LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

3.1 differentiate between personal, cultural and universal nonverbal communication, and explain how cultural norms affect the nonverbal part of the message.

3.2 explain the roles and different aspects of nonverbal communication.

3.3 describe the listening process, and explain how active listening has value in personal and professional situations.

3.4 discuss the role of questions and feedback in personal and professional interactions.

3.5 distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion.

IN REAL LIFE

WATCH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

It’s well known that good communication is the foundation of any successful relationship, be it personal or professional. It’s important to recognize, though, that it’s our nonverbal communication—our facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice—that speak the loudest. The ability to understand and use nonverbal communication, or body language, is a powerful tool that can help you connect with others, express what you really mean, and build better relationships.

Oftentimes, what comes out of our mouths and what we communicate through our body language are two totally different things. When faced with these mixed signals, the listener has to choose whether to believe your verbal or nonverbal message, and, in most cases, they’re going to choose the nonverbal because it’s a natural, unconscious language that broadcasts our true feelings and intentions in any given moment.

Nonverbal communication consists of the part of a message that is not encoded in words. The nonverbal part of the message tends to be less conscious and reveals the sender’s feelings, likings and preferences more spontaneously and honestly than the verbal part. If the verbal message does not match the nonverbal communication, there is a tendency to believe the nonverbal part of the message.

The appropriate use of nonverbal communication and the ability to receive nonverbal communication accurately are two of the skills demonstrated by successful communicators. They are skilled because they are able to integrate the nonverbal with the verbal and contextual information to form the total message. Their nonverbal communication conveys a range of positive and negative cues and signals. Reactions to their nonverbal communication have an impact on liking and disliking, and on the way in which others respond and relate to them in personal and professional situations.

Listening is the interpretative process that takes place with what we hear. Through listening, we comprehend, store, classify and label information. The key to effective listening in any context is mental alertness, physical alertness and active participation. A focus on listening at both the individual and organisational levels can lead to better leadership and teamwork, recruiting and retention advantages, improved productivity and innovation, more effective meetings, fewer conflicts and errors, greater respect, rapport and trust, and fewer miscommunications and mistakes.

Active listening focuses attention and provides feedback, allowing speakers to express their feelings and identify what is really happening. Skill in active listening enhances understanding and improves relationships with colleagues and professional contacts. It minimises misunderstanding and avoids wasted time, energy and resources due to miscommunication. Enhanced understanding decreases the potential for conflict and enables people to work together productively.

In an organisation, appropriate and constructive feedback and questioning create a positive communication climate, which in turn creates an open and encouraging organisational climate. Constructive feedback focuses on what needs to be done. It provides support, reflects understanding, motivates, and establishes and maintains positive work environments. As people communicate in personal and professional situations, they select from a number of relationship skills. Communication skills that manage an interaction and achieve a balance that satisfies both parties include assertion, ‘I’ statements, active listening, appropriate nonverbal behaviour, feedback and feedforward. Assertive verbal statements achieve a result without using power or coercion.

**TYPES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

There are few situations where words alone send the message. In any meeting, negotiation or conversation the nonverbal communication accompanying the words reinforces and adds meaning to them. **Nonverbal behaviour** shows our feelings either consciously or unconsciously. Our capacity to communicate nonverbally affects the quality of our intimate, social and working relationships.

In working towards more effective communication in our profession and workplace, particularly in interpreting the nonverbal part of the message, it is helpful to consider three types of nonverbal message:

1. personal to the individual
2. common to a group of people or culture
3. universal to humankind.

To assist in understanding nonverbal communication, Givens (2014) has compiled a *Nonverbal Dictionary of Gestures, Signs and Body Language Cues*. The items in this dictionary have been researched by anthropologists, archaeologists, biologists, linguists, psychiatrists, psychologists, semioticians and others (including Givens) who have studied human communication from a scientific point of view. This dictionary defines every aspect of nonverbal communication, from ‘Adam’s-apple-jump’ to ‘zygomatic smile’.

**Personal nonverbal communication**

**Personal nonverbal communication** is the use of nonverbal actions in a way that is personal or unique to that person. Givens (2012) states:
Each of us gives and responds to literally thousands of nonverbal messages daily in our personal and professional lives—and while commuting back and forth between the two. From morning’s kiss to business suits and tense-mouth displays at the conference table, we react to wordless messages emotionally, often without knowing why. The boss’s head-nod, the clerk’s bow tie, the next-door neighbor’s hairstyle—we notice the minutia of nonverbal behavior because their details reveal (a) how we relate to one another, and (b) who we think we are.

Givens believes ‘nonverbal messages are so potent and compelling because they are processed in ancient brain centers located beneath the newer areas used for speech’. Nonverbal cues, he asserts, are produced and received below the level of conscious awareness.

Conditioning in the developmental years of childhood, and identification with others who are trusted and respected, influence personal nonverbal communication. Over time, people develop preferences for certain patterns of nonverbal communication based on experience. A person’s style of dress or image is a form of communication personal to the individual. Statements about self are made through appearance and clothing.

