

BSB 7.0

BSBXCM301

**ENGAGE IN
WORKPLACE
COMMUNICATION**

BSBXC301

Engage in workplace communication

Release 1

Learner Guide

Aspire Version 1.1



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Before you begin

This Learner Guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBXC301 Engage in workplace communication*, 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
Navigate the world of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands nature and purpose of own role and associated responsibilities and how it contributes to organisational goals and outcomes
Get the work done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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: Plan workplace communication	1A Determine audience and purpose of workplace communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1B Identify information needs and communication requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1C Discover and select appropriate methods of communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1D Plan content of messages	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident

Topic	Key outcome	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 2: Undertake routine communication	2A Communicate according to organisational requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2B Adjust communication methods to meet audience needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2C Receive and respond to information and communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2D Identify and report communication challenges	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 3: Participate in workplace communication	3A Contribute to and support others in workplace discussions	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3B Use listening and questioning techniques	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3C Seek feedback	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident



Topic 1 | Plan workplace communication

- 1A Determine audience and purpose of workplace communication
- 1B Identify information needs and communication requirements
- 1C Discover and select appropriate methods of communication
- 1D Plan content of messages

1A Determine audience and purpose of workplace communication

Communicating clearly with others in the workplace is essential for the efficient operation of any organisation. This includes knowing the audience and purpose of your communication.

Are you communicating with the CEO or a work colleague? Are you providing critical financial data or general all-staff updates? These are examples of workplace communication.

Purpose of communication

The purpose of your communication may be obvious by the task you have been assigned.

To understand the purpose of your communication, ask yourself, 'Why am I communicating and what do I want to achieve?'

The purpose of your workplace communication may be to:

- provide or request information
- arrange a meeting
- respond to customer queries
- report on sales, work progress or issues
- alert staff to new policies or procedures
- advise a supplier of changes to orders.

If your manager has asked you to contact a customer to let them know when their purchase will be delivered, you should understand that the purpose of the communication is to provide information.

The purpose of communication

Acts as a reminder about:

- due dates for invoices
- dates of meetings
- personal behaviour or dress codes

Provides instructions to staff about:

- how to fill in pay slips or leave forms

The purpose of communication
<p>Clarifies information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ new working conditions ▪ safety procedures ▪ work processes ▪ structure of work teams
<p>Requests information such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a file ▪ work plans ▪ client feedback
<p>Requests advice such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ marketing predictions
<p>Publicises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ new staff training ▪ staff appointments ▪ marketing events
<p>Provides information such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ monthly sales figures ▪ meeting agendas ▪ minutes of meetings ▪ meeting outcomes ▪ new products
<p>Provides information such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lists of clients ▪ addresses ▪ personnel details
<p>Provides evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ telephone calls ▪ copies of letters sent
<p>Keeps permanent records such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ minutes of meetings

Example

Purpose of communication

Rajit works as an administrative assistant at a large organisation providing administrative support to several managers. One of the managers hands him a list of board meeting dates scheduled for the year and asks him to send these out to all staff.

Rajit decides to send them out by email and writes: *Dear all, please find the dates for this year's board meetings below.* He sends the email, and moments later, he receives several queries from staff asking if they are required to attend the meeting. Rajit realises that he didn't clarify the purpose of the communication with his manager. In this case, the purpose was to ensure all staff were aware of what dates the board members would be onsite to attend the meetings.

Identifying your audience

Once you know the purpose of your communication, the next step is to be clear about who you should communicate it with.

Knowing the purpose of your communication and who the audience is affects what you communicate and how best to communicate it. You must be clear about this before you start planning your communication.

Your audience can vary and may include:

- **internal customers** – all staff members, staff in a department, the management team or individuals
- **external customers** – customers, clients, service providers or government departments.

It is possible that there may be a primary and secondary audience for your communication.

For example, you might write a report for your manager, who is your primary audience. This report may be shared with other teams, managers or stakeholders, who are your secondary audience.

So, it is important to know if your communication is likely to have a secondary audience as that may impact the information you include in your communication.

Example

Who needs to know?

Rachel is discussing the Christmas shut-down period with her managing director. He asks her to let everyone know the shut-down dates. Rachel nods and then says, 'So that means our staff, our board, our customers and our suppliers? Is there anyone else who needs to know?' He thinks for a moment and suggests that she notify the cleaners and the building facilities manager. Rachel notes this down and writes an action to communicate this to the audience they have identified.

Practice Task 1

Complete the following table by identifying the purpose and audience for each task.

Task	Purpose	Audience
Create a meeting request for a marketing team meeting		
Let a customer know when stock will be available		
Get a quote to print 1000 leaflets		
Create a poster about how to use the new coffee machine safely		

1B Identify information needs and communication requirements

For an organisation to operate efficiently, people inside and outside the organisation should be provided with the information they need in the way they like to receive it.

As such, your job is to find the best way to ascertain their information needs and to communicate the necessary information with them.

Identifying information needs

When communicating in the workplace, an important question to ask is, 'What does my audience need to know?'

The answer to that question will depend on the type of information you're communicating, as well as who the audience is. The amount of information you provide will depend on the nature of the information, the role/position of the recipient and even their personal preferences.

This table provides some examples.

Task	Information needs	Additional information needs
Send a meeting request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recipients need to know time, date, place and purpose of meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirements for pre-reading or preparation Format of the meeting Meeting attendees
Update a customer on their delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer needs to know when they will receive their delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasons for the delay and likelihood of it happening again
Prepare a monthly sales report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Month-to-date and year-to-date sales data Analysis of sales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison to past years Competitor activity Alignment to marketing activity or product launch
Prepare for a weekly catch-up with supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress on projects, issues or challenges, current priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates on team members and other meetings you've attended

In the workplace, you will experience situations where information needs are clearly expressed. For example, your supervisor may provide you with a report template and past reports so you can see the level of detail of information required. On other occasions, you may not know the information needs of your audience. In these instances, you should ask questions to determine their needs.

This table presents examples of various communication scenarios.

Scenario	Questions to identify information needs
Conversation with a colleague about a work issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How much detail does your colleague require about the issue? ▪ Do they prefer your solutions to be backed up with facts and figures? ▪ Do they prefer to have information sent to them prior to the conversation?
Product information session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who is your audience? ▪ What is their level of familiarity with the product? ▪ Do they understand technical jargon related to the product? ▪ Will they want to know about similar competitor products?
Weekly team meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How much detail do your colleagues need to know about your projects? ▪ What information do they expect from you? ▪ What type of issues or concerns are important enough to be raised at this meeting?

Watch this video about identifying the information needs and requirements of your audience:

aspirelr.link/audience-analysis

Identifying communication requirements

How you communicate something to your audience is influenced by their communication requirements.

These requirements will vary depending on:

- organisational policies and procedures
- location of the audience
- personal preferences
- disability requirements.

Organisational policies and procedures

Most organisations have policies and procedures in place to control and direct communication inside and outside of the organisation. These can include:

protocols and processes that outline how to communicate with external customers

- the use of email
- the use of instant messaging apps
- techniques and guidelines for telephone calls
- the nature of content communicated
- templates and formats for formal documentation
- communication channels in the organisation.

Location of the audience

The location of your audience will dictate the communication requirements. It is difficult to communicate face to face with remote workers or customers and suppliers. Therefore, you will need to identify how best to communicate with them. This could be via phone, video chat, text, email or letter. The urgency of the communication will influence your choice of communication method. You may also need to consider time zones if dealing with people in different parts of Australia or around the world, ensuring you make contact during regular working hours, unless otherwise agreed.

Personal preferences

Most of us have a preference for how we like to receive communication and it will often depend on the type of communication we are receiving. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who then says, 'Send me an email or text'? This may be because they rely on electronic reminders or they like to have a record of what they discussed. You will get to know your colleagues' personal communication preferences.

Here are some typical preferences to consider when communicating with people.

- Some people prefer detailed information in writing so they can properly digest it.
- In meetings, some audience members prefer handouts or onscreen presentations to accompany the discussion, while others might find this distracting.
- Some workplaces now use internal chats or emails to communicate internally rather than engaging in face-to-face conversations.

Disability requirements

There is legislation that ensures workplaces provide equal access to all employees. This includes processes and actions that meet the communication requirements of those with a physical or cognitive impairment. This can include physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities, work-related injuries, medical conditions and mental, psychological and learning disabilities.

If you work with colleagues who have physical or cognitive impairments, it is likely that your organisation has established its communication requirements and developed strategies to ensure communication is inclusive. However, you may deal with customers who have specific communication requirements and it is important that you also establish what their requirements are and how you can best meet their needs.

Example

Inclusive meetings

Joel's manager appears at his desk. 'I need you to coordinate a management meeting in 30 minutes. We've got a major supply issue and I need all managers to understand the situation and how it will affect production and the hours staff will be working for the next few weeks.' Joel nods and responds, 'I'll get the meeting room ready and we'll get the remote managers to video-conference in. Will you brief Nick before or after the meeting?' Nick, the finance manager, is hearing impaired and Joel knows there won't be time to put together written information for him before the meeting. 'I'll talk to him now,' Joel's manager replies. 'He will attend the meeting, but I'll also follow up with him afterwards.'

Practice Task 2

Identify the information needs and communication requirements for the following scenarios.

Scenario	Information need	Your and others' communication requirements
You're asked to reply to a customer's enquiry		
You need to submit a leave request		
Your manager asks for an update on a project you're working on		
A colleague asks for advice on a work issue		

1C Discover and select appropriate methods of communication

Thanks to changes and advances in technology, there are many methods of communication available to us.

Communication has two primary forms: verbal and written.

Verbal communication is effective and fast. Two people speaking to each other can exchange information and respond instantly. Most importantly, verbal communication enables us to ask questions if we don't hear or understand what has been said.

Verbal communication is an effective means of communication, especially when we speak clearly, listen carefully and observe the people we are speaking with.

Written communication can be quite simple (e.g. a handwritten note or a text message) or more complex (e.g. a formal report or a policy or procedure).

Let's look at some examples of verbal and written communication.

Verbal communication	Written communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face conversation • Telephone conversation • Voicemail • Video conferencing • Meeting presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes (e.g. notes on a meeting) • Letter • Email • SMS text (short message service) • Instant messaging

Communication equipment and methods

When deciding on communication methods and equipment, organisations consider factors like cost, flexibility, ease of use and security.

Let's look at some examples of equipment used to communicate in the workplace and what each is used for.

Telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The telephone is used daily in most organisations. • In some places, it is the most common way of communicating. • Communicating by telephone is often very quick and effective. It enables people to discuss and respond to one another in real time. • When calls are linked, several callers can teleconference together.
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Video call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Video calls are similar to telephone calls, but participants can see each other on their phone, digital device or computer screen. ▪ Using this medium requires specialised software and a device capable of displaying video. ▪ An advantage of video calls is being able to see the person you are speaking with. ▪ A disadvantage is the need to have internet access to permit the video to stream to the communication device.
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many organisations prefer their staff to use email to communicate internally. ▪ Using email enables electronic files to be attached and sent instantly, removing the need for printing.
Intranet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An intranet is a network used to store and provide information in an organisation. It is like the internet, but only people in the organisation have access. Many organisations have an intranet to store information such as forms, dates for meetings, and details on personal and social events. If you need to communicate with everyone in the organisation, the intranet may be an excellent choice. ▪ The main disadvantage of an intranet is that you can't be sure the people who need to read your message have read it. There is no simple way of checking, so important information may not get passed on at the right time. If your message is essential, you may need to send an email to everyone to point them to the intranet, or perhaps notify them another way.
Instant messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instant messaging is a way of sending short messages to others via your phone or computer ▪ It allows for brief, immediate information to be transferred as well as attachments such as photos or documents. ▪ Instant messages can be sent on a phone as an SMS or by using different applications such as Viber, WhatsApp or Skype. Instant messages can also be sent and received via your PC. For example, some organisations choose to use programs such as Microsoft Teams. ▪ This type of communication usually allows you to see when messages have been received and read. ▪ One disadvantage of instant messaging is that it can be distracting and, if used too often, can become overwhelming or ignored.

