers, but Louis needs to train the staff in how to use the various functions and how to replace the paper and toner.

1. What are three different ways Louis could communicate this information to the staff?

2. Louis decides to give a demonstration. He gathers everyone around the copier and shows them how to photocopy and scan hard copies, then explains how to print documents from their desks. When he's done, he asks if anyone has any questions. There is no response, so he thanks everyone for their time and lets them leave.

   What are two things Louis could have done differently?

3. Louis needs multiple copies of an important report for a meeting but is too busy to prepare them himself. He sends an email to the office assistant, Rumi, saying: 'Could you sort out copies of the report for the meeting, please? Need them ASAP. Thanks.' Using the SMART principles set out in topic 1, make a list of questions that Rumi needs to ask Louis in order to complete this task successfully.

4. Rumi expresses concern about making the deadline. What should Louis do?

Part B

1. You have been asked to give a presentation to a group of 50 of your co-workers from departments across your organisation. List at least five things you would do to prepare.

2. What could you do as you prepare your presentation to identify and respond to your co-workers' needs?

3. What communication methods could you use to find out the presentation requirements of the audience?
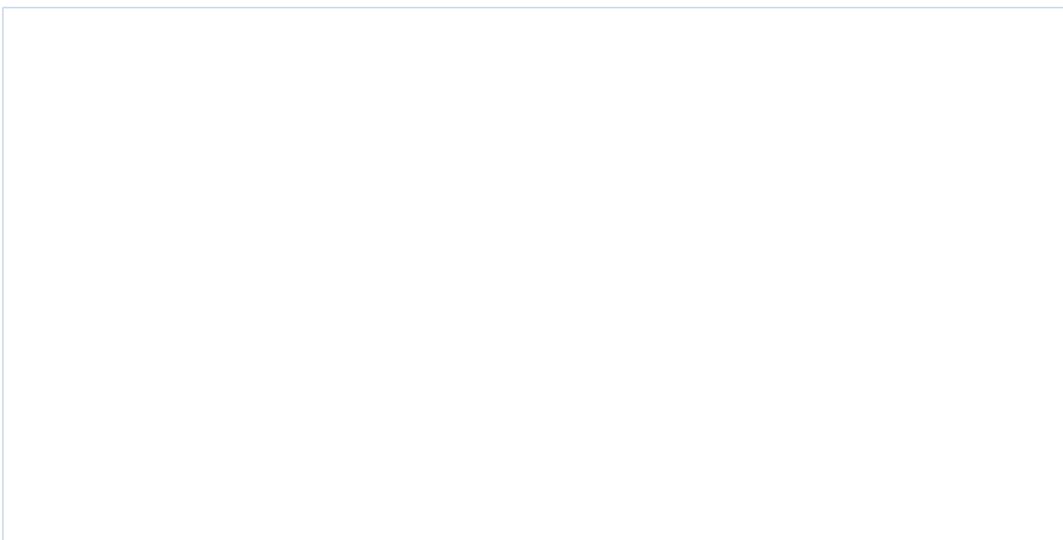
Topic 3 | Facilitate workplace communication

3A   Building relationships and facilitating respectful interaction
3B   Overcoming communication barriers

3A Building relationships and facilitating respectful interaction

A solid relationship and positive interactions with colleagues and clients enriches your work life.

Good working relationships usually start with mutual trust, built on a shared understanding of each other's roles, expectations, skills and preferred ways of working. It is reassuring to know you can rely on others' help and support when you need it, just as they can rely on you.

To establish trust, a supervisor or manager needs to draw on interpersonal skills – often referred to colloquially as 'people skills' – including listening, showing respect, being positive and creating a supportive environment. It is also the role of team leaders and other senior staff to facilitate respectful interaction between employees by modelling inclusive behaviour and language. These interpersonal skills are useful not just in building relationships but also in problem-solving, decision-making, negotiating agreements and handling conflict.

Establishing trust

Where trust exists in a workplace, there is effective teamwork, and morale and productivity are high.

Trust is believing that others will do what you need them to do – assuming, of course, that your expectations of them are reasonable. Mutual trust means that others can rely on you to fulfil your responsibilities too. When the members of a team or an organisation depend on each other to achieve common goals, trust is essential. It is also vital to securing and retaining clients or customers, who need to know that you'll deliver on your promises.

Communication and consistency are the key here. If evidence shows someone that they can believe what you tell them, they start to develop trust in you. You can build on that trust in numerous ways, including sharing information, giving honest feedback and maintaining confidentiality.

Managers can earn their team's trust by:
- Showing integrity
- Being responsive
- Following through
- Being open to feedback
- Getting involved and taking part

Showing integrity

Of all the qualities an effective leader must possess, integrity is probably the most important. This attribute underpins all of your dealings with others. It is only by acting with integrity and doing so consistently that you can you establish a reputation for being honest and just and inspire those around you to follow your example.

Aim to have the highest professional and personal principles, and always tell the truth, even when it's not easy. Have the courage to be open and transparent in all you do, and make sure your actions speak as loud as your words. It soon becomes obvious when someone is saying one thing while doing another.

It is not acceptable to treat some individuals or groups well while ignoring the impact of your actions on others. You should show your subordinates the same respect and consideration you show your peers, and deal ethically with both clients and suppliers. Your credibility will be undermined if you only choose to act with integrity in certain situations.

Make your actions an example of ethical business behaviour and create a safe haven for employees to report serious breaches of your organisation's standards without fear of retribution.

Being responsive

A good leader is responsive to others' needs. Try to be flexible in your outlook and in what you expect of others, keeping the professional needs of your staff in mind. Do they lack experience in certain areas? Do they need extra training? Should duties be rotated? Is a staff member underused? Try not to be fixed in your ways and viewpoint and you will often find a solution that suits all parties without compromising your objectives.

Following through

Always pursue an endeavour to its conclusion, without taking shortcuts. People will come to rely on you as someone who does their work well and makes extra effort to ensure a task is completed the way it should be, or better.

Make it a rule to always keep your word and do what you say you'll do. Remind others you expect this of them also. Be cautious in the commitments you make and of overstating what you can accomplish. If you suspect you won't be able to deliver, don't sweep it under the carpet. Admit it and discuss the alternatives.

Being open to feedback

Let others know you are open to feedback, and be ready to listen to it, particularly if it comes from someone you trust. Be humble, admitting your failings when necessary, and take steps to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Welcome advice from others, and be prepared to laugh at yourself when you get things wrong. Admitting that you are fallible needn't undermine your authority if your team trust and respect you. Reward honesty in your team rather than promoting 'yes people'.

Getting involved and taking part

Try not to let your role as a manager prevent you from mixing socially with your team. Go along to events like team lunches and get involved in the organisation's social club. Everyone should join in – especially in small-business environments. Taking part in social activities shows employees that you regard them as equals. Forming relationships with your team members on a personal level helps to generate a positive and trusting work environment.

Listening

One of the greatest barriers to a good relationship is a failure to really listen.

Most people listen with the intent to reply. As someone else is talking, they are formulating a response in their head. During this time the listener is not giving the speaker their full attention. They are not tuned in to all the cues being sent. It is therefore possible to miss their real meaning.

Effective listening is often referred to as 'active listening': making a conscious choice to listen to someone else so you can genuinely understand what they are saying. You hear the other person's words, and their explicit meaning, but you are also listening for their implicit or unspoken meaning, which may be conveyed through nonverbal cues, such as their tone, the speed at which they are talking, their hesitations or silences and their body language.

A good leader is a good listener. Taking the time to listen to others shows that you respect them and value what they have to say. Be wary of interrupting, not waiting to hear the whole story, or becoming distracted when others are speaking.

To remain focused, minimise distractions and practise patience. If you're not following, or if you need more information, try to wait until the speaker is finished to ask questions.

Tips for active listening
▪ Give the speaker your full attention
▪ Limit distractions
▪ Allow the speaker to finish before responding
▪ Confirm you've understood by repeating or summarising in your own words what the speaker has told you
▪ Ask questions if there's anything you need to clarify

Showing respect

Respectful communication means speaking politely and behaving professionally in your dealings with others.