In this type of nonverbal communication the meaning is unique to the person sending the message. One person may laugh through nervousness or fear of crying, while another person may cry. Douglis (1996) suggests that emotional responses, gestures and body language are the manifestations of the energy used in personal interactions. For example, someone may talk while working, while another person may work in silence. Every person has their own unique nonverbal signals.

Accurate interpretation of the nonverbal messages comes from knowing the person and their pattern of interpersonal communication, both verbal and nonverbal.

Cultural nonverbal communication

It is generally acknowledged that different national cultures interpret body language, gestures, posture, vocal noises and amount of eye contact in slightly different ways. Nonverbal behaviour learned from others communicates meaning and establishes the traditions, attitudes and patterns of behaviour typical of the prevailing culture. Cultural nonverbal communication is learned unconsciously by observing others, receiving direct instructions, or by modelling and imitating the behaviour of others in the group. In order to belong, individuals share and conform to the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour of others in the culture. Deference to cultural norms regulates communication (verbal and nonverbal) and interactions between those in the culture.

Hall (1976) originally identified the concepts of high context and low context to classify differences in communication styles. From his findings, cultures are classified according to where they fall on a continuum between high- and low-context cultures. In a high-context culture a large part of the message is influenced by the background and basic values of the communicator and is implied in the message’s context. Typical characteristics of high-context cultures are high sensory involvement (high-contact touch behaviour and close proximity due to low personal space needs). The message conveys only a limited portion of the meaning in what is said and must also be interpreted in terms of how and where it is said, and the body language of the speaker. Time sense is polychromic, so things may happen simultaneously and proceed at their own pace.

In a low-context culture the words in the message are explicit and nonverbal cues have less impact on the intended meaning. Typical characteristics of low-context cultures are low sensory involvement (low-contact touch behaviour and high personal space needs). The words in the message convey explicitly most of the meaning in the communication. Nonverbal cues have less impact. Time sense is monochromic, so things happen one at a time and in sequence, and planning and punctuality are a priority.

Other research by Richard Lewis (2005) compared the communication styles and cultural features of different nations. The research classified cultures into three broad types: linear-active, multi-active or reactive.

1 Linear-active cultures are calm, factual, task-oriented, decisive and highly planned, and prefer doing one thing at a time—for example, Germans, Swiss and Britons.
Multi-active cultures are warm, animated and loquacious, and prefer to plan and do many things at once—for example, Latin Americans, Arabs and Italians.

Reactive cultures are called ‘listening cultures’. They are courteous, accommodating, compromising and respectful—for example, Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese.

The different national norms may lead to communication barriers caused by differing perceptions of the meaning of gestures, posture, silence, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance and other nonverbal cues. Refer to Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of high- and low-context cultures.

Strategies to bridge cultural differences

As cultural background influences the way people send and receive nonverbal messages, it is important to consider the cultural factors in the message, as well as interpreting the message within its context. Differences in cultural norms about the use of facial expressions and eye contact may cause misinterpretation. Many Asians and Africans, for example, offer respect by looking down and avoiding direct eye contact, while Europeans and North Americans consider the avoidance of eye contact as a lack of attention and regard it as being disrespectful.

Inconsistencies between the verbal and nonverbal messages of someone from another culture may be acceptable norms within their culture.

Positive intercultural relationships can be built by:

- acknowledging cultural differences
- developing cultural awareness and sensitivity
- developing an ‘other-orientation’ or empathy with people from other cultures
- being willing to move away from your cultural mindset in order to behave flexibly in intercultural interactions.

Refer to Chapter 6 for a discussion of approaches and strategies that help bridge differences in background and culture.

Universal nonverbal communication

Universal nonverbal communication is behaviour that is common to humankind. Morris and colleagues (1979) found that some gestures are highly localised in a culture, while others cross national and linguistic boundaries. A person smiling with outspread arms and upturned open hands communicates welcome universally. Universally, facial expressions and gestures are indicators of emotion. Darwin (1872) suggested that emotions have evolved as part of our biological heritage. An emotion such as displeasure or puzzlement is expressed through a pattern of muscular facial movements that we call a frown.

Universal nonverbal messages often show happiness, sadness or deep-seated feelings—for example, a smile or tears. Their basis is physiological change related to emotions, rather than rituals stylised by a society. According to Metcalf (1997), the universal sign for a person withholding their true feelings is putting one or both hands to the face. While an adult may rub the mouth, upper lip or nose with one finger, a teenager may cover the mouth. Children, who are less experienced than adults or teenagers at sending and interpreting messages, will cover their face.

Occasionally, nonverbal behaviours such as a sneeze are unrelated to the verbal message. A sneeze is simply random behaviour that may distract but does not change the meaning. Unrelated nonverbal communication can distract from the verbal message, although it has little effect on the meaning of the verbal part of the message.