Phone communication

Even though telephone communication is quick and effective, it does have some disadvantages. Unlike a face-to-face conversation, you can't see the person you are talking to. You also generally can't see facial expressions or body language. Missing these non-verbal parts of communication can lead to a misunderstanding of what someone is trying to convey.

Misunderstandings may also arise if you can't hear easily or don't listen carefully to what has been said. There might be a bad line or noise, or movement in the office might distract you. Someone may speak with an accent you're not familiar with, making it difficult for you to understand. Always ask for confirmation that what you have said, or heard, has been correctly understood.

Another disadvantage of the telephone is that people aren't always ready to take your call, and you may need to leave a message, which may not be the best way to send the information.

Email communication

Email is another quick and easy way of communicating. It isn't necessary for the recipient to be available at the time the email is sent. It is also useful because the information written in the email can be saved and referred to later if required. However, emails have some disadvantages. Think carefully about what you need to say and who needs to know before deciding whether email is the best method of communicating. For example:

- **overuse:** some people receive hundreds of email messages each day, which becomes physically unmanageable
- **reduction in productivity:** emails can reduce efficiency and productivity in workplaces where too many unimportant messages are being sent and/or received. Staff may need to undergo training to manage emails and prioritise important ones
- **failed transmission:** if the transmission fails or has been sent to the wrong recipient, you may not know that your message wasn't received by the intended recipient
- **file size:** some computer systems take a long time to send large files or restrict the size of files, so it is wise to limit email file sizes to be sure your message gets through. Alternatively, you could send the large files another way using an online data transfer service.

Messaging applications

Messaging applications enable you to quickly and efficiently communicate from almost anywhere. They are easy to download and use.

Most organisations have policies and procedures related to the use of messaging applications for work purposes; make sure you understand and follow these.

This table lists the features, strengths and limitations of some messaging applications.

Type of application	Features	Strengths	Limitations
Text messages sent via SMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be targeted to individuals or groups Suitable for sending short messages May be sent from any mobile device to any other mobile device Can be used to send links and small attachments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An instant form of communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is usually a cost involved It is often unclear whether the message has been received and read Older mobile phones may not be able to receive certain types of messages (e.g. pictures or videos sent as attachments)
Text messages sent via messaging apps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be targeted to individuals or groups Suitable for short messages Can be used to send links and small attachments Common messaging apps include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apple iMessage Facebook Messenger Google Hangout Jabber WhatsApp Yahoo Messenger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An instant form of communication It is often clear that the message has been opened and read Allow you to track a conversation Useful for group messages, where multiple people can be involved in a conversation Usually free to install and use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires the sender and the receiver to have the correct app installed on their system Usually requires internet access

Type of application	Features	Strengths	Limitations
Video calls/ conferences via messaging apps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow 'face-to-face' (F2F) communication between two people in different locations Can be used for video conferencing (e.g. where one or more people can't attend a F2F meeting) Common video messaging apps include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Microsoft Skype Apple FaceTime Zoom Google Hangout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow real-time communication Enable you to see the other person's facial expressions, body language and gestures Most apps support text messages as well as verbal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require reliable internet access All parties need the correct app installed Require all users to have hardware such as a microphone, speakers and a camera

Online communication platforms

Online communication platforms such as social media networks and online forums can be used to communicate to the general public, industry groups or associations.

These platforms are commonly used by organisations to promote products or services to new or existing customers, or to increase brand awareness.

Be aware, however, that with any form of online communication open to the public, it is difficult to know precisely who is accessing the information; additionally, it can be tricky (or even impossible) to erase information after it has been uploaded.

Ensure you follow your organisation's policies and procedures when communicating information on a public communication platform.

This table lists the features, strengths and limitations of some online communication platforms.

Type of online communication	Features	Strengths	Limitations
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be used to communicate short messages (posts) to many people Can be used to send targeted messages to a specific individual or group Common social media platforms include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Twitter Facebook Instagram LinkedIn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be used to reach many people Posts may go viral, increasing the spread of the message May be used for one-on-one communication as well as public posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once content is uploaded it can be difficult to erase as users may be quick to copy and share it
Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be in the form of an online journal or feature article May allow readers to comment on articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have several formatting options, including adding emphasis to text and adding dot points Allow more detailed information to be shared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If comments are turned on, these will need to be monitored to ensure appropriate language is used
Podcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a way to distribute audio–video files across the internet Are recordings that can be played through many different programs, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Windows Media Player QuickTime iTunes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable users to share their voice, which can create a more personal connection with the audience. Can be accessed at a time suitable for the listener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require hardware such as a microphone, headphones and/or camera One-way form of communication

Type of online communication	Features	Strengths	Limitations
Wikis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative websites that allow users to add and edit content Content is categorised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most wikis have a version control system so that if content is deleted, the page can revert to a previous version Enable you to search for content using key words Encourage contributions from the general public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be difficult to track who the content has been written by, what the original content said or how it has changed over time
Online forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable people to ask questions, and share ideas, thoughts and advice on issues Messages on various topics can be categorised into threads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow an open discussion of ideas and encourage contributions from the general public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less instant form of communication – it may take a while to receive a response May require someone to monitor and moderate content on the site

Selecting an appropriate method of communication

How you communicate can be as important as what you communicate.

How do you choose the most appropriate communication method to use?

Sometimes this decision will be made for you. For example, your task may be to provide minutes of a meeting to the meeting attendees. In this situation your organisation may have a procedure where minutes are documented using a Word minutes template, then provided to recipients by email.

In other situations, you may be required to select the appropriate method of communication. Should you send an email or go to see the person? Should you write a letter electronically or write a note on a piece of paper? Every situation is different.

To assist you in determining the appropriate method of communication, ask the following questions:

- Who am I communicating with? (audience)
- Why am I communicating with them? (purpose)
- Do I need a response immediately? (information need)
- What are the communication requirements?

Example

Communication methods

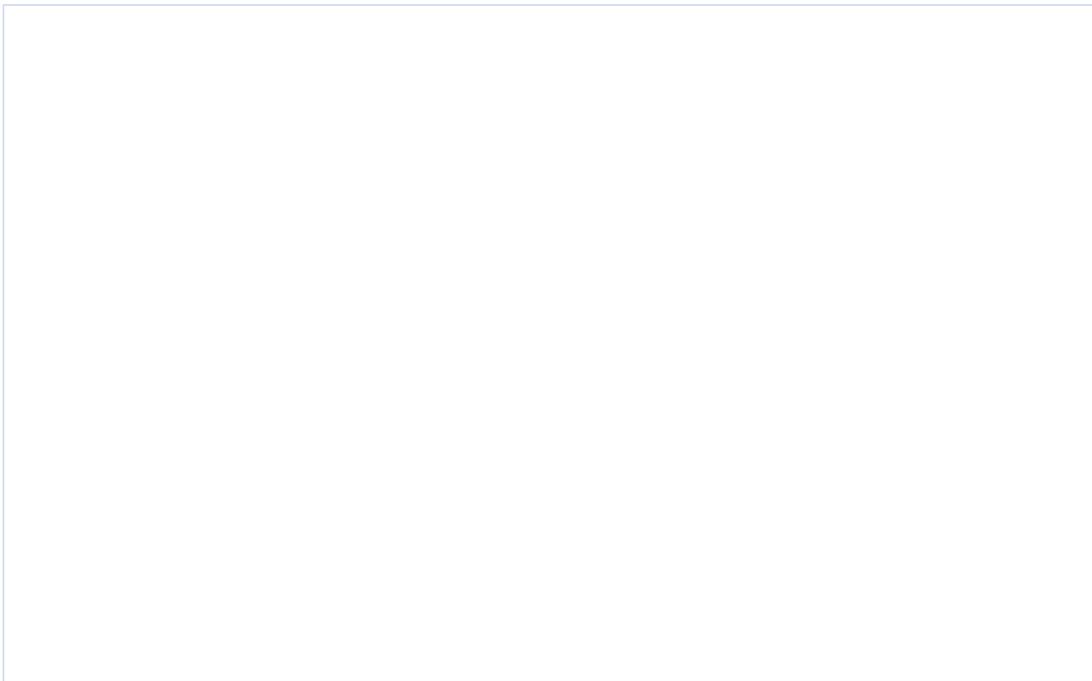
Kane has been asked to inform four area managers that they are required to attend an online meeting at 2pm to discuss sales forecasts. Kane sets up the online meeting, which automatically sends each participant a meeting link via email. However, Kane knows that if the area managers are out visiting customers, they are unlikely to access their email immediately.

So, he decides to send a text message to let them know about the meeting and where they can access the link. He also decides to call Stan and talk to him about accessing the meeting, as he knows Stan is often in a location where internet access is unreliable.

Practice Task 3

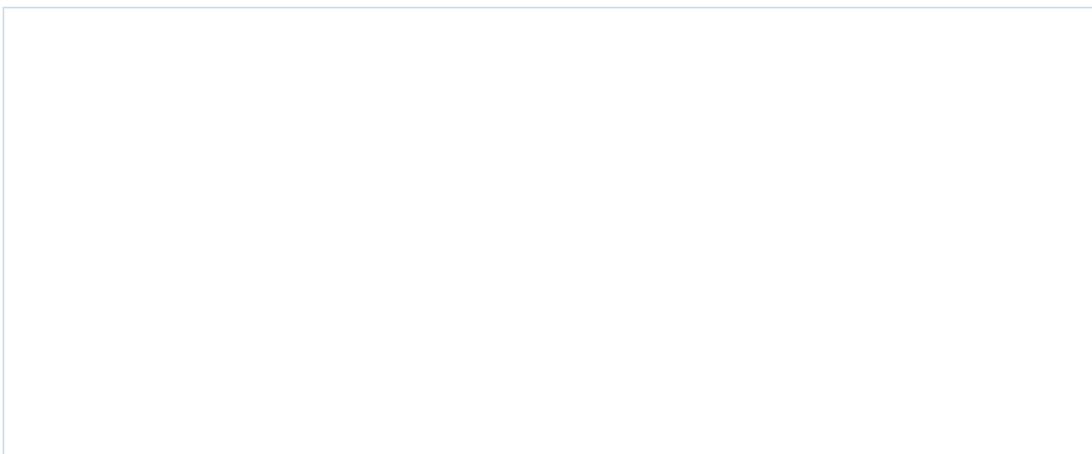
Question 1

Refer to the above example, 'Communication methods'. List the three communication methods that Kane used to inform managers of the meeting and suggest reasons why he used these methods.



Question 2

State two verbal and two written methods of communication and the advantages and disadvantages of each.



1D Plan content of messages

Communication content should be planned so it is clear and easily understood by the recipients.