An organisation's code of conduct usually sets out how employees are expected to interact with each other and with clients – but even in the absence of an official code of conduct, you should always treat everyone you deal with at work with dignity and courtesy. This basic rule applies no matter what your relationship is to the other person: managers should show employees the same respect they show their peers. Employees who are treated with respect by an organisation's leaders tend to respond with loyalty and enthusiasm, have high levels of job satisfaction and display a strong commitment to achieving team objectives.

Showing respect means treating people fairly, appreciating their contribution, recognising their rights and needs and being considerate of their feelings. Whether you are speaking to a colleague or a client, you should address them politely by name and use common courtesies such as 'please' and 'thank you'. Acknowledging others' ideas, opinions, customs and beliefs is another way of showing them consideration and appreciation.

Remaining calm, reasonable and polite even when you are frustrated or angry is a very powerful skill. It can help to defuse a tense situation, showing the other party that you respect them even though you are not happy with their behaviour. Ideally, you should be able to show respect even to those whose beliefs and lifestyles are very different to your own – including people who do not treat you with respect.

Tips for showing respect
▪ Be mindful of the other person
▪ Accept that everyone is different and has the right to be so
▪ Value their point of view
▪ Be polite, sincere, professional and empathetic

Being positive

Positive communication is about choosing words and phrasing that communicate what you want, not what you don't want. 'I want to see you succeed this time' is much more encouraging than 'I don't want to see you fail again.'

The goal of positive communication is to deliver a message in a constructive manner, so others feel understood and supported rather than criticised. Incorporating positive communication techniques into your interactions with others can help you to achieve the outcomes you are looking for without damaging your relationship with them.

If you make a habit of always communicating positively and respectfully, you will minimise misunderstandings and continue to build and maintain effective working relationships.

Creating a supportive environment

As a manager, you should be open to the best of what everyone has to offer. Be generous in acknowledging people's strengths and hard work and in giving praise for a job well done.

As far as possible, avoid focusing on the negative. Make it a rule not to complain about colleagues to others. While this happens in most workplaces, it is up to an organisation's leaders to set the appropriate tone. Make sure employees know to approach you if they have concerns about a team member's work practices but discourage them from gossiping or grumbling about people behind their backs.

You should also ensure that any negative feedback or concerns you have about a team member are kept between you and the individual, unless there is a good reason for discussing those concerns with others.

When recruiting, consider an applicant's values as well as their skills, and try to find someone whose personal qualities make them a good fit with other members of the team. The goal is a mutually supportive environment in which employees motivate each other to do their best.

> ## Example
>
> ### Establishing and building relationships
>
> Rachel has just joined a stationery company as leader of the production team. To achieve the objectives that her manager has set out for her, Rachel knows that she will need to build strong relationships with the members of her team. Rachel starts by meeting with each of them individually and asking them to share information about themselves, the challenges they face in the workplace and their ideas. Rachel listens without interrupting and then asks questions that demonstrate how carefully she has been paying attention. She assures each team member that their conversations will remain confidential and invites them to ask questions about her and her experience, so they can build their own picture of her. These conversations provide Rachel with insights into the team dynamics, the strengths and weaknesses of the various team members and where there are opportunities for team members to give each other greater support. Later, at her first full team meeting, Rachel speaks about her perceptions of the business and the challenges facing the team. The team members feel that she has listened to them and will advocate for them. Rachel is pleased that her relationship with them is off to a good start.

Modelling inclusive behaviour

The conduct of senior staff sets a powerful example. If a team leader routinely tells jokes that are offensive to certain groups (such as women, people born overseas, members of religious groups or people with disabilities), the message that staff receive is that the organisation does not actively support a diverse workplace. As a manager, you have a responsibility to ensure that you and those around you treat people with respect. It's also your responsibility to be alert to any signs of discrimination, harassment or bullying and act promptly to put an end to them. There is little chance of developing a trusting relationship with staff when such behaviours are permitted to go unchecked.

Tips for modelling inclusive behaviour
• Invite people to speak up in workplace discussions and make sure everyone is included in social events
• If a newcomer is having trouble fitting in, let them know that their skills and contribution are valued and that the team is interested in getting to know them

Using inclusive language

Inclusive or non-discriminatory language is free from words, labels, or phrases that reflect prejudiced or stereotyped views of individuals or groups. It seeks to include everyone regardless of their gender, sexuality, race, cultural background or abilities. Inclusive language doesn't deliberately or even inadvertently overlook, exclude or omit anyone who should be considered 'part of the group'.

In Australian workplaces, it is illegal in most circumstances to discriminate against a person on the basis of personal characteristics such as gender or race, and victims of discrimination have legal recourse. For further information about employers' and employees' rights and responsibilities under human rights and anti-discrimination law in Australia, visit the Australian Human Rights Commission's website: aspirelr.link/human-rights-employers.

Tips for using inclusive language
• Avoid using the singular pronouns 'she/her' and 'he/him', unless you are talking about a specific individual; instead use 'they/their'
• Consider revising your wording so that gendered pronouns are not an issue (for example, by saying 'the worker' or 'the manager' instead of 'she' or 'he')
• Avoid broad categories such as 'the blind' or 'Asians', which overlook differences within these groups
• Do not place undue emphasis on differences (for example, saying 'male nurse' when you could just say 'nurse')
• Avoid portraying people or groups 'unevenly' (for example, saying 'men and girls' instead of 'men and women')
• Never use language that denigrates or stereotypes people

Example

Facilitating respectful communication

Terry is a team leader. He comes to talk to his boss, Anna, about a problem he is having with one of his team members.

'I don't think Abishani likes me,' Terry explains.

'What makes you think that?' Anna asks.

'She never makes eye contact, she seems to freeze up if I approach, and she can barely answer questions I ask her,' Terry says. 'But I know she's not shy, because I've seen her talking and laughing with Jenna and Adesh.'

Anna thinks for a moment. 'Perhaps it's not you, but the way you communicate with her.'

'What do you mean?' Terry asks.

'Abishani has only lived in Australia for a few years,' Anna explains. 'Perhaps Sri Lankan women don't often mix with men unless they're family. Maybe she's not used to male colleagues being so direct.'

'I thought being direct was a good thing,' Terry responds with a frown.

'It can be,' Anna assures him. 'But sometimes we need to modify our communication style to be respectful of the needs of others.'

'Perhaps I could be a little more formal,' Terry suggests, 'and not make eye contact or joke so much, until she's more comfortable with me.'

'That's a good start,' Anna responds. 'You could also try inviting her to speak up next time you have a team meeting and telling her you value her ideas.'

'Okay,' Terry agrees. 'I'll try that and let you know how it goes.'

Later in the week, Anna sees Terry having a conversation with Abishani, who is smiling and looking much more relaxed. Anna is pleased that Terry has taken her advice and found a way to communicate respectfully with Abishani.

Practice Task 7

Question 1

Explain what is meant by respectful communication.

Question 2

Provide an example of how you can managers can encourage respectful interactions between employees.
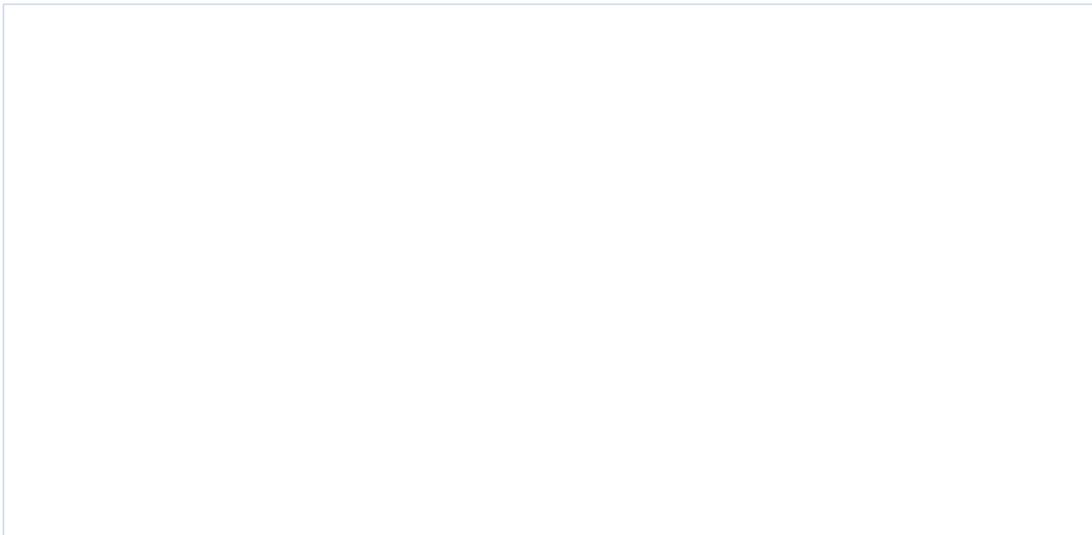
Question 3

A new team member with excellent qualifications and several years of experience has been recruited into your IT team. On the first day she tells you she has no difficulty reading English, which is not her first language, but sometimes cannot understand information given to her verbally. What strategies could you use to help her understand? Tick all that apply.