Givens (2005) asserts that body-language signals can be learned behaviour, innate behaviour or a mixture of both. He lists the eye-wink, thumbs-up and military-salute gestures as examples of learned signals and the eye-blink, the throat-clear and facial-flushing as examples of inborn or innate signals. Laughing, crying and shoulder-shrugging he considers to be ‘mixed’, because, although they originated as innate actions, cultural rules have later shaped their timing, energy and use. Other researchers are in disagreement about the nature–nurture issue, some believing that most or all gestures are learned.
THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Birdwhistell (1970) claimed that the average person actually speaks for a total of only 10 to 11 minutes daily and that the standard spoken sentence takes only about 2.5 seconds. He estimated that verbal components carry about one-third, and nonverbal components carry about two-thirds, of the social meaning of the situation. Mehrabian (1971, p. 44) commented that a person’s nonverbal behaviour communicates feelings or attitudes more than words. His equation is:

\[
\text{Total feeling} = 7\% \text{ verbal feeling} + 38\% \text{ vocal feeling} + 55\% \text{ facial feeling}
\]

Mehrabian (1971, p. iii) stated that ‘people who have a greater awareness of the communicative significance of actions not only can insure accurate communication of their own feelings but also can be more successful in their intimate relationships, in artistic endeavors such as acting, or in work that involves the persuasion, leadership, and organisation of others’. The ability to send clear nonverbal messages facilitates communication.

The total message contains spoken words and nonverbal communication. Birdwhistell (1970) noted that 35% of meaning comes from the verbal part of the message and 65% from the nonverbal part. Words alone are not enough to convey the message. Nonverbal communication adds meaning and modifies or changes the spoken words. Six ways of doing this are shown in Table 3.1.

Argyle (1983) confirmed that research shows that ‘the non-verbal style had more effect than the verbal contents, in fact about five times as much; when the verbal and non-verbal messages were in...
conflict, the verbal contents were virtually disregarded’. Argyle outlined four different nonverbal communication roles:

1. **Communicating interpersonal attitudes and emotions.** From birth we see and read messages sent by nonverbal communication. It is an innate part of our social behaviour, used for negotiating interpersonal attitudes, while the verbal channel is used primarily for conveying information’ (1983, p. 44).

2. **Self-presentation.** The self-presentation role conveys information about our self-concept, image and feelings. Artefacts such as badges, clothes and hairstyle send information about the self nonverbally.

3. **Rituals.** The patterns of behaviour used in rituals and ceremonies, such as university graduations, school speech days, engagements and weddings, confirm social relationships and send messages about status or changes in status (such as from undergraduate to postgraduate).

4. **Supporting verbal communication.** The role of nonverbal communication in supporting verbal communication is shown in vocal cues such as timing, pitch, resonance, rhythm and articulation. They support the verbal message.

Givens (2014) presents the concept of nonverbal learning as the act of gaining knowledge or skills apart from language, speech or words. A great deal of knowledge in organisations (e.g. from how to dress to how to make a major public presentation on behalf of your organisation) is gained by watching, imitating and practising the nonverbal communication of someone who knows. Givens highlights the importance of nonverbal directions at airports, shopping centres and theme parks, and on the roads. They are linked nonverbally via international graphic symbols in a pictorial format to show people where they are and where they need to go.

**ASPECTS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Nonverbal communication is more powerful than verbal communication in conveying emotions, attitudes and reactions. Charles Darwin published the first scientific study of nonverbal communication in 1872 in his book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Since then, there has been considerable research into nonverbal cues. Discoveries in neuroscience funded during 1990–2000, the ‘Decade of the Brain’, have provided a clearer picture of nonverbal communication. Body language has come of age in the 21st century as a science to help us understand what it means to be human (Givens 2005).