When planning the content of a message or any kind of communication, you must consider the following elements:

- purpose
- audience
- information needs
- communication requirements
- communication method.

Here is an example showing how these elements would be used to communicate details of a Christmas party to all employees.

Purpose	To inform
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All employees
Information needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date, time, location and duration of the Christmas party • Theme • RSVP and dietary requirement request details
Communication requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to reach all staff • Needs a response from all staff • Friendly, celebratory tone
Communication method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email meeting request • Intranet • Posters • Inclusion on staff meeting agenda

The example suggests several ways of communicating with staff about the Christmas party. Although each communication method used is required to provide the same information, the presentation of the information will differ. For example, a poster may contain colour and images to attract attention, whereas an email printed out and pinned to a notice board may be ignored.

Planning the content

Good communication results when the required information is shared in a clear, easy-to-understand manner.

One way to ensure you provide all the content required in your communication is to make a list of the main points to be communicated. If you are producing a large written document, these main points may be your headings. You may then want to write smaller related points under them. Put these main points in a logical order. Consider whether they cover all you need to say. Are there any points you don't need to include? If so, delete them. Is there anything the reader needs to do after reading the document? If so, make sure that it's clear.

You may need to check your list with your supervisor to see that you have covered everything.

Using templates to plan your message

You may find that your organisation has a template to help plan messages. Using templates ensures that your communication meets organisational requirements.

Examples of templates include:

- telephone message pads
- report templates (progress reports, annual reports)
- meeting agenda templates
- forms (accident reports, leave requests, customer contact detail forms).

Example

Planning a customer response

Stella works in customer service. She receives an email from a customer wishing to return her purchase as she ordered the wrong size. Stella knows there is a template email for dealing with customer returns. Stella plans her response to the customer: she needs to open the template, add the customer's email address and order details and offer to re-order the product in another size. Following this procedure ensures that all customers are treated equally and receive appropriate customer service.

Practice Task 4

Question 1

Complete the table to plan an email communication to a company requesting information about one of their products.

Purpose	
Audience	
Information needs	
Communication requirements	
Communication method	

Question 2

List two ways that templates can help you plan communications.

Summary

- Good communication begins with understanding the purpose of your communication and who the intended audience is.
- The amount of information you communicate will depend on your audience and their requirements.
- Choose a communication method based on the type of information to be communicated, the audience, and the organisation's policies and procedures.
- Planning the content of your communication ensures clear, consistent communication in your workplace.

Learning Checkpoint 1

Plan workplace communication

Part A

1. Why do you need to know the purpose of workplace communication?

2. How do you find out the information needs and communication requirements of your audience?

3. What five things should you consider when planning communication?

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Zena notices her manager's phone keeps ringing and doesn't seem to be diverting to voicemail. She answers the phone and explains that her manager is away from her desk and takes a message. Zena leaves a note that reads, 'Kaylee called at 12:15'.

1. What was the purpose of Zena's message to her manager?

2. Explain why or why not Zena's note captures her manager's information needs.

3. Explain how a telephone message template may have improved the note Zena left for her manager.

4. What other method could Zena have used to communicate the telephone message to her manager?



Topic 2 | Undertake routine communication

- 2A Communicate according to organisational requirements
- 2B Adjust communication methods to meet audience needs
- 2C Receive and respond to information and communications
- 2D Identify and report communication challenges

2A Communicate according to organisational requirements

Organisations develop communication policies and procedures to meet legislative requirements and to allow the organisation to communicate effectively.

Many organisations develop communication policies, processes, procedures or codes of practice to ensure the organisation:

- meets the requirements of federal and state legislation
- meets a standard of communication between staff and clients/customers.

Meeting legislation requirements

Legislation is the laws and rules made by the government.

All organisations must comply with a range of legal requirements under relevant state, territory and federal laws in Australia. These requirements relate to areas such as access and equity, discrimination, harassment and affirmative action.

Each of these areas is supported by federal or state legislation; this includes, but is not limited to, the following.

Federal legislation

- *Age Discrimination Act 2004* (Commonwealth)
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Commonwealth)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth)
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Commonwealth)
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Commonwealth)
- *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Commonwealth)
- *Fair Work Act 2009* (Commonwealth).

State legislation

- *Discrimination Act 1991* (ACT)
- *Anti-discrimination Act 1977* (NSW)
- *Anti-discrimination Act 1992* (NT)
- *Anti-discrimination Act 1991* (Qld)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (SA)
- *Anti-discrimination Act 1998* (Tas.)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic.)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (WA).

Ethical behaviour guidelines about fair and equal treatment of all people are derived from state or federal government legislative Acts.

These guidelines should be reflected in communication using inclusive language and communication methods that can be accessed by a diverse audience.

Organisational documents that meet regulatory requirements

To meet regulatory requirements relating to communication, many organisations have created policies and procedures, codes of conduct, customer service charters, and privacy and anti-discrimination statements.

These documents provide guidance on the organisation and its staff's actions and behaviours with regard to communication.

You should take time to understand the information in these documents when you begin working at an organisation.

Policies and procedures

Policies and procedures are 'rules' that provide guidelines for what is expected and accepted in the workplace.

Policies and procedures are put in place for many reasons and relate to various aspects of the organisation, such as customer service, profitability, quality assurance, ethics, defined resources, business and performance plans, sales targets, productivity, marketing, staff and customer safety, legal requirements and government regulations.

When engaging in workplace communication, you must be aware of any policies your workplace has regarding communication. Your organisation may have specific procedures regarding its electronic and paper-based documents. There may be a procedures manual that tells you what computer software to use, how to use it and what to do if you have problems with it.

For example, you may be required to:

- document your work with a file name, author and path in the footer of each document
- make regular back-ups so that a document is not accidentally lost
- report any problems you have with software to the IT officer in the organisation.

Other policies or procedures may include:

- protocols for external and internal communications, including requirements for inclusive and non-discriminatory language
- information relating to who is allowed to sign various documents; for example, whether you are authorised to sign letters over the manager's name
- copyright consideration; for example, how you acknowledge any material you have copied in a document, whether you need to seek copyright permission and how you would do so.

It is quite common now for organisations to also have policies relating to social media communications and communicating with the media.

Codes of conduct

Codes of conduct are usually a set of rules that highlight areas such as honesty, privacy, integrity and respect.

Some industries and organisations have a code of conduct that employees are expected to follow. Codes of conduct in industry can be mandatory and provide a set of standards for that industry to follow. For example, the telecommunications industry has a strict code of ethics for people in call centres. The code includes instructions about what hours they can call people and how a contract for purchasing something must be explained to a customer.

You can see a list of industry codes of conduct here: aspirelr.link/accc-industry-codes

Non-prescribed voluntary industry codes of conduct set out specific standards of conduct for an industry, including how to deal with its members and customers. These codes only apply to those who sign up to them.

Most organisations develop codes of conduct that set out the rules regarding how the business and its employees will operate. A code of conduct also lets customers know that the organisation expects to deal fairly with them, and organisations often use this code to signal their organisational reputation and culture.

Confidential information

Some information should not be communicated. For example, you should not provide personal information about anyone who works at your organisation. Information that should not be shared is known as ‘confidential information’.

Some information may be given with permission. For example, a staff member at your organisation may agree for you to give their home telephone number to a specific person. Or your supervisor may allow you to tell a particular person about a draft report. When you’re not sure, don’t give out the information. Always check first.

Examples of confidential information are:

- personal details of people at work
- names and information about the organisation’s clients
- financial information
- information about new products under development.

Example

Communication within guidelines

Sian has just heard from a supplier that one of her organisation’s major competitors is closing down. Excitedly, she drafts a boastful social media post to let her organisation’s customers know and sends it to her manager, Tracy, for approval. Tracy appears at her desk a moment later to tell her that she can’t post the message on social media. Sian is confused, and Tracy explains that the information she received is confidential and that to broadcast news of a competitor’s failure does not align with the organisation’s code of conduct. Tracy asks Sian to wait until the competitor sends out a press release, and then they can meet to discuss how to capture the competitor’s customer base in a way that aligns with the organisation’s code of conduct.

Meeting the organisation’s standards for communication

Both verbal and written communication must meet the expectations of the organisation.

Many organisations aim to promote and develop a culture of effective and inclusive communication. In doing so, they aim to benefit internally through the use of good communication techniques, but also externally by showing others (such as customers, suppliers, people in their industry and governments) that they are a professional and considerate organisation. This culture is evident in all verbal and written communication.

Verbal communication

Verbal communication enables two people to exchange information and respond to each other instantly.

Most importantly, verbal communication allows people to ask questions immediately if they don't hear or understand what has been said.

Many people think verbal communication is the easiest way to communicate, but remember that good communicators listen carefully, look at the people they are talking to, and speak clearly and confidently.

Common examples of verbal communication in the workplace include:

- one person giving instructions or passing information to another person or group of people
- receiving instructions from your supervisor and clarifying what you need to do
- answering requests for information from your colleagues
- answering enquiries from clients
- taking part in informal discussions or meetings
- speaking on the telephone
- using voicemail.

Some of the keys to good verbal communication are:

- speaking effectively
- using appropriate language.

Speaking effectively

Talking to somebody and communicating are not always the same thing. Sometimes your listener can't hear you very well. They might not understand your language or the way you speak. For communication to be successful, both people must understand the information in the same way.

Most people don't think about how the other person will interpret information. They assume the person will understand what is meant. For example, if you say to someone, 'Would you loan me your thumb drive?' you think they know you want them to lend you a computer flash drive or memory stick. If the listener doesn't know what a thumb drive is the communication will not be successful. You need to speak clearly and check often that the listener understands what you are saying.

Using appropriate language

To communicate well with another person, you need to match your language with their understanding. This is true of both formal and informal conversations in the workplace, at home and in the wider community.

Think about how you talk to a young child. Most children don't understand complicated words, so you change the way you speak and choose words that you think the child will understand. You use appropriate language so that you communicate successfully with the child.

It should be similar in the workplace. Before you talk to somebody, you need to think about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Using appropriate language will help the other person better understand what you are trying to say. This is the same whether you are talking to a colleague, a visitor to the organisation or somebody on the telephone.

Here are some points to be aware of.

Technical jargon

Many workplaces use words that are particular to their industry. Almost every job has its own set of unusual words and ways of describing things. This is called 'jargon', and technical words are called 'technical jargon'. Before you talk to somebody, you need to think about the most appropriate terminology to use. It may be best to avoid jargon when speaking to someone from outside the organisation.

Accents and languages

To communicate well, you need to consider the individual differences between people. This may mean adjusting the way you speak. For example, if you are talking to someone whose first language is not English, you may need to talk a little more slowly and clearly. Keep your voice at its normal volume though. Shouting does not help people understand English better.

Hearing problems

If you are communicating with someone who has a hearing impairment, you may need to adjust your way of speaking. Speak clearly and be patient. Make sure they have a clear vision of you so they can see your facial expressions and body language. Always check they have understood what you said and confirm your understanding of what they said.

Discrimination

You should always use non-discriminatory or inclusive language in the workplace. This means that what you say should include everyone, regardless of sex, status, race or abilities.

For example, if you are giving information about parental leave, it will include maternity (mother) and paternity (father) leave. Discriminatory language leaves people out. For example, you should not address letters to 'Sir' or 'Mr' when you don't know whether the person you are writing to is a man or a woman.