○ Provide written as well as verbal instructions.

○ Speak loudly and very slowly when talking to her.

○ Avoid using acronyms and slang.

○ Ask her to paraphrase any instructions you give her.

○ Only communicate with her via email.

Question 4

What are three interpersonal skills you might use when communicating with this new member of the IT team?

Question 5

Which of the following statements are correct? Tick all that apply.

○ An organisation's code of conduct usually sets out how employees are expected to interact with each other and with clients.

○ Respectful communication means accepting what others say and never disagreeing.

○ You will destroy trust if you provide critical feedback to someone.

○ Maintaining confidentiality builds trust.

3B Overcoming communication barriers

Taking a problem-solving approach will help you to identify communication barriers and find ways to overcome them.

Every time that you communicate with another person you are engaging in a complex exchange of information on a physical, intellectual and emotional level. At any one of these levels, various factors can act as a barrier to information being sent, received or exchanged.

It is important to identify potential barriers and the challenges they create so you can consider how to address them. A structured approach to problem-solving and decision-making can be extremely helpful in such situations.

Perhaps the most common barrier to communication in the workplace involves different interpersonal styles or preferences. Language differences and failure to accommodate workers' special needs can also present problems. Accommodations can usually be found; it is a matter of listening to others and working with them to find solutions.

Problem-solving and decision-making

When communication challenges occur, rapid problem-solving and decision-making can prevent challenges escalating into major issues. The table below sets out the steps you should take. Note that active listening, careful observation and respectful communication are important at every stage of this process.

Identify the problem	Define what the problem is and seek agreement that it has been properly defined.
Identify the cause of the problem	What is causing the problem? Gather all the facts and consider the possible barriers to communication.
Consider solutions	What actions could resolve the problem? Don't include options that will sidestep the problem, leaving it unresolved. Do further research or seek advice as required.
Decide on a solution and implement it	Choose the best option and seek the agreement of others who are affected or involved, then take steps to resolve the problem. Once the solution is in place, be sure to monitor its effectiveness and make any adjustments necessary.

Identifying problems, possible causes and solutions

The table below shows the problem-solving and decision-making process in action. You can use a similar approach to identify barriers to communication that may exist in your workplace, along with potential solutions.

Problem	Cause	Possible solutions
You are having difficulty communicating instructions to an employee who has limited proficiency in English.	Language differences/ linguistic barrier	• Use an interpreter or another member of staff who can communicate in the employee's first language • Prepare written instructions in the person's first language with the help of a translator • Explain again more clearly, avoiding the use of terminology or jargon • Use pictures to convey your meaning
Your attempts to be friendly and welcoming seem to make a new staff member who has only recently arrived in Australia feel uncomfortable.	Cultural differences/ cultural barrier	• Find out a little about the new staff member's culture and its customs and conventions, so you can understand how they might perceive your behaviour • Be patient and considerate, allowing them time to settle into their new workplace and get to know you
A member of staff says they will not be attending a conference you thought they'd find interesting. When you ask why, they say that the venue isn't wheelchair accessible, so they are unable to participate.	Lack of accessibility/ physical barrier	• Consult your colleague about possible options, such as arranging a support person to accompany them, or modifications that could make the venue accessible • Find a different venue
At a team meeting, a co-worker becomes angry, upset or confused and is unable to 'hear' or understand what others are saying.	Emotional distress/ emotional or psychological barrier	• Reassure your co-worker and let them know it's okay to leave the meeting if they want to • If they leave, arrange to have someone go with them as support and check on their wellbeing afterwards • Give them enough time to calm down or adjust before trying to engage again

Problem	Cause	Possible solutions
The place you have chosen to hold a meeting is too hot. It's also noisy and the lights are flickering. Staff are having trouble paying attention.	Distractions/ environmental barriers	• Remove distractions and make the space more comfortable by turning on the air conditioning, asking nearby staff to keep the noise down and turning off the flickering light • Find another place to hold the meeting • Postpone the meeting until the problems can be addressed • Circulate any important information in an email as a reminder for staff who may have missed it during the meeting

Deciding on and implementing solutions

Consultation is an important part of deciding how to deal with barriers to communication, because solutions must work for everyone involved.

Never prejudge or dismiss a co-worker's concerns or ideas. Instead, listen without interrupting: find out what others have to say before contributing yourself. Try to adopt the habit of expressing understanding of the other party's point of view before making your own suggestions, and be prepared to explain the logic behind your thinking. Accept that others have their own opinions, even if you disagree, and be open to different perspectives. You may find that there are details or angles you haven't considered, and might be persuaded to change your mind.

Wherever possible, involve the people who will be affected by a decision in the decision-making process. It is much easier to implement a solution that everyone has agreed on and is willing to support.

Communicating in a crisis

Many workplaces were not prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic that first reached Australia early in 2020. Organisations had to find new ways to communicate with their staff and clients or customers almost overnight. Most turned to technological solutions, but patience, flexibility and understanding were necessary as huge numbers of workers transitioned to working from home.

As a team leader, supervisor or manager, it is important that you plan for unexpected scenarios and have policies in place to cope with a crisis. Even when you're coping with a situation you've never had to deal with before, it's helpful to have a clear set of basic guidelines in place that you can follow or adapt as you look for solutions to the problem.

It is also important to ensure any policy or procedure you develop complies with legislation. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, employers were still required to comply with work health and safety legislation, even though employees were working in their own homes. Many businesses already had a working-from-home policy in place and asked employees to submit photographs of their desk, chair and computer set-up, to be sure they were suitable. Other companies had to come up with policies very quickly to make sure they were fulfilling their duty of care.

Accommodating different interpersonal styles

We are all different and have our own ways of working with and relating to others.

We all work differently and have preferences about how we like to communicate. You probably have colleagues who love to work from home, where they don't have to socialise, and colleagues who'd much rather be in the office, where they can chat with others and bounce ideas off them. We all have strengths and weaknesses, too, and our shortcomings can cause problems for our co-workers, just as their shortcomings pose problems for us.

Empathy and tolerance go a long way towards creating a harmonious workplace, but sometimes we need to find more concrete ways to accommodate our differences. As a manager, it is your job to ensure that the members of your team get along and work together to achieve their common goals. This may mean helping people with very different personal styles to negotiate their disagreements and avoid or resolve conflict. Again, active listening is key. No matter what solution you decide on, both parties will feel better for having been heard.

Always remember that the point of the process is to find a workable solution everyone can agree on, not to establish fault or attribute blame. If someone becomes upset or angry when you are speaking with them, avoid reacting emotionally. Instead, show empathy and be patient. Reassure them that you are trying to help, and give them time to calm down before continuing. It is in everyone's best interest to maintain positive relationships within the team.

Example

Resolving conflict

Clare has had a team member, Harriet, in her office in tears. She is upset because another employee, Lynne, spoke bluntly to her and complained about her attention to detail. Claire approaches Lynne to hear her side of the story.

'I'm sorry she's upset,' Lynne responds. 'But I'm just so frustrated. I send her emails explaining exactly what I need and then she calls to ask me questions. The answers are already there, in the email, but she never bothers to read what I've written. She's always interrupting me and wasting my time. I've got a deadline this afternoon and I need to stay focused – doesn't she understand that?'

Clare has a chat to Harriet, who says that Lynne's instructions aren't always clear and it usually seems safest to call her rather than trying to figure things out on her own. Clare asks to see one of Lynne's recent emails and realises why Harriet is having trouble: the instructions are set out in one long paragraph and include a lot of detail, some of which doesn't seem necessary or relevant, particularly a run-down of preliminary tasks that have already been completed.