Theoretical writings and research classify nonverbal communication into the seven main areas shown in Table 3.2. However, it should be noted that to consider each of these aspects in isolation is artificial. In practice, what is sent as a complete message is a cluster of nonverbal cues in association with the spoken words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 3.1: Nonverbal communication</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradicting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substituting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling the flow of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.2: Classifications of nonverbal communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Body movement</td>
<td>Body posture (the way a person stands, leans forward or back, and moves the head), body movements (eye, head, hand, feet and leg movements) and facial expressions all affect the message.</td>
<td>A person leaning forward, pointing and shaking a finger at someone is seen as trying to dominate the other person. Fiddling with jewellery or pens may convey nervousness and insecurity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Physical characteristics</td>
<td>Physical characteristics, first impressions and images of others can be associated unconsciously with past experiences of people with similar characteristics. They are important parts of nonverbal communication.</td>
<td>People react to factors such as body shape, general attractiveness, body and breath odours, weight, hair and skin colour. These factors often determine our responses in interpersonal encounters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Touching behaviour</td>
<td>Touching can console or support the other person and show feelings such as affection, sexual interest or dominance. Hand gestures demonstrate feelings and convey thoughts and words through movement. A handshake, for example, can express either dominance or equality.</td>
<td>Stroking, hitting, holding or guiding the movements of another person are touching behaviours that communicate nonverbally. Each adds a different meaning to a message—a pat on the arm can convey intimacy or control. Some touching is ritualistic, such as a handshake as a greeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vocal qualities</td>
<td><strong>Paralanguage</strong> is that part of language associated with, but not involving, the word system. It consists of the voice qualities and vocalisations that affect how something is said, rather than what is said. Vocalisations, the tone of voice, rate of speaking and voice inflection, are an important part of the total message.</td>
<td>Voice qualities include pitch range, pitch control, rhythm control, tempo, articulation control and resonance. Vocalisations (such as sighing, groaning, volume, 'um' and 'ah') also give clues to the total message. A tired person will speak more slowly than usual; a disappointed person may speak with a flat tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Space (proximity)</td>
<td><strong>Proximity</strong> means nearness, in terms of physical space. Hall (1969) identified four distances that people maintain between themselves and others: 1. Intimate space is 0-45 cm. 2. Personal distance is 45-120 cm. 3. Social distance is 1.2-3.6 m. 4. Public distance is 3.6 m to out of sight.</td>
<td>Personal space varies according to gender, status, roles and culture. People can use their height and weight to convey a message; for example, towering over another in their personal space may cause discomfort and withdrawal. When speaking to acquaintances or work colleagues, about an arm’s length of space is usual; to friends and family, about half an arm’s length is fine; and in intimate relationships, contact is direct and close.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Artefacts</td>
<td><strong>Artefacts</strong> are objects used to convey nonverbal messages about self-concept, image, mood, feelings or style. Many artefacts are common to the group. Others (particularly clothing) are an individual, highly visible part of nonverbal communication that can create a positive or negative first impression.</td>
<td>Perfume, clothes, glasses and hairpieces project the style or mood of the wearer. A police officer’s ID, a nurse’s uniform and an Italian suit can signal power in a situation. If a plain-clothes police officer produces official identification at an accident, others immediately perceive the person’s authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paralanguage** is that part of language associated with, but not involving, the word system. It is the voice qualities and vocalisations that affect *how* something is said, rather than *what* is said.

**Proximity** means nearness in place.

**Artefacts** are objects that convey nonverbal messages.
CHAPTER 3  INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

7. Environment

Office space, factory layout, the sales area and conference venues have an impact on perceptions, morale and productivity. The environment should match expectations: an unsuitable environment can produce ‘noise’ that causes communication barriers. The environment should satisfy instincts such as the need for privacy, familiarity and security.

Table 3.3: Categories of body movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of body movement</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emblems</td>
<td>Emblems are nonverbal acts learned through imitation.</td>
<td>To reinforce or replace the words.</td>
<td>The nonverbals for ‘okay’, such as a nod or a smile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrators</td>
<td>Illustrators are nonverbal acts that relate to and illustrate the spoken word.</td>
<td>To accentuate or emphasise a word or phrase, or to complement what is said.</td>
<td>A nod of the head and wave of the arm in a certain direction, accompanying the statement ‘over there’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective or feeling displays</td>
<td>Affective displays are changes in facial expressions that display emotion.</td>
<td>Unconscious displays reflect feelings, whereas intentional expressions can disguise or hide feelings.</td>
<td>Facial expressions and eye contact—for example, a smile to express happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulators</td>
<td>Regulators are nonverbal acts, such as head-nods, that regulate communication between people.</td>
<td>To maintain and control the flow of speaking and listening. Regulators indicate whether to continue, repeat, elaborate or change from speaker to listener.</td>
<td>A head-nod to encourage another person to continue speaking, or raising of the eyebrows to invite an answer to a question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptors</td>
<td>Adaptors are nonverbal acts performed unconsciously in response to some inner desire.</td>
<td>To display instinctive responses.</td>
<td>Scratching an itchy ear, or raising the arms in shock or horror.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Movements of the hands, arms, feet and head are closely oriented with the spoken words. They convey messages about emotions, feelings and attitudes. Knapp (1978) has presented Ekman and Friesen’s five main categories of body movement: emblems, illustrators, affective or feeling displays, regulators and adaptors. These categories are explained in Table 3.3.

Vocalisations also give clues to the total message (see Table 3.4). The tone of voice of a person excited about a coming holiday reflects this excitement. A higher voice pitch than usual is interpreted as dishonesty or discomfort. A salesperson who speaks too quickly may be greeted with suspicion. Someone who raises their voice at the end of a sentence may sound uncertain and less authoritative than one who ends a sentence with a lower voice pitch. Sounds and other actions express a great deal about emotions and state of mind. Clearing the throat, fidgeting, perspiration or hand-wringing, for example, may display apprehension. Sideways glances, rubbing one’s eyes, touching and rubbing of the nose, or buttoning the coat while drawing away may imply or create suspicion.