Tips for good verbal communication

- Listen carefully.
- Ask questions to clarify what the other person means.
- Speak clearly.
- Avoid using jargon.
- Use language the other person can understand.
- Do not assume the other person knows what you are talking about.
- Clarify that the other person understands what you mean.

Written communication

The 'style' of your written communication refers to the language, tone and approach you use.

When communicating in the workplace, you must decide whether it is appropriate to use a formal or informal style of communication. Most business documents will be in a formal style. For example, although you may know the customer you are sending an email to very well, most organisations will expect you to address the recipient formally.

If the email or intranet message is about an informal occasion for staff, you can use an informal style. Remember to make the language in the message non-discriminatory, inclusive and polite.

Sometimes you may need to make a permanent record of something that is said. Sometimes the communication needs to go to many people in different places at the same time.

Writing is most useful when you need to:

- provide evidence of business activities such as telephone calls or sales
- keep a record of how things are done to avoid mistakes being made; for example, leaving instructions to follow when preparing pay slips
- clarify or explain information such as new working conditions or safety procedures
- request information such as whether employees can attend a meeting or access a file
- publicise events, activities or achievements such as new training opportunities, new staff appointments or expected visitors
- provide briefing notes; for example, for your supervisor to talk about a specific topic in a meeting
- report information such as monthly sales figures, meeting minutes or meeting outcomes.

When you produce something in writing, you need to think about the way you write. You will communicate more effectively if you follow a few basic guidelines.

All business writing should be:

- clear
- concise
- courteous
- correct
- jargon-free
- accurate and complete
- inclusive.

Clear writing

Clear writing is easy to understand. Always use plain English; this means using simple words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Never use a long or technical word if a simple word will do.

Paragraphs should only contain one thought or idea and be no longer than five or six lines. It is better to write a short paragraph than confuse your audience by putting two or more ideas in one paragraph. Clear writing means the reader is less likely to get confused.

These are examples of unclear and clear writing.

Unclear writing
Pursuant to the reference proposed by the undersigned at last night's meeting, I herewith furnish the preparatory documents.
Clear writing
Enclosed is a draft of the report I discussed with you at last night's meeting.

Concise writing

Concise writing uses the least amount of words possible to relay information. To write concisely, you need to explain precisely what is meant while avoiding repetition or not including unnecessary information. Include specific details and definite statements. Think carefully about what needs to be communicated. Only include information that is relevant to the situation and the receiver.

These are examples of non-concise and concise writing.

Non-concise writing
Ms Byrne was forced to cancel her meeting this morning, due to food poisoning she contracted from a seafood dinner she ate last night at the restaurant adjacent to the train station.
Concise writing
Ms Byrne cancelled her meeting this morning because of illness.

Courteous writing

Courteous writing is polite and respectful. This means you show respect for the reader. It involves being tactful and making sure your writing doesn't offend your reader.

Avoid words and phrases that might provoke a negative response, such as 'You said that ...', 'You claimed that ...' or 'You have failed to ...' Try to be positive, not negative.

These are examples of discourteous and courteous writing.

Discourteous writing
We have received your letter of 17 April 2019. You claim that the sandals you bought are faulty. However, you failed to post them to us, so we cannot verify your claim.
Courteous writing
Thank you for your letter of 17 April 2019. If you post the faulty pair of sandals to us, we will be happy to forward a replacement pair to you by return post.

Courteous writing also uses an appropriate tone. This means the language of your message is appropriate to the receiver.

Business writing is more formal than if you were writing a casual letter to a friend – being too familiar can offend your reader.

Courteous writing also avoids sexist or discriminatory language. It uses words such as 'chair' or 'chairperson' instead of 'chairman'.

If you are drafting a document using titles such as Ms, Mrs and Mr, and you are not sure of the person's gender, check with someone first. Many names, such as Kim, Gerry, Terry, Cong and An, can be either male or female.

When writing formal business letters:

- avoid contractions; for example, write 'you are' instead of 'you're'
- don't use slang, jargon or clichés
- always refer to people by their correct titles; for example, Ms, Mrs, Mr, Dr, Professor.

Correct writing

Correct writing follows specific rules and styles for business writing. Many organisations have their own 'in-house' style that everyone is expected to follow. This is to make sure all documents have a specific company look. For example, your organisation may want you to set out the name and address on a letter in a certain way. Or you may be expected to set out an email in a specific style and format.

Here is a comparison between a non-professional and a professional style.

Non-professional
Hi there Greg, Thanks for your stationery order.
Professional
Dear Mr Wells, Thank you for your stationery order.

It is your responsibility to produce writing that is accurate and complete. This means that, as far as possible, the information and language should be correct. It also means that you have taken care to provide all of the required information. In particular, you need to check details such as names, times, dates, calculated figures and telephone numbers.

You don't have to know a lot of rules to make your language correct. You can use a dictionary or the spell check function on your computer to look up an unfamiliar word. The grammar check function on your computer can also be used to check sentence construction and basic grammar.

Inclusive writing

The language you use must be inclusive. This means writing for all types of people. No-one must feel that you are excluding them in what you have written. For example, don't make assumptions about the gender of people in specific jobs.

Don't assume the people reading your document will be of the same gender, ethnicity or ability as you. Instead of using 'he' or 'him', use 'he or she' or the plural pronoun 'they'. Most places prefer the plural use, but check what style your organisation uses.

Be careful not to use discriminatory language such as demeaning terms like 'girls' instead of 'women'.

Example

Clear, accurate and courteous writing

Sashi Brenner manages a sales team. Sashi sent an email to his team:

Hey peeps! Don't forget that your reports are due to me on Monday, 18th October. Miss the deadline and you're on toilet cleaning duty for the next month.

Cheers Sashi

Sashi was trying to lighten the tone of his request for the time-consuming sales reports he needed from his sales team, but not all his team appreciated his informal tone, and one team member took the email seriously and complained about it to HR.

When Monday came around and Sashi asked for the reports, half of his team had completed them while the other half said they were working to the due date, which was the 28th of October. Sashi had written the wrong date on his email: the correct date was the 28th of October!

Sashi reflected on the unexpected consequences of his email. He decided to check his emails for accuracy and make the language more formal in the future to avoid confusion and offence.

Practice Task 5

Question 1

Why do you think workplace communication requires formal language?

Question 2

State two examples of written and verbal communication.

Question 3

Research one of your state's legislations and outline how it is relevant to workplace communication.

Question 4

Rewrite Sashi's email (from the example, 'Clear, accurate and courteous writing') in a formal style.

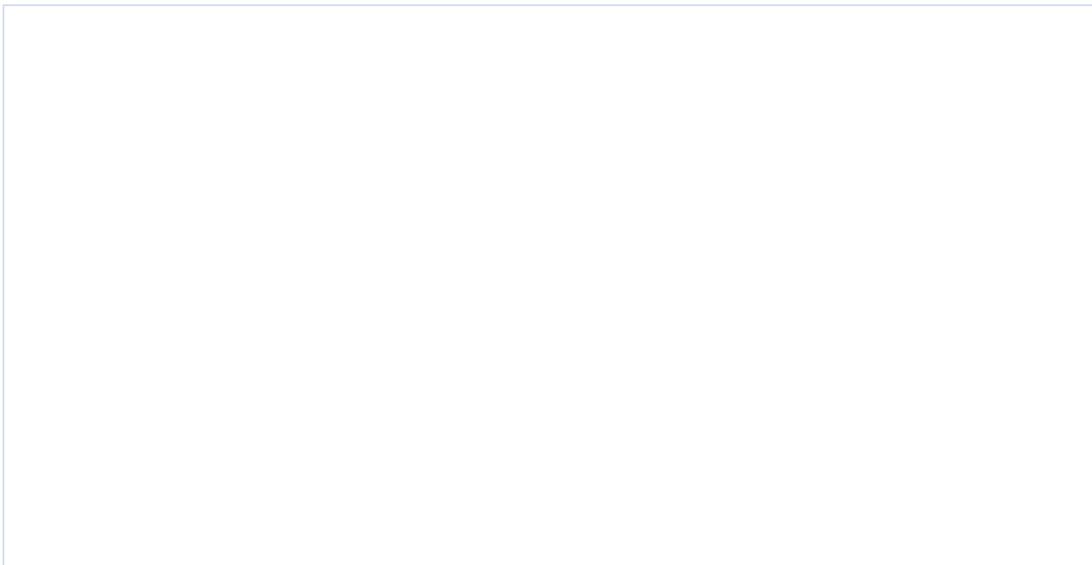
Question 5

Briefly describe the purpose of a code of conduct.



Question 6

Briefly describe the purpose of an organisational policy.



Question 7

Where could an organisation source ethical behaviour guidelines to use in their organisation?

Question 8

Which type of communication may support an organisation's culture as a considerate organisation? Tick all that apply.

- Use of correct grammar
- Inclusive communication
- Regular detailed reports
- SMS and telephone calls

Question 9

Complete the table by stating the appropriate type of communication for each document type.

Document type	Formal or informal
Business report	
Minutes of a meeting	
Notice board message about a social outing	
SMS message to a colleague to advise them to phone home	
Leave application submission	

2B Adjust communication methods to meet audience needs

Communicating effectively with a diverse audience means adjusting the way you communicate.

The people you work or communicate with may have a variety of cultural backgrounds, language skills, special needs or disabilities. To communicate effectively and with respect, you must consider and value these differences.

Cultural differences

Being aware of cultural differences can help you communicate with others more effectively.

It is useful to ask yourself how culture may be shaping your own reactions, and to try to see the world from other people's point of view. Overall, the message is to be respectful, courteous and sensitive and not force your values or beliefs on others.

Here are some cultural differences you may encounter in the workplace and suggestions on how you can adjust your communication method to suit them.

Cultural difference	Explanation	What you should do to adjust your communication method
Eye contact	Australian work culture values eye contact. It is seen as being attentive, direct and honest in communication. For other cultures, looking down or away is understood as a respectful way to communicate.	Do not assume a person is rude because they will not make eye contact with you. Consider their cultural background and why they may not be providing eye contact. Be patient and courteous, and do not try to force them to make eye contact.
Body contact	In Australia, it is an everyday business greeting for people to shake hands. In some cultures, this is not accepted, particularly between men and women, and may offend.	Do not show offence if someone does not shake your hand. Consider the person's cultural background. Be understanding and polite, and do not force a handshake.

Cultural difference	Explanation	What you should do to adjust your communication method
Hierarchy	While Australian workplaces vary in their structures, the relationship between managers and their employees is often quite informal. Staff can generally communicate directly with different levels across the organisation. In many other cultures, there is a strict and more formal protocol for communicating with people of a more senior position.	Do some research to find out what the accepted protocols are before communicating with a particular level in an organisation.
Gender interactions	In Australia, it is common for male and female employees to work together in all industries and types of roles. Workplaces in some other cultures apply higher levels of segregation. Some roles may be seen as 'men's' or 'women's' jobs.	Be sensitive and understanding of fellow workers from other cultures where segregation between men and women is prevalent. Support others from such cultures to feel comfortable in a 'mixed' environment.
Sharing information	Australians tend to be quite social in the workplace. They openly share information about their personal lives and families. Some cultures see talking about such things in the workplace as inappropriate. For them, personal questions may be intrusive.	Respect other people's right to privacy.
Individualism	It is normal in Australian workplaces for people to talk about their achievements, and to use 'I'. In some cultures, this is seen as rude and arrogant; achievements are only spoken about in the context of the team, so 'we' is used (even if one person was primarily responsible).	Be inclusive of all participants' contributions to the workplace.