Clare shares what she has learned with Harriet and Lynne and asks them to think about each other's needs, so that they can find a way to communicate that works for both of them and avoid further conflict. Later that week, Clare asks them to meet in her office to talk. Lynne agrees to make her instructions shorter and simpler, breaking them down into step-by-step bullet points, and only including details about the next task she wants Harriet to do. Harriet agrees to read Lynne's instructions more carefully and then send a follow-up email if she has any questions. She will call Lynne only if she needs to confirm instructions for a task that needs to be done urgently. Lynne then apologises to Harriet for speaking to her so impatiently. Harriet accepts her apology and says that she'll try to keep interruptions to a minimum in future; she understands now that Lynne is often working to deadline and answering calls when she is busy makes her feel stressed.

Accommodating language differences

More than 200 languages are spoken in Australia, and the 2016 census showed that just over one in five Australians speaks a language other than English at home. In certain areas or industries, the percentage is much higher.

You need to be aware of your audience's English language proficiency and adjust the way you communicate accordingly. When speaking with someone for whom English is a second language, speak clearly but don't shout. Remember that a strong accent doesn't necessarily mean limited comprehension. Conversely, a person may speak English well but be unable to read complex texts. Sometimes you just need to allow someone more time to take in your message; at other times you may need to find another solution, such as simplifying your vocabulary or expression, having a text translated or providing an interpreter.

No matter what the circumstance, it is always best to avoid slang in workplace communication. Idiomatic expressions can also cause problems: many everyday idioms don't have a literal meaning and can be very confusing to a person unfamiliar with colloquial English. For example, instructors often tell trainees they will 'get the hang of it'. Think about how someone unfamiliar with the phrase may interpret this. How could you say it differently, to make the meaning clear?

Tips for accommodating language differences in the workplace
▪ Make sure the recipient has the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns or consult an interpreter if necessary
▪ If you are preparing a message for several recipients, write a draft and have one of the intended readers check it to be sure that your meaning is clear
▪ Written messages may sometimes be inadequate or inappropriate; if there is no response, follow up with a conversation or phone call
▪ Avoid acronyms, even common ones like ASAP, and abbreviations like 'uni' and 'this arvo', unless you're sure the person you're addressing will understand
▪ Always check that the information you want to convey has been correctly understood

Accommodating special needs

The term 'disability' refers to both physical and intellectual disabilities, whether permanent or temporary. It is the responsibility of all employees, but particularly staff at management level, to ensure that information is communicated to workers with disabilities in an appropriate format. This may mean providing sophisticated assistive technologies or doing something as simple as placing noticeboards where they can be read by a person in a wheelchair.

Employers have a duty of care to all employees; in the case of employees with disabilities, you may need to take extra steps to discharge this duty appropriately.

Tips for communicating with a people with disabilities
▪ Get to know the special needs of your team members and others you deal with regularly
▪ Ask employees what special needs they have and the kind of support they need, rather than making assumptions
▪ Do not discuss a person's disability unless it is relevant to their work or they initiate the conversation
▪ Never assume that a person with a physical disability has an intellectual disability
▪ Speak to the person you are addressing directly, not to their support person, interpreter or carer
▪ Be wary of patronising others by extending sympathy or making assumptions about what they can or can't do
▪ Remember that an employee may regard their disability as a private matter and expect you to treat any information they share with you as confidential

Confirming that communication issues have been resolved

As a team leader, you must follow up after a solution has been implemented to be sure that you properly identified the problem and that your attempts to solve it have been effective. If you don't, employees may lose trust in you. Don't let this happen. If you can, involve your team in monitoring the effectiveness of any changes you've made and show them that you intend to be accountable for their success or failure.

You can confirm that communication problems have been resolved by:

- Actively observing your team's body language and behaviour
- Checking in with those involved to ensure strategies are working
- Seeking feedback from others

If the solution you decided on isn't working, this needs to be addressed swiftly. Unresolved issues can result in poor morale, renewed conflict and performance issues. Revisit the problem if necessary, ensure it was properly identified and then consider alternative solutions.

Example

Resolving communication issues

When Hallie first started running sales meetings by video conference, the meetings were plagued with IT issues and her team quickly became frustrated and disengaged. Hallie worked closely with her team and the IT department to resolve the issues and ensure the meetings ran smoothly. Hallie was confident that the issue had been resolved until her manager pointed out that one of her team members, Raj, regularly found reasons not to attend the virtual meeting. Hallie considered this. She had thought Raj's reasons for not attending the meetings were valid, but the number he had missed was increasing. Hallie gave Raj a call and discussed her concern that he was missing out on sharing and receiving important information. Raj confessed that he found it hard to hear and follow what was going on in the virtual meeting. English was his second language and the accents of his colleagues were harder to understand when using video conferencing software. Hallie realised that she had not considered all the issues and she apologised to Raj. She suggested that they talk to the rest of the team together and find a more inclusive way to run the meetings.

Practice Task 8

Question 1

Which of the following behaviours can help to avoid or resolve conflict? Tick all that apply.

○　Active listening.

○　Showing empathy and being patient.

○　Reacting emotionally.

○　Establishing fault and attributing blame.

○　Giving others time to calm down.

Question 2

Which of the following are potential barriers to effective communication within a team? Tick all that apply.

○ Team members are located in different places.

○ A team member comes from a cultural background in which speaking out in a group setting is considered rude.

○ Team members frequently socialise together.

○ A team member is often distracted at work due an issue in his home life.

Question 3

Joanna wants to increase participation in her weekly team meetings. She and Samir are the only ones who ever say anything. Each time Samir contributes, the other team members' body language changes. No one comments or offers suggestions, even on the frequent occasions when Samir's suggestion is inappropriate.

What steps can Joanna take to identify the problem and resolve it?

Summary

- Good working relationships usually start with mutual trust
- To establish trust, you need to draw on interpersonal skills such as listening, showing respect, being positive and creating a supportive environment
- It is the role of team leaders to facilitate respectful interaction by modelling inclusive behaviour and language
- Taking a problem-solving approach can help you to identify and overcome communication barriers
- It is the responsibility of all staff, but especially managers, to accommodate their team members' needs
- After a solution has been implemented, you should follow up to be sure that you properly identified the problem and that your attempts to solve it have been effective