How people use their own personal space and the space of others defines the relationship; it communicates and reflects the way they feel towards others. Mehrabian (1971, p. 1) explains that ‘people are drawn...
PART 1  THE COMMUNICATION FACTOR

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Table 3.4: Vocalisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocal characterisers</td>
<td>Vocal characterisers include laughing, crying, sighing, yawning, clearing the throat, groaning, yelling, whispering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal qualifiers</td>
<td>Vocal qualifiers include intensity, such as too loud through to too soft, and pitch level, from too high to too low.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal segregates</td>
<td>Vocal segregates are sounds such as ‘Uh huh’, ‘Um’, ‘Uh’ and ‘Ah’, silent pauses, and intruding sounds from the environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer’. He refers to this as the immediacy principle.

Verbal and nonverbal contradictions

Most nonverbal communication is clear and easy to understand, but on occasions the nonverbal part of the message may be ambiguous and confusing. A nonverbal message that does not align with the spoken message can contradict the verbal component of the total message. The message is two-edged because the facial and vocal expressions, postures and gestures do not match the words. The percentages for the three components that make up total feeling in Mehrabian’s (1971) formula (see p. 50) show that facial expressions have the greatest impact on the message. The cues in the vocal qualities have the next greatest impact. The experiment shows that, when we are resolving the general meaning of an inconsistent message, words make up the smallest percentage of the message.

Usually, nonverbal communication is not consciously observed unless it causes some confusion or doubt in the receiver. Sometimes, it is possible to ignore confusing nonverbal communication, but on other occasions it must be acknowledged or even confronted. For example, the verbal message may convey agreement, while a range of nonverbal signals—such as pitch of voice, facial expression or the body held back—indicates lack of agreement or even ridicule. It is useful to check the meaning whenever you are in doubt, are uncomfortable with the communication or have to make a decision on the basis of the total message.

When the verbal and nonverbal messages are incongruent or different from one another, the total message can be understood more easily by following this four-step process:

1. Hear the words.
2. See the nonverbal behaviours.
3. Check the meaning with the sender.
4. Consider the impact of the context or setting.

Nonverbal communication always exists in a context or framework. The context often determines the meaning of the nonverbal behaviour. On different occasions the same nonverbal gesture may have a completely different meaning because of its context. Nonverbal behaviour separated from its context and the spoken words that accompany it is almost impossible to interpret with any accuracy.

REVIEW QUESTIONS 3.2

1. Briefly explain the roles played by nonverbal communication.
2. What are the seven aspects of nonverbal communication?
3. a. ‘Paralanguage will often determine the message being sent.’ Briefly explain. In your answer give examples of three vocalisations and discuss their impact on the message.
   b. Briefly explain the four types of space that dictate the rules of proximity in a society or culture.
   c. What part do artefacts play in nonverbal communication?
**THE LISTENING PROCESS**

DeVito (2001) lists two studies—using adults as subjects (Rankin 1929) and using college students (Barker et al. 1980)—which showed that listening occupied more time than any other communication activity. The ratio varies from 45% (adults) to 53% (college students), with speaking, reading and writing accounting for only 55% (adults) and 47% (college students). Lane (1987, p. 28), while reporting similar figures (45%...
listening, 30% talking, 16% reading and 9% writing), cautions: ‘The percentage figure on listening can be misleading . . . it means simply the time spent in silence while someone speaks.’

While hearing is a passive process, listening is a five-stage conscious, knowing response to the message in which the listener hears sounds, interprets those sounds and attaches meaning to the sounds in the message:
Stage 1: Receiving the verbal and nonverbal messages.
Stage 2: Understanding the speaker’s thoughts and emotions.
Stage 3: Remembering and retaining the message.
Stage 4: Evaluating or judging the message.
Stage 5: Responding or reacting to the message.

Hirsch (1986) divided the cognitive components of listening into 10 parts: making the physiological and neurological connections; interpreting the sounds; understanding the sounds; assigning meaning to the sounds; reacting to the sounds; receiving some sounds and ignoring others selectively; remembering what was received; attending to the sounds purposely; analysing the information presented; and filtering communication information on the basis of past experiences. Whatever the listening purpose, concentration and a deliberate effort to be interested in the speaker’s message will increase listening effectiveness. In interpersonal interaction the process of listening, responding to what the speaker is saying and participating in the communication interaction as an equal partner with the speaker is of crucial importance. In professional interactions the willingness to listen enables the listener to understand the viewpoints of others, to build positive relationships and to enhance their professional image.

By listening well, a listener is able to avoid directing and leading, blaming, judging or being insensitive to others. Rather than feeling the need to be responsible for others or being in confrontation with others, an effective listener is accepting of, and accepted by, others.

Types of listening
Skill in listening and an understanding of the different types of listening shown in Table 3.5 empower people to interact effectively in personal and professional situations.

