

The Communication Skills Workbook

**Self-Assessments, Exercises
& Educational Handouts**

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The Communication Skills Workbook

Self-Assessments, Exercises & Educational Handouts

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Using This Book *(For the professional)*

Interpersonal communication is the process of sending and receiving messages with another person. This process sounds and appears to be easy. However, in reality, communication involves a very complex set of skills, as complex as those necessary for driving a car or reading a map. Part of the reason for this complexity is that messages can be communicated and received in a variety of ways, i.e. listening, speaking, signing, touch, eye contact. People need adequate communication skills in order to survive and thrive in our challenging society. Effective communication skills are critical in many walks of life including:

- Developing and maintaining friendships
- Participating in the community
- Being effective in educational settings
- Parenting successfully
- Finding a job
- Succeeding in the workplace
- Maintaining intimate relationships

As indicated from the list above, the better the communication skills, the more effective and successful people will be. The good news is that communication skills can be taught. Effective communication skills can be learned and improved through practice. Most people typically learn their communication skills from their family, teachers and friends. Problems arise when these influences are poor role models. When people learn ineffective communication skills it is important for them to identify their areas of weakness, learn more effective ways of communicating with other people, and find ways to practice these critical skills.

Over the last century many different workbooks, workshops, and self-help systems have been designed to help people explore communication issues and blocks to effective communication. In the past twenty years, many research studies have focused on the value of self-reflection and journaling as a way of exploring personal characteristics, identifying ineffective behaviors, and examining thoughts and feelings that lead to ineffective behaviors. This book is unique because it combines two powerful psychological tools designed to enhance communication skills: self-assessment and journaling.

The Communication Skills Workbook contains five separate sections. In each, the participants will learn more about themselves as well as the impact of effective and ineffective communication skills:

- Active Listening Scale helps individuals determine how effectively they listen when communicating.
- Nonverbal Communications Scale helps individuals examine how their body language is affecting their interpersonal communications.
- Communications Skills Scale helps individuals measure how effective they are at using communication skills to initiate, build and maintain interpersonal relationships.
- Social Radar Scale helps individuals explore how attuned they are to verbal and nonverbal cues.
- Negotiation Skills Scale helps individuals explore how well they negotiate to get what they want without manipulating or alienating other people.

These sections serve as avenues for individual self-reflection, as well as group experiences revolving around identified topics of importance. Each assessment includes directions for easy administration, scoring and interpretation. In addition, each section includes exploratory activities, reflective journaling activities and educational handouts to help participants discover their habitual, ineffective methods of communicating with others and to explore new ways for enhancing interpersonal communication.

Using This Book *(continued)*

The art of self-reflection goes back many centuries and is rooted in many of the world's greatest spiritual and philosophical traditions. Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher, was known to walk the streets engaging the people he met in philosophical reflection and dialogue. He felt that this type of activity was so important in life that he went so far as to proclaim, "The unexamined life is not worth living." The unexamined life is one in which the same routine is continually repeated without ever thinking about its meaning to one's life or and how this life could be lived. However, a structured reflection and examination of beliefs, assumptions, characteristics and patterns can provide a better understanding, which can lead to a more satisfying life. A greater level of self-understanding about important life skills is often necessary to make positive, self-directed changes in the negative patterns that keep repeating throughout life. The assessments and exercises in this book can help promote this self-understanding. Through involvement in the in-depth activities, the participant claims ownership in the development of positive patterns.

Journaling is an extremely powerful tool for enhancing self-discovery, learning, transcending traditional problems, breaking ineffective life and career habits, and helping to heal from psychological traumas of the past. From a physical point of view, writing reduces stress and lowers muscle tension, blood pressure and heart rate levels. Psychologically, writing reduces sadness, depression and general anxiety, and leads to a greater level of life satisfaction and optimism. Behaviorally, writing leads to enhanced social skills, emotional intelligence and creativity.

By combining reflective assessment and journaling, your participants will be exposed to a revolutionary method for enhancing critical communication skills.

Preparation for using the assessments and activities in this book is important. The authors suggest that prior to administering any of the assessments in this book, you complete them yourself. This will familiarize you with the format of the assessments, the scoring directions, the interpretation guides and the journaling activities. Although the assessments are designed to be self-administered, scored and interpreted, it helps for facilitators to be prepared to answer questions about the assessments for participants.

For example, the following statement is included on the Communications Skills Scale:

#25. *I use "I" statements to deliver criticism to others.*

Some of your participants might not understand "I statements." With your background and experience, as well as familiarity with the tests, you should be able to clarify for participants any confusing words or phrases.