Verbal communication

The way we communicate verbally is influenced by our culture. It may be the words we use, our tone, or how formal or informal our language is.

Languages have different ways of speaking between men and women, to children and among employees. English has less 'inbuilt formality'.

When you know that words and actions mean different things in different cultures, you can choose your words and actions carefully to reduce the risk of offending or upsetting others. No-one is expected to understand the details of all cultures across the world, but you need to be aware of people's reactions when you communicate. Reactions can signal when your listener is hearing a different message from the one you are trying to give.

Example

Cultural misunderstandings with verbal communication

Here is an illustration of two situations where cultural misunderstandings caused a breakdown in effective communication.

Case study 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bricklayer employs a man from Argentina as a labourer. • By the end of the day, the bricklayer is very impressed with his new labourer. He pats him on the back and tells him that he has 'worked like a dog today'. • The labourer is very upset. He believes he worked harder than anyone that day, but his boss has insulted him by comparing him to a dog. Although the boss intended to make his labourer feel proud and happy, he has unknowingly insulted him. • In the labourer's culture, being compared to a dog is a huge insult.
Case study 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A human resources manager is interviewing university graduates for a job. Many of the applicants are from India or China. The manager asks all the applicants to talk about their role in a team to judge their teamwork skills. • Those who have grown up in Australia highlight their personal roles and responsibilities and speak about how they have worked in the team. Many of the applicants who have grown up overseas only talk about the team as a whole. The interviewer finds it hard to judge their personal teamwork skills. • For many of these workers, it is arrogant and inappropriate in their culture to speak about themselves over the group. This is reflected in the way they answer the question.

Nonverbal communication

‘Nonverbal communication’ is sending and receiving messages in different ways without the use of words. It can be intentional or unintentional.

It is important to understand something about cultural values so that you can interpret the emotions expressed in cross-cultural interactions. In most western cultures, direct eye-to-eye contact is seen as positive; Arabic cultures make prolonged eye contact because they believe it shows interest and helps them gauge the honesty of the other person; in Japan, eye contact is avoided as a sign of respect. When someone’s nonverbal communication does not make sense to you, it is a good idea to think about possible cultural differences before you act or speak.

Nonverbal communication includes:

- touch
- eye contact
- volume of voice
- proximity (personal space)
- gestures
- dress
- sounds (verbal, but not words)
- posture (arms crossed over chest, slouching).

Example

Cultural misunderstandings with nonverbal communication

Ezra attends a meeting with his manager, Peter, to meet a potential new supplier. One of the suppliers introduces herself as Kyoto Sugihara and offers them each a business card, presenting it with two hands. Ezra watches Peter take the card and put it straight into his satchel, and notices a frown appear on Kyoto’s face. Peter pushes his business card across the table to Kyoto, who accepts it with two hands before studying it carefully. Ezra realises that this is a sign of respect from Kyoto, and his manager has risked offending her by treating the exchange of business cards as a transaction rather than a formal introduction.

Language barriers

Language barriers often make it hard to communicate effectively in the workplace.

If you are faced with a language barrier, try the following strategies.

Use simple language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use simple, ordinary, everyday English language. • Avoid slang, jargon, abbreviations and technical jargon. Terms you use every day in your profession or industry may not be readily understood by people who do not work in your occupation. • If you speak slowly and clearly with simple words, you do not need to increase the volume! Louder is not clearer.
Check understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If speaking directly to the person, watch their facial expression and body language to see if they understand. If they frown, it may mean they do not understand. Try using more straightforward language. Break any complicated statement into several simple parts. • Ask simple questions to check the listener has understood your message. You may need to provide the information again by using different words.
Seek help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you cannot understand what the person is saying, ask if there is a friend or relative who might assist with translation. • Research translation services on the internet to get some assistance.
Be patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your listeners time to interpret and understand what you have said. They may need a pause between the end of your statement and the start of theirs to think about what you have said. • In telephone conversations, if you cannot understand what the person is asking, it may be appropriate to ask them if a relative is available to help with translation.

Adjusting communication methods

There are several strategies you can use to adjust your communication method and achieve better results.

When communicating with someone with a disability or special needs, it is essential to remember to treat them as an individual as their communication requirements will be unique to them.

A person's disability can influence communication in many ways, depending on how their condition impacts on their vision, hearing, speech, cognition or mobility.

There are many smart technology devices that can help you communicate with people who have disabilities. Smart technology is an example of the Internet of Things (IoT), which describes smart devices that have support for internet connectivity and can interact with other devices over the internet by granting remote access to users for managing the device.

Some assisted technologies can support communication for people with a disability or special need.

The following table provides suggestions on how to adjust your communication methods and lists some useful tools you can use to communicate with someone who has a disability.

Impairment	Methods/Actions	Tools
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you greet a person who has a visual impairment, make sure you identify yourself. • If you have a group discussion, you should identify who you are directing a question towards by using their name as a vocal cue; for example, 'Sarah, what do you think?' • Always give a verbal warning about any physical movement that is about to take place in the person's immediate surroundings. For example, 'I am just going to bend down and pick up that pen for you.' • Always announce when a conversation is over. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large print and braille documents ▪ Audio, taped format or podcasts ▪ Smart or assisted technology ▪ Speech-to-text programs
Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When speaking to someone with a hearing impairment, face them directly, and speak clearly and slowly using a natural tone. • Check that the person is wearing hearing aids and that they are in working order. • Use written communication wherever appropriate. • Provide actions and visual cues wherever appropriate. • Raise your voice when necessary but never shout, as shouting can distort sound. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smart or assisted technology ▪ Text-to-speech programs

Impairment	Methods/Actions	Tools
Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When speaking to someone who has difficulty speaking, it is essential to take an encouraging and non-corrective approach. • Be patient and allow time for reflections and confirmation of their message. • Don't ever pretend to understand if you don't. Instead, repeat questions and break them down into short questions. • Pay careful attention to body language and reactions to help your understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smart or assisted technology ▪ Text-to-speech programs ▪ Static and dynamic communication devices, communication boards and picture cues
Cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health conditions may include depression, anxiety, psychosis, dementia and other conditions that affect a person's ability to understand information and how it applies to them. • It is important to remember that sometimes people with cognitive impairments won't be able to tell you what they need or that they don't understand. • Make sure you use consistent verbal and nonverbal communication. • Watch the person's body language and make sure that they feel safe, comfortable and unhurried in their attempt to communicate with you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smart or assisted technology ▪ Text-to-speech programs ▪ Static and dynamic communication devices, communication boards and picture cues
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When communicating with a person who has a mobility impairment, be aware that their mobility aid is a continuation of their personal space. • Moving a person's mobility aid away from them can create a sense of disempowerment and distress. • Offer the person a seat and sit down so that you can see the person's body language and talk to them at eye level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smart or assisted technology

Example

Presenting to diverse audiences

Nicole is meeting with the sales director, Jules, to discuss the requirements for a conference he will be presenting at. Jules tells her he will need to send the final presentation to the conference organisers so they can create handouts for attendees. The conference organisers have requested that Jules's presentation adhere to the accessibility guidelines found here: aspirelr.link/wai-accessible-presentations

They go through the guidelines together, and Nicole suggests they make a checklist for this and future presentations, so they can ensure that their presentations are always accessible. Jules agrees, and he reviews the speaker guidelines to ensure he makes the best impact.

Practice Task 6

What adjustments can you make to your communication methods to meet the needs of the following groups?

Group	Adjustment to communication method
English as a second language	
Hearing impairment	
Cognitive impairment	
Visual impairment	

2C Receive and respond to information and communications

Receiving, understanding and responding to communicated requests and directions is part of the daily tasks in a workplace.

When you receive, understand and respond to instructions or information efficiently, workplace tasks and actions can be completed more easily. This seemingly simple process benefits from good communication.

Here are some tips for receiving and responding to workplace communication.

Verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the whole message and don't assume you know what the speaker is going to say before they say it. • Use positive body language to show that you are listening. • Ask questions to clarify any points you don't understand. • Summarise what you have been told and what is expected of you.
Written communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the message or instructions carefully. You may want to do this twice. • Note any questions you have about the message and check to see that they have not been answered in the written communication. • Ask questions to clarify any points you don't understand. You can do this verbally or in writing. • Respond to and acknowledge the message and confirm your understanding of the message and what actions you are required to take (if any).

Example

Toolbox talk

Peta attends a toolbox talk onsite every morning. It's always the same thing about site safety and she usually tunes out. She half listens to her manager and when everyone stands up, she does too and heads for the door. Her manager stops her before she leaves and hands her a piece of paper. It's a form for new Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) that she must collect from the storeperson. Peta looks blankly at her boss and he sighs in frustration. Peta has not paid attention and has missed important workplace health and safety information. He directs her to go and get her new PPE and then see him so he can tell her again how to use it effectively and why it's important.

Receiving communications

Effective communication is a dynamic exchange of thoughts and ideas.

Each person brings different knowledge, experience and feelings to an exchange that can alter the information being expressed and interpreted. The only way you will know for sure that the other person has understood you is if they confirm the message. Likewise, you can never really know that you have understood a message until you have sought clarification on your understanding.

You receive communications by actively listening. This is a whole-body response that tells the speaker that you are listening, you care about them and you believe that what they have to say is important.

Active listening involves:

- focusing on the speaker and listening closely
- showing that you are listening and understanding by using nonverbal clues such as nodding your head and maintaining eye contact
- providing verbal responses such as 'I see' and 'Yes, I understand'
- paraphrasing, or repeating back to the speaker, what they have said to confirm your understanding.

By actively listening to requests and clarifying meanings, you will be able to get the most out of each exchange and respond appropriately every time.

Responding appropriately

When communicating in the workplace, it is important that you respond appropriately to the information you receive.

Your response is a combination of your verbal and nonverbal language.

When responding, consider how you are positioned, and what your body language says – make sure it is consistent with the verbal response you give so you don't confuse the message. For example, if you say, 'Yes, I believe you', but smirk and roll your eyes as you end the conversation, the message the person receives will be more along the lines of, 'I don't believe you and I'm just agreeing so that you stop talking'.

Sometimes communication will require follow-up action, and other times it may not. It is essential that the reason for the communication is clear so that you respond appropriately. For example, if Mary tells you she doesn't like the way a work colleague talks to her, she may want empathy and acknowledgment, or she may want you to assist in resolving the issue. If Mary just wants empathy, she won't appreciate you breaching her confidence and telling your colleague what she said.

If you are unsure of how to respond to a message appropriately, you should ask for further clarification about what is wanted and expected of you.

Respond in a timely manner

Some written communication is sent for information purposes and does not require a response. It may even contain the subject line 'For your information' or 'FYI'. However, there may be people who always expect a response to their emails, so a quick response acknowledging their email is appropriate.

Ensure you understand when and if a response to written communication is expected. If you are unsure, your acknowledgment can include a question asking for clarification about what is expected of you.

Choose an appropriate communication method for responding

It may make sense to respond to an email with an email or a phone call with a phone call, but a more appropriate communication method may be needed.

For example, an email may be ambiguous, so it might be easier and quicker to call the sender to clarify the content. A customer may call with a query but may ask you to respond by email so that they have your answer in writing.

Organisational requirements may dictate how you respond to customers and suppliers, or urgency and practicality may dictate how you respond to a message. However, you should confirm with the sender whether you can respond using an alternative method of communication.