Learning Checkpoint 3
Facilitate workplace communication

Part A

1. You are part of a group reviewing your organisation's code of conduct. You have been asked to define 'respectful communication'. Identify four features of respectful communication for the group.
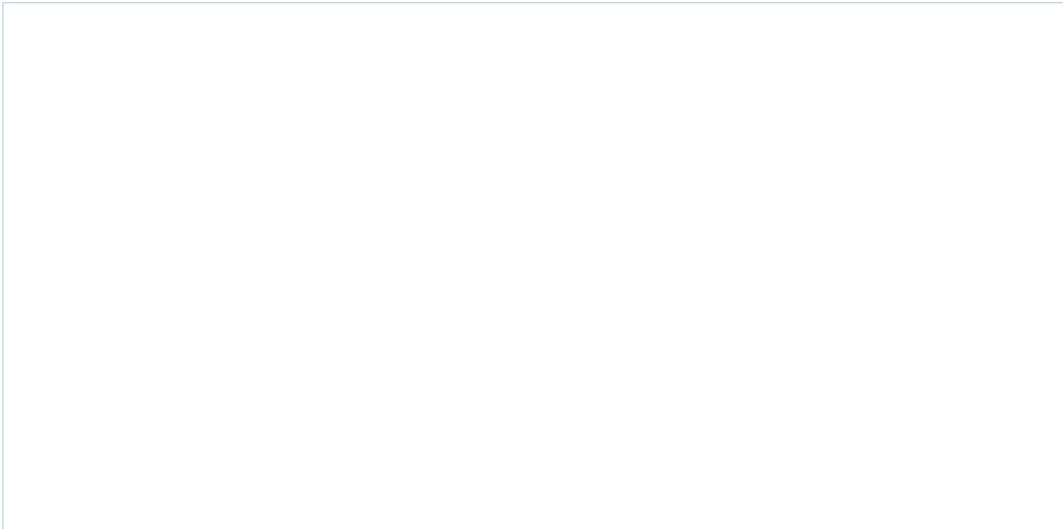
2. At a job interview you are asked to identify three different interpersonal skills that have helped you build relationships and facilitate respectful interactions and to provide examples of how you have applied them.
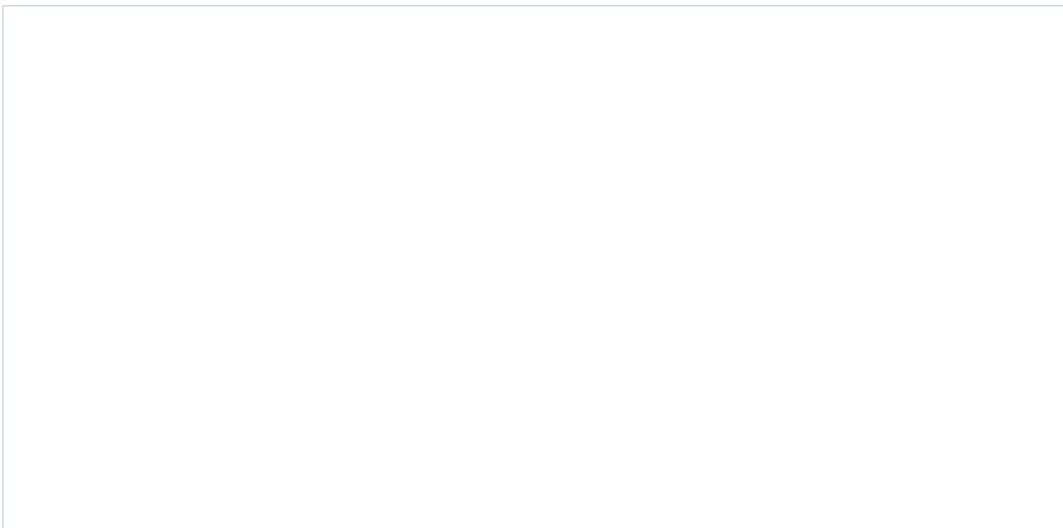
3. Another supervisor approaches you to discuss a communication barrier between two groups in her team. She asks you to explain the problem-solving model you use and what questions you would ask if you were her.

4. You are satisfied that you have a solution to a communication problem between your team and a team located in a remote office. How will you implement the solution and monitor its effectiveness?

Part B

Read the case study and then answer the questions below.

Case study

Didi is at a management team meeting. The team are discussing sending a delegation from the company to China to explore business development opportunities. Much of the conversation is about the conferences they will attend and the companies they will meet with. Didi asks if the delegation has been to China before or had previous business dealings with Chinese companies. Didi is Chinese; she grew up in Shanghai before emigrating to Australia in her early twenties. Her question is met with blank looks, so Didi explains that Chinese and Australian business customs are very different. She recommends that the delegates be given some training before their visit, in order to make the most of it. The managing director is impressed and asks if Didi would be willing to prepare some guidelines on how to establish relationships with Chinese clients.

1. Research some basic guidelines for attending business meetings in China and prepare a list.

2. Explain what interpersonal skills may be required to develop relationships with Chinese clients.
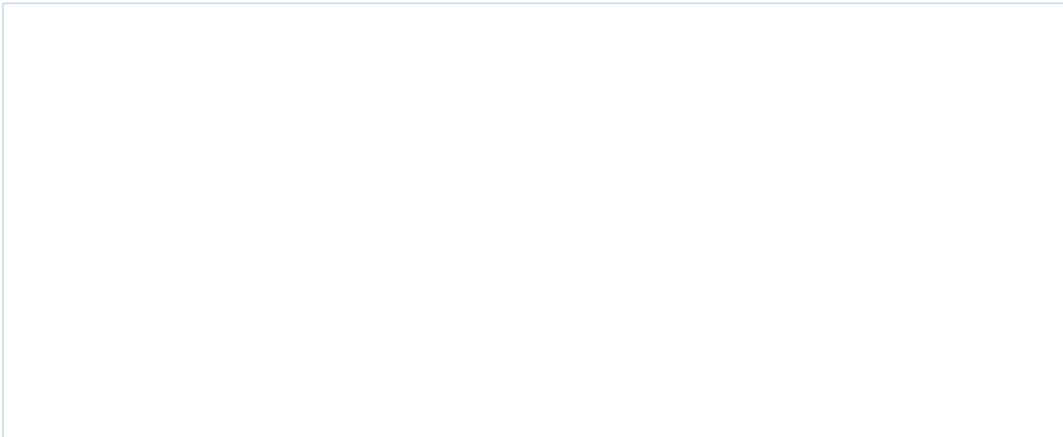
3. Identify potential challenges you may face in communicating with Chinese clients and suggest possible solutions.
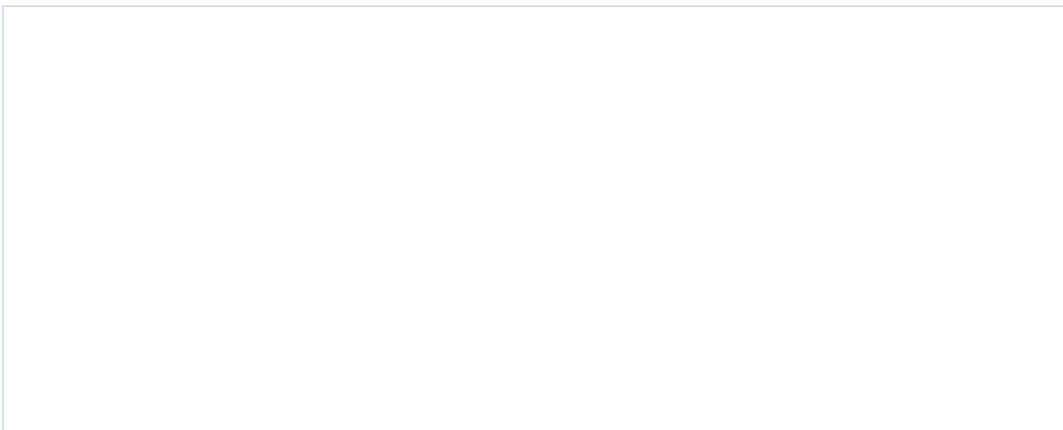
Topic 4 | Monitor and support team communication

4A   Ensuring communication meets requirements

4B   Providing and seeking feedback

4C   Collating and reporting important information

4A Ensuring communication meets requirements

It is the responsibility of all staff to communicate in a way that complies with the law and their employer's policies.

All of an organisation's internal and external communication must comply with the law. It is the responsibility of all employees, as individuals, to ensure that they obey relevant legislation. Staff in supervisory or management roles have the additional responsibility of ensuring that the members of their team understand the legislative requirements and conduct themselves accordingly. This might mean holding workshops on subjects such as anti-discriminatory language or bullying in the workplace, for example, or monitoring record-keeping procedures to be sure that clients' information is kept confidential.

Every organisation also has its own standards, policies and procedures dictating how staff communicate with internal and external audiences. Again, it is the supervisor's or manager's role to ensure that all employees comply with these organisational requirements.

Meeting legislative requirements

Workplace communication must comply with government legislation.

An act is a law passed by parliament, such as the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth), which establishes health and safety responsibilities in the workplace and provides for the creation of legally enforceable regulations and codes of practice. Australia's federal work health and safety regulations have their basis in this act and determine how it is applied.

Some acts and regulations, such as the *Fair Work Act 2006* (Cth)*,* apply in all states and territories. Each state and territory also has its own work health and safety and anti-discrimination acts. Managers need to be aware of an organisation's obligations under both federal and state laws and how they differ, especially when managing team members in different states.

Supervisors and managers should model correct communication protocols; they should also make sure team members are aware of their obligations under the law and that they are meeting these obligations. Induction programs are an ideal opportunity to ensure individuals are aware of legislative requirements and how to comply with them; regular reminders in team meetings and 'refresher' training sessions are also useful.

Monitoring changes to legislation is important too, so that organisational policies and procedures can be kept up to date.