Effective dialogical or conversational listeners acknowledge differences in perception and avoid communication barriers caused by past experiences and background. Conversational listening involves both surface and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.5: Types of listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Discriminative listening (the most basic type of listening) | Ability to:  
  - discriminate and make sense of the differences between sounds, including the phonemes (smallest sound units in a language)  
  - hear the subtleties of emotional variation in another person’s voice  
  - listen as a visual, as well as an auditory, act, to understand meaning communicated through body language as well as words. |
| Comprehension listening (the next step of making sense; also known as content listening, informational listening and full listening) | Ability to:  
  - comprehend the meaning  
  - relate to the lexicon (vocabulary) of words, rules of grammar and syntax to understand what others are saying  
  - interpret the nonverbal components of communication  
  - extract key facts and items to comprehend major points, ideas and content  
  - filter information on the basis of past experiences  
  - focus on the content to understand accurately and fully. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogical or conversational listening</th>
<th>Ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ learn through conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ engage in an interchange of ideas and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ seek actively to learn more about another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ share and respond to the different levels of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ concentrate on the message and look for key points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ question to verify understanding and gather additional information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ find the general theme among the facts and details in the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ listen for any gaps or omissions from what is being said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ observe the verbal and nonverbal parts of the message.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biased listening (hearing only what the person wants to hear)</th>
<th>Due to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ misinterpreting what the other person says based on previously held stereotypes and other biases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ firm, opposing or different views, or a resistance to the speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ projection of own position onto the speaker and the words when under pressure or feeling defensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ making the speaker’s words fit what you want them to fit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative or critical listening (evaluating and judging what the other person is saying)</th>
<th>Ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ form an opinion about what is being said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ assess strengths and weaknesses, agreement and approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ listen to the speaker’s ongoing words and at the same time analyse and relate what is being said to existing knowledge and rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ assess the objectivity of what is being said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ evaluate what is said against own values and assess as good or bad, ethical or unethical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ distinguish between subtleties of language and comprehend the inner meaning of what is said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ think critically and ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ weigh up the pros and cons of an argument when the speaker is trying to persuade a change in behaviour or beliefs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partial listening (intending to listen to the other person but then becoming distracted)</th>
<th>Due to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ stray thoughts or something said by the other person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ thinking about a question to ask, rather than listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ lack of concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ daydreaming and losing the thread of the conversation, having to ask the speaker to repeat what was said.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>False listening (pretending to listen but not hearing what is being said; an old proverb says ‘There is none so deaf as those who won’t hear’)</th>
<th>Due to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ nodding or smiling at the appropriate time to make a good impression without taking in anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ engaging in inconsequential listening—for example, politicians and royalty who move on after a short space of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ turning-off or letting one side do most of the talking; may lead to conflict when there is a need for a relationship, as in couples.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attentive ‘data-only’ listening (listening only to the content and failing to receive all the nonverbal sounds and signals, such as tone of voice, facial expression, reaction of speaker)</th>
<th>Due to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ listening only to cold facts and figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ failure to gather and respond appropriately to emotions, feelings and situation of the other person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ strong results motive, driven by ‘push and persuade’—for example, salespeople</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ manipulation and force to win against the other party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ focus on short-term gains at the risk of destroying constructive and sustainable results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active listening (listening—without two-way emotional involvement—to the verbal and nonverbal components of the message)</th>
<th>Ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ interpret body language such as intonation, facial expressions and body movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ see and feel the situation from the other person’s position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ give empathic feedback without transmitting sympathy or identifying with the other person’s feelings and emotional needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ attend to, encourage, summarise and mirror the content and feelings in the message.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in-depth listening skills. Conversations are dynamic interactions between the speaker(s) and the listener(s). Research by Reardon (1987, p. 101) suggests that conversations move through five steps or phases:

1. Initiation phase to exchange greetings and open the channels of communication.
2. Rule-definition phase to determine the purpose of the interaction and the time it will take.
3. Rule-confirmation phase to gain agreement about the purpose and time.
4. Strategic development phase to discuss the actual topic of the conversation.
5. Termination phase to say farewell or to move on to another topic—that is, start another conversation.

Regardless of a conversation’s purpose, listeners who reach a shared understanding with the speaker have listened attentively and shown supportive verbal and nonverbal interest in the whole message. They listen to and balance the meaning in the surface message and any in-depth message. Their response is appropriate in that it meets the needs of the speaker, the purpose of the conversation and their needs as listener in the context of the particular interaction.

Active listening

Active listening is empathic listening, without two-way emotional involvement, to the verbal and nonverbal components of a message. Active listening focuses on the other person’s message and provides appropriate feedback. The active listening method:

- helps the listener to bypass the personal filters, beliefs assumptions and judgements that can distort the speaker’s message
- acknowledges and provides feedback to the speaker, as well as verifying what the listener has heard
- enables the person to reach their own decisions and form their own insights
- confirms communication and facilitates understanding between the speaker and the listener.

Covey (1989) recommends listening in professional and personal situations to establish communication and using empathic listening to perceive or sense a situation from the point of view of the speaker. The reward is a whole new level of communication and problem solving because the listener acquires the ability to see a situation simultaneously from multiple points of view. As well as building respect and a professional image, a listening-centred approach fulfills a number of purposes. For example, a leader who is willing to actively listen to people at all levels in an organization is able not only to understand and learn from others but also to inspire and motivate. Leaders who really listen to others open opportunities for collaboration, improve relationships, and assist in finding innovative and creative solutions. A sense of inclusion is built by leaders who listen to the viewpoints of others, and who give and receive feedback. In contrast, leaders who do not listen reduce the feelings of responsibility, control and importance of their followers. A leader who tells people exactly how to do something, or tells them to stop thinking and just keep doing it the way it has always been done, demotivates staff, inhibits innovation, stiles creativity, dampens morale, and may even cause underachievement of goals and objectives.