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The Assessments, Journaling Activities, and Educational Handouts

Materials in the Assessment, Journaling Activity, and Educational Handout sections in this book are reproducible and can be photocopied for participants' use. The assessments contained in this book focus on self-reported data and thus are similar to ones used by psychologists, counselors, therapists and career consultants. To receive accurate and useful information, participants need to respond honestly. By being honest, participants help themselves to learn about the unproductive and ineffective patterns in their lives, and to uncover information that might be keeping them from being as successful as they might be.

An assessment instrument can provide participants with valuable information about themselves; however, these assessments cannot measure or identify everything. The assessments' purpose is not to pigeon-hole certain characteristics, but rather to allow them to explore all of their characteristics. This book contains self-assessments, not tests. Tests measure knowledge or whether something is right or wrong. These assessments provide information about a topic of importance in the participant's education, life and career communications. There are no right or wrong answers.

When administering the assessments in this workbook, remember that the items are generically written so that they will be applicable to a wide variety of people but will not account for every possible variable for every person. The assessments are not specifically tailored to one person. Use them to help participants identify negative themes in their lives and to find ways to break the hold that these patterns and their effects have in their life.

Advise the participants taking the assessments that they should not spend too much time trying to analyze the content of the questions; their initial response will most likely be true. Regardless of individual scores, encourage participants to talk about their findings and their feelings pertaining to what have they discovered about themselves. Talking about communication skills will certainly enrich their lives and the relationships in their lives.

Layout of the Book

The Communication Skills Workbook is designed to be used either independently or as part of an integrated curriculum. You may administer one of the assessments and the journaling exercises to an individual or a group with whom you are working, or you may administer a number of the assessments over one or more days.

This book includes five sections, each of which contains:

- **Assessment Instruments** — Self-assessment inventories with scoring directions and interpretation materials. Group facilitators can choose one or more of the activities relevant to their participants.
- **Activity Handouts** — Practical questions and activities that prompt self-reflection and promote self-understanding. These questions and activities foster introspection and promote pro-social behaviors.
- **Reflective Questions for Journaling** — Self-exploration activities and journaling exercises specific to each assessment to enhance self-discovery, learning, and healing.
- **Educational Handouts** — Handouts designed to enhance instruction can be used individually or in groups to enhance communication skills and to provide positive reinforcement for effective interpersonal skills. They can be distributed, converted into masters for overheads or transparencies, or written down on a board and discussed.

Who should use this program?

This book has been designed as a practical tool for helping professionals, such as therapists, counselors, psychologists, teachers, and group leaders. Depending on the role of the professional using *The Communication Skills Workbook* and the specific client or group's needs, these sections can be used individually, combined, or as part of an integrated curriculum for a more comprehensive approach.

Why use self-assessments?

Self-assessments are important in teaching various communication skills because they help participants to engage in these ways:

- Become aware of the primary motivators that guide their behavior
- Explore and learn to *let go* of troublesome habits and behavioral patterns learned in childhood
- Explore the effects of unconscious childhood messages
- Gain insight and a *wake up call* for behavioral change
- Focus their thinking on behavioral goals for change
- Uncover resources they possess that can help them to cope better with problems and difficulties
- Explore their personal characteristics without judgment
- Develop full awareness of their strengths and weaknesses

Because the assessments are presented in a straightforward and easy-to-use format, individuals can self-administer, score and interpret each assessment at their own pace.

Introduction for the Participant

It is very important for our physical and psychological well-being that we maintain interpersonal relationships with other people in our life. These relationships are a necessity, not a luxury, and we need to be prepared in order to develop and maintain these critical relationships. Positive, supportive relationships can help us cope with difficult times in our lives, reduce psychological distress, and increase our general happiness and life satisfaction. Communication can literally be described as the center of all interpersonal relationships. The problem is that communication can be very difficult to initiate, so that one can develop and maintain positive relationships with other people. Managing the dynamics of personal relationships can be quite challenging.

Communication is definitely a skill that takes considerable learning and practice to gain a sense of mastery. Personal relationships are at times difficult to maintain because they are extremely complex, constantly changing and very fragile. That is why it is beneficial to use effective communication skills in personal relationships. Effective communication skills ensure that we will listen actively to what the other person is saying, communicate clearly, negotiate to ensure *win-win* situations, maintain effective body language and be aware of the cognitive distortions that may block clear communication between two people.