Legislative requirements
Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth) and state WHS laws Together with legislated WHS regulations and approved codes of practice, Australia's state and federal WHS laws establish employers' work health and safety duties, including record-keeping and incident reporting requirements, and make it mandatory to consult workers and include them in the negotiation of work health and safety matters.
Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and state privacy laws Certain organisations are required to comply with the federal privacy act or equivalent state or territory laws. Under these laws, personal information supplied to an organisation must be kept secure and viewed only by people who are authorised to do so. It is the responsibility of management to make sure team members know what information they are permitted to collect, how to store it safely and under what circumstances they are allowed to view it or share it with others.
Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) The federal fair work act and regulations govern relationships between employers and employees in Australia. They prohibit discrimination, and therefore the use of discriminatory language, in the recruitment, employment and termination of employees.
Anti-discrimination laws Federal legislation such as the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, Sex Discrimination Act 1984, Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Age Discrimination Act 2004 mandate that no one should be subject to derogatory, abusive or discriminatory behaviour or language on the basis of their race, sex, ability or age and other personal characteristics.

Meeting organisational requirements

Employees must be trained to comply with an organisation's communication policies and standards.

An organisation's policies and standards reflect its culture and values. They are often formalised in a code of conduct that all members of the organisation are expected to follow. A code of conduct typically requires members to behave with honesty, integrity and respect in their dealings with others. Organisations may also have specific policies and procedures setting out rules or guidelines for everyday workplace activities such as record-keeping or sending email.

It is essential that employees comply with their organisation's requirements when communicating with others. Within a company, such codes or policies promote good relationships, professionalism and productivity. When communicating with customers, suppliers and other external parties, complying with these policies creates a positive impression and protects your organisation's reputation.

Once again, induction programs provide an ideal opportunity to let staff members know what is required of them. This information can be reinforced in team meetings or at training or professional development sessions.

Some industries have their own code of conduct that all participants in that industry must follow. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission regulates these codes under the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010*. If your industry has a code of conduct, employees at your organisation are required by law to comply with it. You can see a list of industry codes here: aspirelr.link/accc-industry-codes.

Typical workplace communication policies	
Computer use	Policies and procedures for computer use: ▪ State the organisation's conditions for use of work computers ▪ Give information on what is appropriate and inappropriate use ▪ Provide guidelines for managing copyright and intellectual property
Conflict resolution	Conflict resolution policies and procedures: ▪ State the organisation's commitment to addressing any conflict to the satisfaction of all concerned, including external customers ▪ Give information about the dispute resolution process to be followed and the documentation to be kept when dealing with a dispute
Email	Email protocols: ▪ State the organisation's conditions for use of email as a communication channel ▪ Give information on the way emails need to be addressed, closed, stored and copied
Social media	Social media guidelines: ▪ State who can post and respond to customers on behalf of the company ▪ State the tone and communication style that should be used ▪ Provide parameters around the type of information that can be shared on social media ▪ Include sign-off procedures before content is posted
Style	An organisation's style guide: ▪ Sets out rules for professional written communication ▪ Gives information about the use of templates and the company letterhead and logo; writing style, grammar and spelling; and use of graphics
Record keeping	Record-keeping procedures: ▪ Set out rules for record keeping and file management ▪ Give information about what records need to be kept, the forms to be used and the importance of accuracy and use of objective language

Putting social media policy into practice

Katia is responsible for handling her organisation's social media accounts. When a customer posts a complaint on Facebook, it is Katia's job to respond. Fortunately, the company has a clear set of guidelines she can follow. Katia starts by acknowledging their complaint and then invites them to call, email or message her to share more information.

It can be difficult dealing with upset and sometimes abusive people, but Katia abides by her organisation's code of conduct and does what she can to protect the company's reputation. Katia's manager has authorised her to offer discounts, credits and refunds up to a certain value, which allows Katia to resolve most complaints to the customer's satisfaction. Occasionally, she needs to refer a complaint to her manager, and they work together to resolve it.

Katia is required to keep a log of all customer complaints and how they've been resolved. This is a key performance indicator she is measured on. During her performance review, Katia is able to discuss how the current policies and procedures help her to resolve customer complaints and make suggestions for how they can be improved.
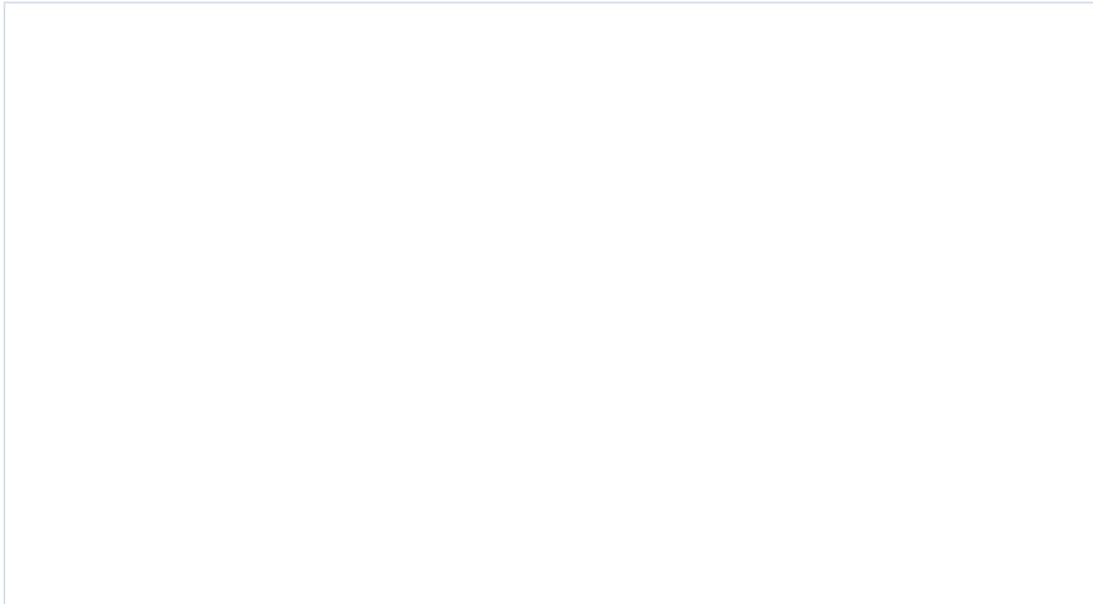
Practice Task 9

Question 1

What are three acts that deal with workplace communication?
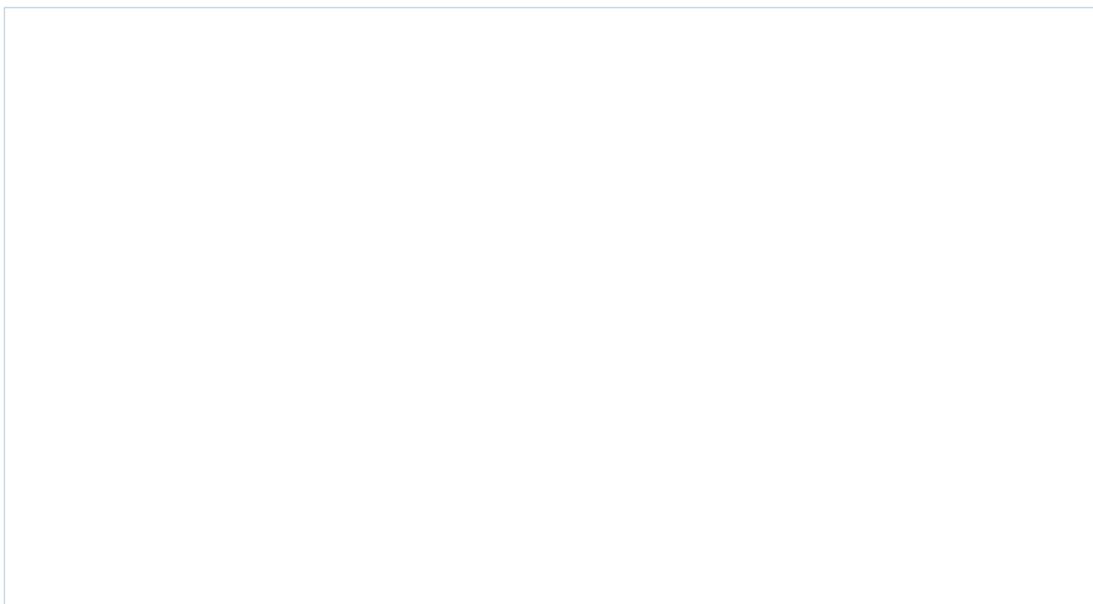
Question 2

Describe a policy in your workplace that relates to the communication activities you carry out in your role.