Example

An appropriate response

Tahni receives an email from a colleague: *I'm so busy at the moment. My workload keeps increasing, and I have no idea how I'm going to finish the monthly report. Any ideas?*

Tahni considers the content of the email. It is evident that her colleague is stressed, but is she just venting or is she asking for help? Tahni decides she needs to clarify what her colleague wants.

In her reply, Tahni writes, *I'm sorry you're feeling overwhelmed. It's such a busy time for everyone. Is there anything I can help you with?*

Tahni gets a quick reply: *No, I'll manage. I know you're busy too. I just needed to share.*

Tahni smiles to herself and replies: *Anytime.*

Practice Task 7

Question 1

Gary receives the following email from his manager, Steve:

Gary, can you bring the stuff from that costing project we did for HomeBuilt Constructions? There's some things that they are concerned about and we need to sort out what we will do. It's pretty urgent.

Steve

How would you respond to Steve's email?

Question 2

How do you decide whether an email or message requires a response?

2D Identify and report communication challenges

For a workplace to operate effectively, communication issues or challenges should be identified and addressed.

Challenges in the workplace can result in communication not being as effective as it could be.

The table below lists some of these challenges and strategies for helping overcome them.

Challenge	Example	Strategy
Linguistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may be difficult to discuss and negotiate with someone who has limited English because you may have trouble understanding each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use an interpreter or direct the person to a member of staff who can communicate in their preferred language, if possible. Explain clearly. Avoid using terminology or jargon. Learn a few words of the person's first language. Use pictures to convey meaning. Prepare information in the person's preferred language.
Cultural	Cultural expectations may relate to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> body language appropriate conversations between men and women protocols such as avoiding eye contact introductions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about cultural expectations and differences in relation to acceptable body language and conventions for resolving difficulties in other cultures. Clearly explain what you will do and why and how this may differ from the other person's experiences.
Physical	Barriers that may limit understanding or attendance may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited hearing or vision, or an inability to speak an age-related condition such as dementia an inability to access a location due to a physical disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use pictures to represent words or an electronic device that speaks for the other person. Select an accessible location for a person with limited mobility. Include a carer, interpreter or support person in the discussion.

Challenge	Example	Strategy
Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A person may be emotionally impaired and unable to 'hear' or understand what you are saying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reassure a person who is sad, angry, upset, confused or fearful of the results of discussions. Give the person time to adjust. Speak slowly and clearly. Arrange to have someone with them as support. Check on the person's wellbeing following discussions.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The place you have chosen to discuss a conflict may have background noise, distractions, other people in the area, flickering lights, excessive heating or cooling, or be an inaccessible or uncomfortable location. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look around the environment before beginning to communicate and think about what factors may affect communication. Ask the person if a specific factor is a problem for them and find a location that is appropriate.
Listening	<p>People may not listen carefully because they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> only hearing what they want to hear not paying attention too busy thinking of a reply distracted by emotions trying to speak over whoever is talking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of listening blocks so you can identify them. Concentrate on obtaining everyone's attention. Speak concisely so people do not lose their concentration and the flow of the discussion.

In addition to the above challenges, there are other barriers that can affect good communication.

Communication challenge	Likely barriers creating the challenge
Conflict with clients or team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linguistic, cultural, psychological or listening barriers could be causing the conflict. Try to uncover the basis for the conflict and reflect on what you could do to remove barriers and improve communication.

Communication challenge	Likely barriers creating the challenge
Unethical or inappropriate communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unethical communication includes telling lies or being dishonest or inaccurate in what is said. Inappropriate communication includes sending unwanted, angry, aggressive or insulting texts or messages such as messages of a sexual nature. Speaking in an aggressive or degrading manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linguistic, cultural and psychological barriers may be causing the issue. Is the person aware that their communication is unethical or inappropriate? This requires immediate attention in order to ensure everyone is working to organisational and legislative requirements.
Potential risks or safety hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linguistic, environmental and listening barriers could be causing the issue. Have safety procedures not been properly communicated and understood? This requires immediate attention to protect the health and safety of everyone at work.

Report challenges

Where challenges to communication issues cannot be resolved easily, they must be reported to an appropriate person. If the challenge is related to your day-to-day work tasks, this may be your supervisor or manager. If the challenge relates to breaches of organisational standards including discrimination, harassment or work health and safety, this should also be reported to human resources and/or to the workplace health and safety officer.

When reporting challenges, you should:

- describe the communication challenge
- explain what you think is causing the challenge
- describe any steps you've taken to resolve the challenge
- suggest possible solutions (if appropriate).

Example

Technology challenges

A weekly sales meeting is held with both office-based and field staff. The meeting room is set up for both phone and video conferencing and is regularly maintained by the IT department. Caleb is the sales assistant and dreads the weekly sales meeting. It is his job to take the minutes of the meeting, but he finds it difficult because often the field sales team are hard to hear due to call quality and drop-outs and people often talk over one another. Caleb decides to discuss this issue with his manager, describing the problem and suggesting that perhaps the field sales team send their updates prior to the meeting and the meeting is then just used to discuss issues and celebrate successes. Caleb's manager agrees that the meetings do not run smoothly and is impressed by his suggestion. He promises to consult with the field sales team and come up with a better format for the meetings and to talk to IT about improving the audio quality at the meetings.

Practice Task 8

Question 1

Describe a communication challenge you have faced in the workplace and what you did to resolve it.

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Ben is the team leader. He leads a team of five people responsible for testing and tagging electrical equipment for organisations. Ciara recently joined the team.

Ben is getting frustrated; he has noticed that although he gives instructions and tells everyone what their tasks are at the start of the day, Ciara rarely follows hers – in fact, whenever they are all together Ciara rarely joins in the conversation.

Question 2

What barrier/s might be contributing to this communication issue? What issues could this cause? What should Ben do?

Question 3

Two members of Ben's team are not getting along. They hardly speak to each other and it's becoming a real problem as they have to work together some days. What should Ben do?

Question 4

Jason is one of the members of Ben's team. He has taken to telling Ciara how beautiful she looks each day. Is this appropriate? What should Ben do??

Summary

- Communication in the workplace must be clear, respectful and follow legislative and organisational requirements.
- To communicate effectively with those from diverse backgrounds, you may need to adjust your communication methods.
- You need to consider verbal and nonverbal language, cultural preferences, and physical and cognitive capabilities when communicating.
- When information and instructions are received, ensure you can interpret them so you understand what actions are required.
- You may need to ask clarifying questions in order to respond appropriately to communications.
- It is likely you or your recipient may experience communication challenges. You should attempt to resolve these and report challenges that can't be resolved to your supervisor or manager.

Learning Checkpoint 2

Undertake routine communication

Part A

1. What is meant by communication style? List two types of communication style.

2. Give an example of an organisational policy or requirement that may impact communication.

3. Your manager has asked you to write to a supplier requesting product information about a new type of photocopier. When you write to the supplier, how will you ensure your request is concise?

4. When you write to the supplier in Question 3, how will you ensure your request is courteous?

5. When you write to the supplier in Question 3, how will you ensure your request is correct?

6. When you write to the supplier in Question 3, how will you ensure your request is professional?

7. How would you write your request to the supplier in Question 3 to ensure it is easy to understand by people from diverse backgrounds?

8. If there was an issue communicating to a work colleague and you believed it could result in a danger to your safety or the safety of others, what should you do?

9. How would you maintain good communication with a person who, due to cultural differences, did not like making eye contact?

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Darren's company sponsors a local charity for disadvantaged youth. Darren has been asked to present during a video conference and has a five-minute slot during which to talk about his company. Darren has been sent some presentation guidelines via email and he discusses these with a marketing colleague, Sue-Ann. She complains that they are quite onerous, and Darren explains that there will be a number of people in the conference with physical and cognitive disabilities. Sue-Ann rolls her eyes and mutters 'Well, then – it probably won't make any difference what you say'. Darren is shocked but doesn't say anything. He asks Sue-Ann to send the images he needs for the presentation and ends the conversation.

1. How will Darren adjust his communication methods to suit the needs of his audience?

2. How should Darren respond to the email he received containing the presentation guidelines?

3. Darren is shocked by Sue-Ann's remark. What should he do?



Topic 3 | Participate in workplace communication

- 3A Contribute to and support others in workplace discussions
- 3B Use listening and questioning techniques
- 3C Seek feedback

3A Contribute to and support others in workplace discussions

All organisations rely on their staff's communication skills to function successfully. It is up to you to contribute to conversations, ask questions and provide information – and to help others do the same.

If you need to have a one-on-one discussion with a work colleague to share or receive information, or to solve a problem, or if you need to attend and participate in a meeting, it is beneficial to plan and prepare. Here are some tips:

- Understand the agenda for the discussion or meeting.
- Consider what information you need, or what research you might need to do, to speak confidently about the topic.
- Plan the key points you want to discuss.
- List the questions or issues you want to raise in the discussion.
- Consider what you want the outcome of the discussion or meeting to be and what you need to do to achieve this.
- Consider the background of the individual or group you are communicating with and how this will shape your communication.

Using clear communication

When you are trying to share ideas or information, it is easy to be misinterpreted or only partly understood. Clear communication can help avoid this situation.

Consider the following points.

Have a clear purpose
Make sure that the idea or main purpose of the message is clear. You may have to limit the amount of information and the number of ideas contained in the message so that the main point does not become diluted.
Keep it brief
Only include essential information and use the minimum number of words necessary to effectively get your point across.
Provide solid facts and vision
Make sure your message contains the essential facts and imagery necessary to convey the essence of the main idea.

Ensure the information is correct
Make sure your information is correct and up to date.
Make sense
Ensure that the information is logical and relevant to the main point of the message and follows a reasonable sequence.
Don't leave things out
Make sure you provide all of the important information that is required to make an informed decision.
Consider your audience
Use open, transparent communication that takes into account the individual needs of the listener. Leave out any confusing language such as jargon.

Supporting others to communicate

People will find it easier to participate in workplace communication if they are listened to and shown respect by their colleagues.

A meeting should offer everyone the opportunity to express their ideas, concerns or questions. The person running the meeting should ensure that everyone has a chance to talk. Every participant needs to contribute appropriately to ensure inclusive discussions take place.

Here are some tips for supporting others and allowing them to participate in meetings:

- Do not let your ideas dominate the meeting; give others a chance to share their ideas.
- Do not speak over, interrupt or contradict others while they are talking.
- Be mindful of your body language and facial expressions.
- Show others you are listening.
- Thank others for their ideas and input.

Using communication techniques to support others

Although you may not need to attend formal work meetings, there are still many instances where you will need to communicate and support others to do the same, making effective verbal communication essential.

A number of techniques can be used to optimise the exchange of information by meeting the communication needs of each participant and expressing empathy, respect and cultural awareness.

Here are some communication techniques and their applications.

Open-ended questions
An open-ended question is one that requires an explanatory answer rather than a 'yes' or 'no' response. It is designed to encourage the responder to give a full, detailed expression of their knowledge and feelings on the subject matter. Example: 'How do you feel about that change?'
Affirmations
An affirmation is a genuine and supportive statement that is directed at a specific thought, comment or behaviour. These statements are used to demonstrate understanding and appreciation of the subject matter. Example: 'That's a great way of putting it.'
Reflections
A reflection is an interpretive statement that the listener uses to confirm that their interpretation of the message is correct. This technique is used to express empathy towards the speaker and makes them feel they are understood. Example: Jasper said, 'Everyone is working a lot later than usual'. Rob reflected, 'So you feel there is too much work to do and not enough time?'
Summaries
A summary is a form of reflective listening where the listener summarises the main points of the communication to ensure that they have not missed any important information. This technique can be used to check that information has been interpreted accurately and also to close off one topic and lead into the next.