The good news is that if you feel like you are not a good communicator, you can learn and practice the skills that will help your interpersonal relationships grow and work more effectively. This book relies on a self-reflective method that is both therapeutic and fun. *The Communication Skills Workbook* is designed to help you learn about all the various skills that can be used to enhance or block effective communication between you and other people.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I – Active Listening

Active Listening Scale

Directions	15
Active Listening Scale	16
Scoring Directions	18
Profile Interpretation	18

Activity Handouts

Blocks to Active Listening Skills	19
Mastery of Active Listening Skills	24

Journaling Activities

Listening Strengths	28
Listening Weaknesses	29
Weak Listening Skills	30

Educational Handouts

Stages of Listening	31
Improving Communication Skills	32
Blocks to Active Listening	33

SECTION II – Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal Communication Scale

Directions	37
Nonverbal Communication Scale	38
Scoring Directions	42
Profile Interpretation	42

Activity Handouts

Exploring Nonverbal Communication	43
Nonverbal Tips for Enhanced Communication	47
Nonverbal Communication Identification	48
Nonverbal Communication Log	49

Journaling Activities

Nonverbal Communications Pitfalls	51
Improving Nonverbals	52
Conversation and Nonverbals	53

Educational Handouts

Improving Nonverbal Communication 54
Nonverbal Communication 55

SECTION III – Communications Skills

Communications Skills Scale

Directions 59
Communications Skills Scale 60
Scoring Directions 62
Profile Interpretation 63

Activity Handouts

Messages 64
Emotions 65
Assertiveness 66
What I Want 68
Non-Assertive Situations 69
People With Whom I am Non-Assertive 70
Listening 71

Journaling Activities

I Need to Improve 73
Being More Assertive 74
Clear Messages 75

Educational Handouts

Communication Pitfalls 76
Rewards of Effective Communication 77

SECTION IV – Social Radar

Social Radar Scale

Directions 81
Social Radar Scale 82
Scoring Directions 85
Profile Interpretation 86
Scale Descriptions 87

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Activity Handouts

Valuing Diversity	88
Intuition	91
Empathy	95

Journaling Activities

Social Radar – NOT!	96
Enhancing Social Radar	97
Developing Social Radar	98

Educational Handouts

What is Intuition	99
How People Receive Intuitive Input	100

SECTION V – Negotiation Process-Style

Negotiation Process-Style Scale

Direction	103
Negotiation Process-Style Scale	104
Scoring Directions	106

Activity Handouts

Profile Interpretation – Talker	107
Profile Interpretation – Aggressor	108
Profile Interpretation – Preparer	109
Profile Interpretation – Listener	110
Negotiation Situations	111

Journaling Activities

Being a Better Negotiator	117
My Recent Negotiations	118
Learned Attributes of Negotiations	119

Educational Handouts

Principles of Successful Negotiation	120
Four Negotiations Styles	121



BUILDING YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

Actively listening to other people sounds easy, doesn't it? In reality, it is one of the most difficult aspects of effective communication. Active listening takes commitment and knowledge of barriers that are keeping you from listening effectively to others. The following exercises are designed to help you begin thinking about the potential blocks to active listening and take steps in listening effectiveness.

Blocks to Active Listening

I. DAYDREAMING

Daydreaming is allowing your attention to wander to other events or people. It is a time when you stop listening and drift away into your own fantasies.

In what situations do you find yourself daydreaming?

When you find yourself daydreaming, with whom are you talking?

When you find yourself daydreaming, what is the conversation about?

When you are daydreaming, how do you feel about the other person?

(Continued on the next page)

SECTION I: ACTIVITY HANDOUTS

(Blocks to Active Listening continued)

II. REHEARSING

Rehearsing is when you are busy thinking about what you are going to say next, so that you never completely hear what the other person is telling you.

In what situations do you find yourself rehearsing?

When you find yourself rehearsing, with whom are you talking?

When you find yourself rehearsing, what is the conversation about?

When you are rehearsing, how do you feel about the other person?

(Continued on the next page)



(Blocks to Active Listening continued)

III. FILTERING

Filtering is when you listen to certain parts of the conversation, but not all.

In what situations do you find yourself filtering conversations?

When you find yourself filtering conversations, with whom are you talking?

When you find yourself filtering conversations, what is the conversation about?

When you are filtering conversations, how do you feel about the other person?

(Continued on the next page)

SECTION I: ACTIVITY HANDOUTS

(Blocks to Active Listening continued)

IV. JUDGING

Judging is when you have stopped listening to the other person because you have already judged, placed labels, made assumptions about, or stereotyped the other person.

In what situations do you find yourself judging?

When you find yourself judging, with whom are you talking?

When you find yourself judging, what is the conversation about?

When you are judging, how do you feel about the other person?

(Continued on the next page)



(Blocks to Active Listening continued)

IV. DISTRACTIONS

Distraction occurs when your attention is divided by something internal to you (headaches, worry, hunger) or external to you (traffic, whispering, others talking).

In what situations do you find yourself distracted?

When you find yourself getting distracted, with whom are you talking?

When you find yourself getting distracted, what is the conversation about?

When you are distracted, how do you feel about the other person?