Question 3

Find a copy of your organisation's social media policy or an example from another business. Identify three items that the policy addresses.

4B Providing and seeking feedback

Thoughtful, constructive feedback helps us to learn and grow.

Regular feedback can greatly improve our motivation and boost both our confidence and our performance. Feedback clarifies expectations and helps us to learn from our mistakes and build on our strengths. It is part of an ongoing learning cycle.

As a supervisor or manager, providing feedback to others is an important part of your job, but it is also important to seek feedback about your own performance, especially your communication skills. We are not born good communicators; we develop and continuously learn how to communicate better.

Providing feedback

Feedback ensures employees know how well they are performing and helps to identify where additional support is required.

Providing feedback lets employees know that their contribution is important. It also lets them know that their performance is being monitored, motivating them to do their best. Lack of meaningful feedback can lead to frustration, conflict and sometimes long-term damage to professional relationships.

Most employees receive formal feedback at least once a year, at an annual performance review, but feedback is most useful when given regularly throughout the year, both formally and informally. Feedback sessions can even be scheduled several times over the course of a project or activity, as a way of checking on an employee's or team's progress and keeping them on track.

Positive feedback is motivating and builds confidence. Taking the time to acknowledge the efforts of individuals, groups or the whole team is an excellent way to show them that their contribution is recognised and valued. When someone's work is exceptional and you want to call attention to it, consider praising them in a meeting where colleagues or more senior staff are present, or send them an email to let them know their work is appreciated, copying in the head of their department.

Negative feedback is equally important, but it needs to be considered more carefully. The aim is to draw an employee's attention to an issue and discuss how you can support them as they work to address it. If they come away feeling angry or resentful, it is unlikely they'll be motivated to do better. Managers need to create a culture of constructive criticism rather than blame, and encourage staff to learn from their mistakes rather than trying to cover up problems.

Feedback should always be delivered in the appropriate setting or forum, and timing is also a consideration. After making a mistake, a staff member may be upset or embarrassed, and it sometimes best to wait until they have had time to calm down or reflect before offering feedback about what happened and how they could do things differently. In other situations, immediate feedback may be necessary to prevent problems down the track – for example, if a trainee is using equipment in a way that might cause injury. For urgent feedback, it's best to communicate verbally, following up in writing if necessary.

Types of feedback

There are many different ways to provide feedback – publicly or privately, formally or informally, one on one or in a group, verbally or in writing – but some of these methods are more suited to praise than criticism, which requires tact and sensitivity.

Types of feedback	
Performance reviews	Performances reviews are usually conducted at least once annually and may be linked to the offer of a pay rise, bonus or promotion. Managers should prepare by reviewing the employee's performance, which should be measured against the indicators outlined in their job description. Both individual achievements and contributions to the team should be taken into account. A performance review is formal: the tone should be professional and the discussion balanced. Both positive and negative feedback should be supported with examples illustrating what the employee does well and where they need to improve. Where your feedback is negative, move on to ways you can work together to remedy the situation.
Team feedback	Team members can learn a lot from each other's feedback. Managers can encourage employees to provide feedback to each other and to the team as a whole by asking employees to draw the team's attention to other members' good work or outstanding efforts. Structured feedback sessions that focus on the team's overall performance, as opposed to individual members' achievements or shortcomings, are another good strategy.
360-degree feedback	This highly structured method of giving feedback involves every member of a team giving the other members feedback on their performance. For example, team members could give each other a score out of 10 for communication skills, participation, cooperation or effort. The feedback may be given anonymously, so that team members feel free to be honest. Participants then receive a report showing the scores they received. Receiving feedback in this way can be confronting and the process needs to be managed carefully. Getting low scores from team members can be a shock, but if handled well it can motivate employees to improve their performance.

> ### Example
>
> #### Giving positive feedback
>
> Jeremy, a team leader, is providing feedback on a recently completed project at a team meeting.
>
> 'I want to take the time now to talk about the work that Margie and Harif have been doing on the new customer service questionnaire. They've worked very hard on this project, and last week the new questionnaire replaced the old one. Initial reports show that we're now collecting around 60 per cent more data on each client than we did before. Our target was 50 per cent, so Margie and Harif have helped us to smash that goal. On behalf of the team, thanks for your hard work and congratulations on a job well done.'
>
> After the team meeting, Jeremy meets privately with Margie and Harif and talks to them about their project in more detail, asking them what they learned and what they would do differently next time. He praises some specific aspects of the project, and tells them again that they have made a major contribution to the team.

Seeking feedback

Successful team leaders don't just give feedback; they also seek it from others. They need to know how well they are doing their job and where they need to do better. It's particularly important, as a manager, to gauge how well you communicate with others.

There are many different ways to gather feedback. It's best to draw on several different sources if you can, including the members of your team, so that you have a range of perspectives from which to draw conclusions. Try to remember that you don't need to respond to what you hear immediately – just listen, and take notes if you need to. Afterwards, reflect on what you've learned and how you should act on it.

Gathering feedback from different sources

If you really want to know how well you're getting your message across and how your communication skills could be improved, you need to seek feedback from several different sources. This might include your peers, team members, clients or customers, or anyone else you regularly communicate with.

There are many different ways you could do this. For example, you could:

- Ask a peer to observe you running a meeting or giving a presentation and give you specific feedback
- Send draft copies of reports or other written documents to colleagues for their comments

- Tell your team members you want to work on your communication skills and ask them for suggestions
- Review complaints and incident reports to find out whether the training you give staff has been effective
- Survey clients to find out how satisfied they are with the service you offer them and whether they feel you listen to them

Seeking feedback from your team

By asking for feedback on your performance and communication skills, you set a good example for your team, modelling how to receive and respond to praise and criticism at work. You are also showing them you want to be held accountable and that you are genuinely interested in their views. You could ask for general feedback, or focus on specific situations. For example, you might ask 'Do you think that the information I give you before brainstorming meetings is adequate?'

Make sure they know that the invitation to offer feedback is genuine. Try to communicate that through your body language and the tone of your voice, so that staff will feel comfortable giving you their honest opinion. Be prepared to deal with criticism gracefully, resisting the temptation to defend yourself, justify your actions or offer explanations.

Reflecting on the feedback you have gathered means:

- Acknowledging areas in need of improvement
- Identifying what steps to take to improve your skills or change existing attitudes and behaviours

Try talking to your supervisor or someone else you trust as you think about these questions and explore ideas. They may be able to suggest personal development activities or strategies that will help. Talking about your plans with others can also help you to stay focused and motivated to improve.

Example

Reflecting on feedback and seeking assistance

Jeff calls a team meeting. There are three items on the agenda. Everyone participates as they discuss the first two items. As they move on to the final item, one of the team members, Natalie, asks if she can leave, as the issue they're about to discuss has nothing to do with her. Jeff says that he'd prefer she stayed, as the issue affects everyone on the team and he values her input. Natalie sighs impatiently. She says that she has an important deadline to meet and asks again if she can leave the meeting. Jeff reluctantly agrees, preferring to avoid conflict.

Later that week, Jeff tells his manager what happened. He admits that he felt uncomfortable when Natalie challenged him and that he has not yet spoken to her about her behaviour. His manager asks how the rest of the team felt and Jeff says that some felt he had let the team down by not dealing with the matter more effectively.

Jeff's manager suggests strategies he could use to build confidence, and they role-play a conversation in which Jeff addresses the issue with Natalie, rehearsing what he will say. Although discussing the situation with his manager was uncomfortable, Jeff now feels more prepared to speak with Natalie and to handle such conflicts in future.

Practice Task 10

Question 1

Why is it important to ask for feedback from a range of sources, including your team members?

Question 2

Why is it important to reflect on feedback?

Question 3

Which of the following statements are correct? Tick all that apply.

○ For the sake of team cohesion, encouraging your team to give negative feedback should be avoided.

○ Seeking feedback on your performance helps you to identify areas in which you can improve.

○ 360-degree feedback provides multiple perspectives.

○ You should never delay giving feedback.