Communicating with respect

Showing respect in communication includes listening, providing honest responses and not being judgmental.

Respect can mean many different things. At its most basic level it involves taking someone's feelings, needs, thoughts, ideas and preferences into consideration. More than this, respect means valuing a person's feelings, needs and ideas, and taking them seriously.

Most people hope to be treated respectfully. If you are the first to show respect, mutual respect can be established. Respectful behaviour varies between cultures and across ages. Respectful behaviour might include addressing older customers or senior staff members by title; for example, 'Mr Jacobs' rather than 'Joe' or 'Joseph'. When you show respect for others, they are more likely to be respectful towards you.

You can show respect in the workplace by:

- giving your full attention to others when they are speaking
- asking people how they feel and acknowledging their feelings
- accepting that others might see and feel differently from you
- seeking information to better understand other people's feelings
- taking people's feelings and thoughts into consideration
- acknowledging people's choices, even when they are different from yours.

Being courteous

Courtesy is about how we behave towards others in a social or work environment. It is closely linked with manners and being polite. Courteous behaviour depends on the culture and immediate environment, and it can change over time.

In the past, it was considered appropriate and courteous for men to stand when a woman came into the room. This is no longer seen as a requirement of showing courtesy. Today, the most basic expectations of courteous behaviour for English speakers in Australia include saying 'please' and 'thank you'.

Other ways to show courtesy include:

- not talking over others when they are speaking
- being on time for meetings
- acknowledging that time is important for other people: 'Do you have time to show me the software?'

Speaking and acting with sensitivity

Showing sensitivity is about being aware of others' feelings and circumstances and taking these into consideration when you communicate and interact with them. In the workplace this means showing sensitivity not only in your individual interactions, but also in your behaviour or responses in teams and meetings.

It is also about the ideas or language you use in your work. For someone who speaks English as a second language, you could show sensitivity by using straightforward language that avoids slang or colloquialisms.

Before you speak, you need to think about the words you are going to use and the people you are speaking with. You can show sensitivity by:

- taking into consideration the perspectives of others, including people who are very different from you
- using inclusive language (e.g. saying 'chairperson' rather than 'chairman')

- adjusting your communication style to be appropriate for the setting and audience
- showing an awareness of the feelings of others
- accepting that some people have strong feelings about topics that don't engage you.

The following checklist can help you to reflect on your behaviour and to see if you are demonstrating the concepts of respect, courtesy and sensitivity in your communication with others.

In order to show respect towards others, have I:	✓ or ✗
• given my full attention to the person speaking?	
• (if it is appropriate) asked how they feel and acknowledged their feelings appropriately?	
• shown empathy (accepted that others see and feel differently from me)?	
• sought information to better understand others' feelings?	
• taken the feelings and thoughts of others into consideration?	
• acknowledged other people's choices, even if they are different from my own?	
In order to show courtesy towards others, have I:	✓ or ✗
• let others finish what they are saying before I started talking?	
• made sure to say 'please' and 'thank you' where appropriate?	
• acknowledged that other people's time is important and ensured they are free when I ask them to do something?	
• been on time to meetings?	
In order to show sensitivity towards others, have I:	✓ or ✗
• taken the perspective of others, including people who are different from me?	
• used inclusive language when speaking to others?	
• adjusted my communication style to suit the setting and audience?	
• shown an awareness of other people's feelings?	
• been aware of topics that others have strong feelings about?	

Social protocols

Social protocols are the rules that affect our behaviour both in the workplace and in the larger community. They are often unwritten, they vary depending on the environment and they change over time. They are behaviours considered by most people in any group to be appropriate for a given situation. Here are some common workplace protocols.

Courtesy and punctuality
Being polite; arriving at meetings on time; listening to others when they talk
Professionalism
Ensuring that your work is at its best standard and that problems are dealt with openly; following correct procedures; being respectful in your interactions with others
Confidentiality
Always keeping confidential or sensitive information appropriately guarded (generally you would not breach the confidence of others unless there was a safety issue)
Acknowledging the contribution of others
Not taking credit for other people's work or ideas; acknowledging the role of the team

Example

Contribute to discussions

Amy is invited to attend a meeting to explain to staff how the new process for claiming their expenses.

Amy is nervous as she doesn't have much experience talking to groups of people. Her manager is supportive and tells her to prepare some simple step-by-step instructions on the expense-claiming process. He advises her to provide these instructions as handouts and also to use them in a PowerPoint presentation.

Amy knows the content well and she feels the instructions are clear, but she knows that people are often resistant to change.

She begins by asking the team how long it currently takes them to complete expense claims. This invites contributions from the team, and they share their frustrations with her. Amy then tells them how the new process will save them time.

She speaks clearly, keeping the information brief, and telling them only what they need to know. After she has finished, she asks some questions so she can judge if everyone has understood what has been said.

Amy observes the positive body language from the team and is pleased that her strategy worked.

Practice Task 9

Read the example on the previous page 'Contribute to discussions', then answer the following questions.

Question 1

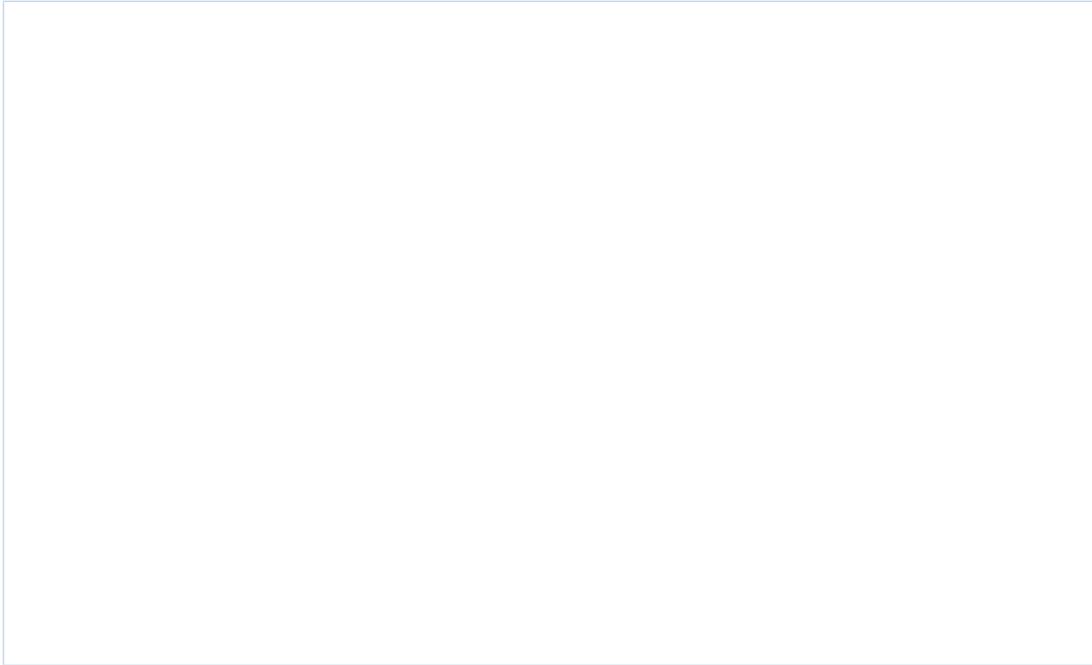
How did Amy attempt to provide clear communication?

Question 2

List five ways that you can support others in workplace discussions.?

Question 3

State three ways you can show courtesy towards others during a conversation.



3B Use listening and questioning techniques

Listening and questioning are two techniques practised by good communicators.

Good communication is a whole-body response that tells the speaker you are listening, you care about them and you believe that what they have to say is important.

By actively listening to requests and asking questions to clarify meaning you will be able to get the most out of each exchange and respond appropriately every time.

Active listening

Active listening is about focusing completely on what is being said – not just hearing.

Active listening demonstrates that you value the other person. This helps to build a rapport and develop a trusting relationship.

The two key features of active listening are paraphrasing and summarising. Paraphrasing is where you express the meaning of what you heard in different words. Summarising involves briefly stating the main points of what a person has said to let them know you understand them.

Here are some tips for listening actively:

- Briefly recap the speaker's message in your own words.
- Soften your summary with phrases like, 'You feel ...', 'It sounds like you ...', 'You think ...', 'It seems to you that ...'
- Try to use paraphrasing statements more than questions.
- Allow sufficient time and pauses for the speaker to add to what they are saying.
- If more than one feeling is expressed, focus on the last or most prominent one.
- Do not add or ask for any new information.
- Use neutral words, body language and tone of voice.

Self-awareness and listening

Good listening requires a high level of self-awareness. We often engage in listening, but sometimes only really take in and comprehend a small portion of the information. Good listening means giving our full attention; avoiding distractions such as mobile phones or a person walking past; and doing all of the following all of the time.

Use body language

This indicates to the person speaking that they still have your attention, and that you are actively engaged in listening to what they have to say. Body language – such as smiling, nodding your head or facing the speaker – reinforces the nonverbal message, 'You have my attention, and I am focused on you'.

Do not interrupt

People need to have the opportunity to speak without interruptions. However, your skills are needed to determine when the person is repeating themselves or taking up too much time at the expense of other parties; if this happens, you need to find the right moment to stop them.

Defer judgment

Hold off on responding until the end of the person's speech, both verbally and in your thoughts. If you make judgments partway through, you may become biased towards only hearing the parts that reinforce the judgment you have already made.

Listening strategies

Strategies to help you understand what is being said include noting:

- key information
- questions you need to answer
- directions or instructions you need to follow
- the formal or informal way a person speaks – this tells you how you should respond
- changes in emphasis – this tells you the meaning of the word or sentence.

Questioning

When you need to obtain information or clarify the meaning of something, it is important to ask questions in the right way.

It is not uncommon in the workplace to find communication difficult. In these instances, you need to ask questions to obtain information or clarify understanding.

Here are some questioning techniques to assist you.

Open questions

Open questions should be used to collect more information and give the speaker the opportunity to fill in any missing details.

Examples:

- 'Can you please tell me how you would like me to do this?'
- 'Can you please explain what is happening?'
- 'Can you please tell me more about what is happening?'
- 'Can you please repeat that for me?'

Closed questions

Sometimes asking a series of 'yes' or 'no' questions may help clarify what the person wants and needs.

Examples:

- 'Do you want me to do this?'
- 'Would you like to go there?'
- 'Would you like me to come now?'

Leading questions

Leading questions try to lead the listener to your way of thinking.

Examples:

- 'I've seen a different way of doing that; Would you like to see it?'
- 'How difficult do you think it will be to meet the deadline?'
- 'Are you okay with using the new software program to complete that task?'

Probing questions

Probing questions are used to find out more information or more detail.

Examples:

- 'Why do you think it is better to do it that way? What do you think are the advantages?'
- 'You mentioned customers seem to be unhappy with our service lately. Can you tell me why you think this is the case?'

Summary

Once you feel that you have understood the message, you summarise the key points for the speaker to check you have understood correctly. It is important to be willing to listen and be corrected if you have misunderstood.