One profession where a listening-centred approach is essential is marketing and sales. For example, in the first meeting between a salesperson and a potential client, active listening on the part of the salesperson builds rapport, uncovers the client’s explicit needs, and helps mutually determine whether there is a fit between the company’s product or service and the client. Since an ongoing relationship is built between the salesperson and the client, active listening is essential to the maintenance of this relationship, the discovery of facts, and the uncovering of issues, dissatisfactions, concerns, problems and desired outcomes. By actively listening the salesperson focuses on the client, asking questions to encourage them to continue and reflecting understanding of their message. This not only deepens the listener’s understanding of the client’s needs but also leads the client to new insights into their own needs and the value of the listener’s product or service.

Bolton (1987) describes active listening as a cluster of attending, encouraging and reflecting skills used together in order to pay attention to the content and feelings that comprise the whole message. The purpose of each of these skills is shown in Figure 3.1. These skills are techniques that allow the listener to give the speaker their full attention until the speaker is able to communicate the real message. Sometimes a listener
will use only one of these techniques, while on other occasions they may use them all in combination to provide feedback that encourages the speaker to continue.

**Focus on the speaker**

In **attending listening**, listeners use their body language and words to provide feedback that assures the speaker of their total attention. Some ways of offering this feedback are eye contact, posture and body movement. A capacity to ignore distractions, and an understanding of the impact of moving into the personal space of others and the impact of the environment, also improve the quality of attending listening skills. The six factors in Table 3.6 help listeners to give their complete attention to the speaker.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.6: Attending listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Verbal attending responses | • ‘I hear you . . .’  
• ‘I see . . .’  
• ‘Oh . . .’  
• ‘Uh hmmm . . .’ |
| Eye contact | • Use supportive eye contact.  
• Focus eyes on the speaker without being intimidating.  
• Show sensitivity and occasionally shift the gaze from the other person’s face.  
• Avoid staring directly at the speaker for long periods, as the speaker may feel uncomfortable. |
| Posture | • Use open posture (i.e. not folded arms or crossed legs) to attend to the other person.  
• Lean slightly forward towards the speaker in a relaxed way.  
• Face the person squarely. |
Table 3.6: Attending listening  continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body movement</td>
<td>■ Avoid moving about a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Avoid fiddling with objects, crossing or uncrossing legs, signalling or speaking to passers-by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Stay still and concentrate on the speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal space</td>
<td>■ Create a comfortable distance between listener and speaker—comfort in the use of physical distance depends on culture and personal preference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Avoid moving into the speaker’s personal space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>■ Create an environment without distractions or interruptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Remove any physical barriers between listener and speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Establish an environment where both people can feel relaxed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid distractions</td>
<td>■ Face and maintain contact with the speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Ignore distractions, rather than turning away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Stop and focus your attention on the other person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Invite the speaker to continue**

**Encouraging listening** indicates that the listener is willing to do more than listen. Encouraging listening invites the speaker to say more and to disclose their thoughts and feelings, but without pressuring them. It is their choice, so let them decide. They may be experiencing feelings of ambivalence about whether to talk or to keep their feelings private. Continue to provide attention by using eye contact and an open posture, and give them the opportunity and freedom to disclose. For example, if the speaker seems upset or annoyed, a listener might say something like, ‘You seem to be upset about the discussion with that last client. Would you care to talk about it?’

Minimal and brief spoken responses let the speaker know the listener is listening and encourage them to continue. Some of these responses are ‘mm’, ‘hmmm’, ‘yes’, ‘okay’, ‘I see’, coupled with attentive posture. Other nonverbal cues such as head-nodding and facial expressions convey the listener’s interest to the speaker without attempting to control or divert the conversation away from the area of interest.

A pause or silence allows the speaker time to consider, reflect and decide whether to continue the conversation. As a listener, use this time to attend to and watch the body movement of the speaker. This can give you clues to the total message, both the content and the feelings in the conversation. Allow silences and give the speaker time to think.

Encouraging listening invites speakers to disclose their thoughts and feelings. Examples of encouraging questions are: ‘I’d like to hear how you feel’, ‘Would you like to talk about it?’, ‘You’d like to talk further?’ and ‘Perhaps you’d like to tell me?’ Although encouraging questions let the other person know that the listener is interested in talking with them, they do not necessarily show that the listener understands. To show understanding, change encouraging questions into reflective statements such as ‘So you are . . .’, ‘It sounds as if you are going to . . .’, which clarify and summarise the other person’s words without interrupting the flow of words or thoughts.

**Mirror the content and feelings in the message**

**Reflective listening** restates or mirrors to the speaker the feeling and content in the message. Reflective listening informs the speaker that the listener has heard and understands the intended message. Several techniques for providing feedback in reflective listening are detailed in Table 3.7.