4C Collating and reporting important information

Collating important information and reporting it management is part of a team leader's job

Communicating with your team is a big part of your role as a supervisor or manager, but certain information must be communicated 'upwards' to members of senior staff, such as your department head, an HR manager or the CEO. Even CEOs have an obligation to communicate specific information to their organisation's board or external parties such as regulatory bodies.

Your first responsibility is to gather and collate any information you are required to, and the next is to pass it on to the appropriate person in your organisation's hierarchy. It is especially important that you report any unresolved issues in the workplace, such as:

- Ongoing threats to health and safety that have not been addressed
- Bullying that persists after staff have been warned that it is not acceptable
- An employee's repeated failure to meet performance targets despite receiving support from other members of the team or from their supervisor

Senior staff need to know about unresolved problems so that they can take action and prepare to deal with any consequences. You should always report such issues as soon as you become aware of them. It is a matter of urgency, because the potential outcome of any breach could compromise the safety of individuals, damage the reputation of the organisation or have a negative impact on employee wellbeing.

Collating information

Collating relevant information and leaving out the rest makes it easier to take in the most important points quickly.

When you collate information for someone above you in the organisation's hierarchy, include only the details they require, so you can be sure they'll see and take in the relevant points. You should also give some thought to the organisation and formatting of the information. For examples, you might collate sales figures by territory or by day, week or month, depending on how they will be used, but either way you would probably set them out in a table.

Some kinds of information need to be collated and passed on regularly, such as employees' hours, recorded on time sheets for the payroll officer. Other kinds of information, such as details of worker injuries and potential or actual breaches of legislation or organisational standards, should be reported immediately to your manager or an HR officer.
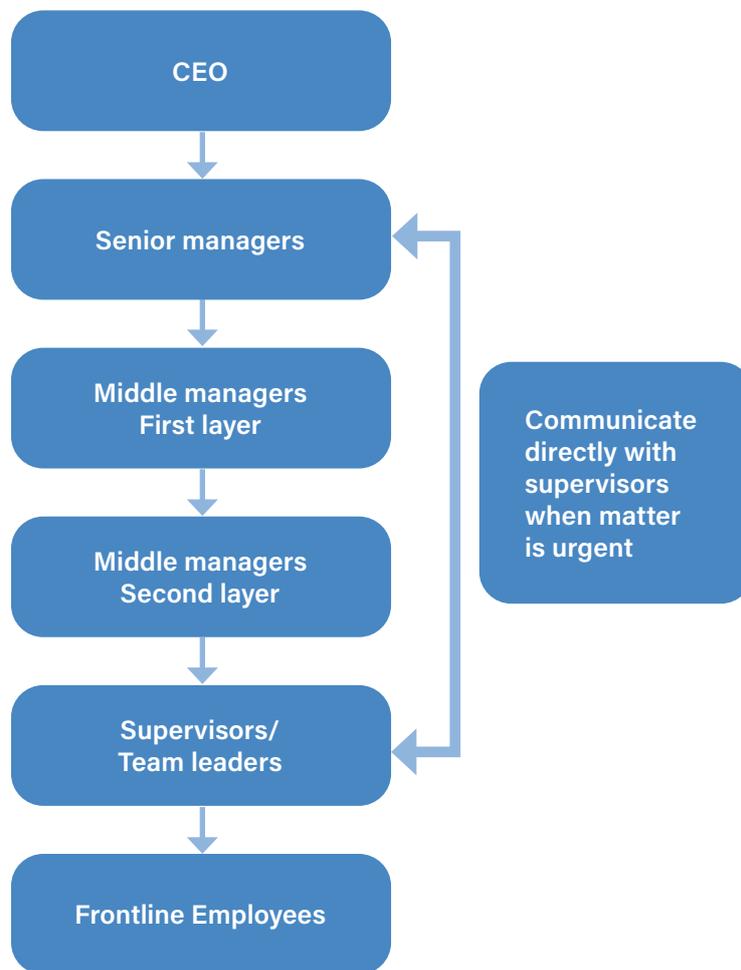
When reporting an issue or incident, you should:

- Describe what happened/is happening, and what the consequences have been
- Identify the people involved, where appropriate
- Provide any available evidence
- Explain what you think the cause of the problem is
- Describe any steps you've already taken to address the problem and what the results have been
- Seek approval to take further action, where appropriate
- Recommend possible solutions

Communicating upwards

Team leaders often rely on 'upward communication' to:
- Raise complex or serious problems
- Seek support or approval to deal with an issue
- Draw attention to a problem or situation that is beyond their authority
- Alert management when the safety or wellbeing of employees is at risk
- Air employee or team grievances
- Gain approval for new initiatives or expenditure

The flow chart below shows the hierarchy typical of a traditional management system. Most non-urgent matters should be communicated to your immediate supervisor. However, when an issue is of a more serious or urgent nature, you may need to go directly to a decision-maker. No manager likes to be uninformed about issues with potentially far-reaching consequences.

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┌─────────────────────────┐
│           CEO           │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│     Senior managers     │◄─────┐
└─────────────────────────┘      │
             │                   │
             ▼                   │      ┌──────────────────────┐
┌─────────────────────────┐      │      │ Communicate          │
│     Middle managers     │      │      │ directly with        │
│       First layer       │      │      │ supervisors          │
└─────────────────────────┘      │      │ when matter          │
             │                   │      │ is urgent            │
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┌─────────────────────────┐      │
│     Middle managers     │      │
│      Second layer       │      │
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┌─────────────────────────┐      │
│      Supervisors/       │◄─────┘
│      Team leaders       │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Frontline Employees   │
└─────────────────────────┘
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Example

Upward communication

One of Antonio's team members has posted information to the company's social media without approval. The information is incorrect and has causes a number of customer complaints. Antonio takes down the post and speaks to the team member. Before he replies to the customer complaints, he needs to let the leaders of other teams know what has happened so they can be prepared to handle any consequences.

Staff are required to log customer complaints, so Antonio fills in a report and sends it to his manager, explaining the situation. Antonio recommends his team member's social media posting rights are removed until they have further training. Antonio needs the IT department to action this request, so he copies the IT manager into his email. Antonio's manager reviews the report and calls a meeting to review the issue. In the meantime, the IT manager approves the temporary suspension of the team member's access to the company's social media accounts, to prevent it happening again.

Practice Task 11

Refer to previous example and answer the following questions.

Question 1

Why did Antonio need to report this issue to other team leaders?

Question 2

What information should Antonio include when he reports the customer complaints to his manager?

Summary

- A team leader, supervisor or manager must ensure that all communication is consistent with legislative and organisational requirements in order to protect an organisation's reputation
- Feedback helps you to identify areas of strength and weaknesses
- Seeking feedback and reflecting on it will help you to improve your performance and communication skills
- Important information and unresolved issues need to be collated and reported to your supervisor, manager or other senior members of staff

Learning Checkpoint 4
Monitor and support team communication

Read the case study and answer the questions below.

Case study

Talia is the manager of a call centre. She regularly listens to calls in order to identify any communication issues or training needs. Every week, Talia holds a meeting with her team and provides them with feedback on how they are meeting their targets, what they are doing well and where they could improve. Talia highlights examples of high-performing individuals, but she leaves more sensitive feedback for her one-to-one meetings with members of the team.

At the next meeting, Talia tells the team that Sarthak recently dealt with a particularly difficult call. She commends him on his patience and calm manner when the customer made derogatory comments about his accent and culture. Sarthak looks uncomfortable and seems reluctant to discuss it, so Talia moves on, but she decides to talk to him about it later, one on one.

In her office the next day, Sarthak admits that customers' abusive comments can be quite upsetting. Talia empathises with him and explains that he does not need to tolerate those kinds of comments because he is protected by workplace legislation. She seeks his input in revising the guidelines for dealing with abusive customers, which she will include in her notes when she reports the incident to management. Sarthak looks worried, but Talia assures him that it is her job to report these issues and the management team will want to hear his thoughts.

1.   How does workplace legislation protect Sarthak?

2.   What feedback does Talia provide Sarthak?

3. What feedback would you give Talia on her communication skills?

4. Describe the steps Talia took to collate the relevant information and report it to her manager?

5. Why is it appropriate that Talia escalated the issue to management?