Example:

- Jamie: 'So what I'm hearing is that you're unhappy working with the new software because you feel you haven't had sufficient training?'
- Emily: 'Yes. That is correct.'

How to communicate in group situations

How you communicate and support others to communicate in a group situation is critical to achieving good team results.

Support others to communicate in a group situation by:

- encouraging each person to speak and contribute
- allowing each person time to finish what they are saying
- not dismissing what someone has said
- listening actively to each speaker
- providing positive feedback and thanking everyone for their contribution
- showing each person equal courtesy and respect.

Example

Listening and questioning

Thea is busy at her desk when a colleague appears at her door. Thea glances over, continues typing and says, 'How can I help you, Josie?'

'I'm sorry to interrupt,' Josie replies, 'but do you have a minute?'

The tone of Josie's voice makes Thea stop typing and she turns to look properly at Josie. She immediately says, 'Of course. Come in and close the door'.

As Josie comes in, Thea turns off her screen and switches her phone to silent. She turns to face Josie, ensuring her that she has her full attention and Josie smiles gratefully, knowing that Thea is focused on their conversation.

Josie blurts out, 'I just have to tell you, I don't want to work here anymore. I just can't. That's it'.

Thea responds, 'Okay, I hear what you're saying, but can you tell me what has made you come to this decision?' Josie tells her the details of an argument she has had with another staff member. Thea nods and says, 'I see' throughout the conversation. She then asks, 'Has this happened before?'

Practice Task 10

Read the example on the previous page, 'Listening and questioning', then answer the following questions.

Question 1

List three active listening techniques used by Thea.

Question 2

What questioning techniques did Thea use to obtain more information?

Question 3

What are four ways you can support communication in a team?

3C Seek feedback

Feedback from others inside and outside of your organisation can be effective for evaluating your communication skills.

Seeking feedback about the way you communicate is always a good idea. Remember, feedback is not a negative thing, even if some of the comments are not what you want to hear. Feedback is an excellent way to find out how you are going. Did you gather the correct information? Did you pass it on appropriately? Have your speaking and listening skills improved? Seeking feedback is a great opportunity to think about how you can improve the way you work.

Feedback can be obtained from several different sources. These may be internal (e.g. your supervisor, colleagues or team-mates) or external (e.g. suppliers or customers). It can be verbal, such as comments, tips and helpful suggestions discussed while you are on the job. Or it can be written, such as notes, memos or brief reports explaining where to make changes and improvements.

Here are some sources of feedback.

Colleagues – Managers – Team leaders

Seeking advice from colleagues with more experience is a good way to pick up new ideas. For example, someone who has worked in customer service for many years is sure to have advice and tips for dealing with difficult customers. Other colleagues might have advice about where to find information. Never be afraid to ask for help. Keep a notebook handy and jot down any ideas you receive.

Mentors

A mentor is someone you can talk with informally about your work. A mentor may not be your team leader or your supervisor. They may be someone you feel comfortable talking with, someone who can offer suggestions based on their experience, or someone you can approach when you want to discuss a work issue. Your supervisor may be able to arrange a mentor for you.

Performance appraisals

Some organisations have a formal process for giving feedback to their employees. This is called a performance appraisal. It might take place every six months or every year. It is an opportunity to discuss work issues and concerns as well as your performance. It is also a good time to ask for feedback on how you can improve the way you work.

Steps for obtaining feedback

It may be difficult to encourage your peers to provide feedback on your communication skills, so it's important to ensure they know why you value their feedback.

If you're going to present at a meeting, it may be worth asking one or two colleagues if they can provide feedback on how you went after the presentation. That way they will actively observe you and be able to give effective feedback.

Consider using the following steps to obtain feedback:

- Ask for feedback and explain how the feedback will help you.
- Promise you'll be receptive to anything they say.

Things to consider when receiving feedback:

- People who only see you in one role may only be able to describe your behaviours in relation to that role.
- People can have a different perception of your values than you do.
- Listen to what others have to say, and pay attention to their emotions, body movement and language.
- Some people may not feel they can be completely honest and may try to hide the truth if they feel it will be hurtful.
- You might be surprised with some information because you have a blind spot for traits that others may see in you, but you are unable to see in yourself.
- Use your self-awareness to be open to the opinions of others and to explore different ways of thinking.
- Part of the self-reflection process is to adjust your goals and review your objectives.

Example

Feedback from colleagues

'Wow! I'm glad that meeting is over,' Gillian comments to her colleague, Jack, as they leave the conference room.

'You did a great job with your presentation,' Jack tells her.

'Really?' Gillian asks. 'I was quite nervous and can't remember much of it. Do you have any feedback? It would help me for future presentations.'

'Your content was great, and it was obvious you were well prepared,' Jack replies. 'You spoke a little too fast at the beginning, so maybe you could work on that. Also, it might have been good to let people ask questions or at least check their understanding before you moved on from the market research findings.'

'Okay,' Gillian nods in agreement. 'That's really helpful. Anything else?'

'Not that I can think of,' Jack tells her. 'I could see the management team were impressed.'

'Really?' Gillian asks. 'Thanks so much for your feedback, Jack. I really value your opinion, and I'll try to address those things when I present to the board next week.'

Reflecting on feedback

Feedback is only useful if you reflect and act on it. You may not agree with all the feedback you receive, but you should take time to consider why others may have felt a certain way.

You can begin to reflect on communication feedback by asking yourself the following questions:

- What did I do well?
- What can I improve on?
- How did I feel?
- What have I learnt?
- What can I do next?

Your manager may be helpful in suggesting actions that will improve your communication skills and it may also be good to share your strategies for improving your skills with those who gave you feedback.

Practice Task 11

Question 1

Who could you seek feedback from about your communication skills in the workplace?

Question 2

State three strategies you could use to obtain feedback from others.

Summary

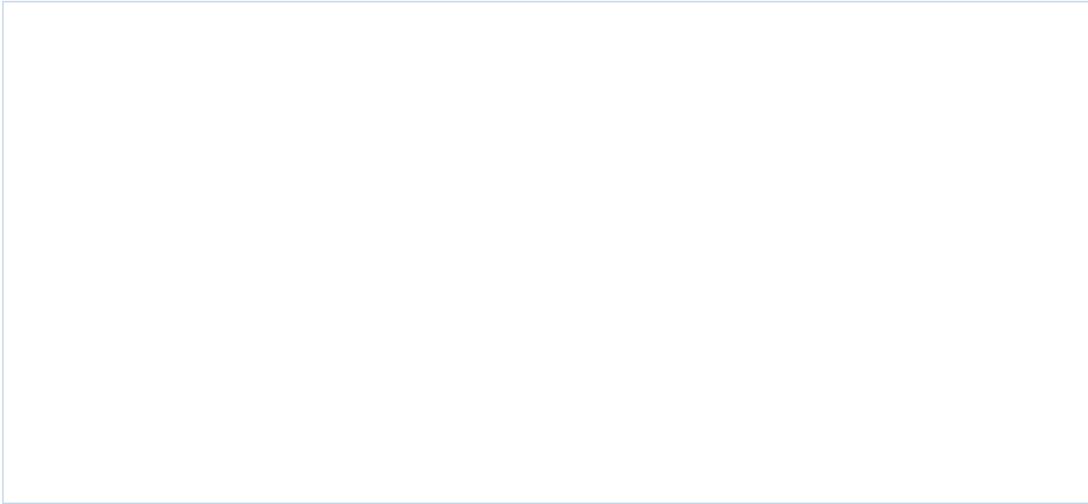
- Preparing and planning are key to clear communication in workplace discussions.
- You can support others to communicate by asking open-ended questions, offering affirmations and treating others courteously.
- Active listening can be demonstrated by using positive body language, repeating concerns and summarising key points made by others.
- You should seek feedback on your communication skills in order to reflect on what you do well and where you could improve.

Learning Checkpoint 3

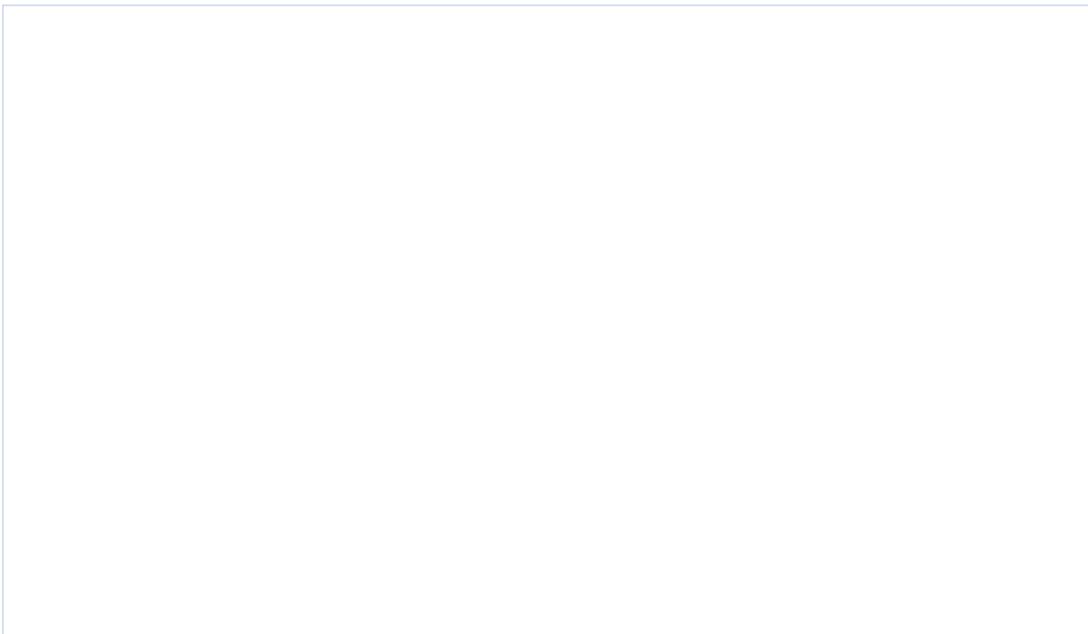
Participate in workplace communication

Part A

1. List five strategies for clear communication.



2. Describe how you can behave professionally and courteously, and how you can support others in meetings.



Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

A team meeting is held monthly at 9:30am. Jess, the team leader, has already started the meeting when Tatiana arrives five minutes late, a coffee in hand, and joins the others at the table.

'What have I missed?' she asks without apologising.

Jess quickly re-caps and then continues with the update. A few minutes later, Tatiana's phone vibrates on the table. She picks it up, giggles and begins responding to a message.

Several team members, including Mary, glance at each other. Jess continues on to the slide with information about project schedules. Joannie begins her update, but Tatiana interrupts her.

'That's never going to work! I told you I couldn't deliver to that schedule.'

'Bad luck. You never gave me alternative dates – live with it,' Joannie replies defensively.

'Well, I'm pretty sure I did,' Tatiana retorts.

'How about we have this conversation outside the team meeting?' Jess suggests, and Tatiana rolls her eyes and goes back to looking at her phone.

1. Did Tatiana behave professionally and courteously in the meeting? List all the examples you can find to support your answer.

2. What feedback would you give Tatiana on her behaviour in the meeting?

3. How could the team leader suggest Tatiana and Joannie improve their communication?

4. Later Joannie comes to speak to Jess about the conversation. How can Jess demonstrate active listening?

5. What feedback could Jess ask Mary for after the meeting?