Active listening builds empathy with the other person and creates positive interpersonal relationships. It is a technique that lets the speaker either confirm or correct the feedback from the listener. The process of active listening involves the listener in active participation with the other person. When listeners use active listening, they are giving the other person all their attention in order to understand the issues or situations from the other
### Table 3.7: Feedback in reflective listening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paraphrasing</strong></td>
<td>Restate the essential part of the message concisely in your own words.</td>
<td>Respond with phrases such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listen for the main ideas and the direction of the message and mirror the</td>
<td>'You’re saying that . . .’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>content to the speaker.</td>
<td>'I see, you would say that . . .’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree or disagree with what was said and then rephrase the message.</td>
<td>'You feel it is a good idea . . .’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid repeating the other person’s statements word for word.</td>
<td>These help you to paraphrase the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective statements</strong></td>
<td>Express in brief statements the essential feelings you received from the</td>
<td>Respond with phrases such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>message.</td>
<td>'It's really discouraging’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let the speaker know you understand their feelings.</td>
<td>'You really dislike some . . .’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respond to a statement such as: ‘I thought I would have got that last</td>
<td>‘Sounds as if you’re really . . .’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>promotion. Seems like I miss out every time.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarifying statements</strong></td>
<td>State clarifying remarks in terms of the feelings, rather than as</td>
<td>A listener who feels confused by what the speaker has said can use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>criticisms of the speaker. If the listener's understanding is</td>
<td>phrases such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inaccurate, the speaker has the opportunity to rephrase what they said.</td>
<td>'Could you repeat that? I don’t think I understood.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give feedback to the speaker and show your understanding of the message.</td>
<td>‘Could you give me an example of . . .? I’m not sure I followed what you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take the guesswork out of communication.</td>
<td>said.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summarising</strong></td>
<td>Present relevant points again to give accurate feedback that links issues,</td>
<td>Respond with phrases such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ideas and information.</td>
<td>'So far we've covered . . .’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restate, in a condensed way, the most important points of concern in a long</td>
<td>'Your main concerns seem to be . . .’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conversation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use at the end of a discussion to conclude and give direction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paraphrasing** is restatement by the listener of what was said, using different words.

**Reflective statements** let the speaker know that the listener understands the underlying feelings.

**Clarifying statements** confirm the listener’s interpretation of the message, enabling the speaker to confirm as correct or add more information.

**Summarising** is used in listening to restate in a condensed way the most important points.
person’s perspective or point of view. As well as communicating their understanding of the other person, active
listeners also enable the speaker to find their own understanding and insights. The speaker, given the opportunity
to talk to an active listener, is able to find their own satisfactory resolution or answer to the issue of concern.

Barriers to listening

Obstacles to listening given by Hargie and Dickson (2004) are *dichotomous listening*, which occurs when ‘an
individual attempts to assimilate information simultaneously from two different sources’ (p. 188), and *inatten-
tiveness*, not only on the part of the listener but also on the part of the speaker, who may either consciously or
unconsciously confuse, distract or mislead the listener(s). Typical causes of poor listening are a preoccupation
with self, a preoccupation with external issues, and pre-conceived expectations of people and events.

Many poor listening behaviours are conditioned responses learned from people such as parents, relatives,
teachers or peers in childhood. Poor listening in any workplace leads to problems. At work you will listen
to your manager, supervisor, team leader and colleagues give project, task and other instructions. Any of
the following *barriers to listening* will cause you to miss the main point, forget the message or be unable to
determine what you are supposed to do in response to the message:

- the tendency to reconstruct messages so that they reflect our own attitudes, needs and values
- listener apprehension caused by fear of misunderstanding, misinterpreting or being unable to adjust to
  the spoken words
- attitudes towards the speaker, desire to criticise and ambush the speaker—the friend-or-foe factor
- listening only for the pause that lets the listener interrupt, change the subject or combat the speaker’s
  words to promote their own ideas and viewpoint
- filtering out or distorting unpleasant or difficult messages through oversimplification or the elimination
  of undesirable details
- unchecked emotional responses to words, concepts or ideas that raise emotions and prevent the listener
  from focusing on the speaker’s message
- mind drift when the listener daydreams and drifts off into their own thoughts rather than listening
- mind-reading and attempting to read too much into the speaker’s words and nonverbals without
  clarifying the meaning with the speaker
- assuming a topic will be boring, resulting in lack of concentration, partial and false listening
- allowing the speaker’s personality or mannerisms to overpower the message
- information overload and interruptions from smartphones and other technological devices.

Gamble and Gamble (1996) describe six behaviours demonstrated by poor listeners. In their words, people
use these behaviours to ‘unlisten’. Table 3.8 identifies the purpose of these behaviours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.8: Poor listening behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behaviour</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear hogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap fillers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earmuffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dart throwers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.9 provides examples of ineffective verbal responses and their impact on the speaker. Everyone succumbs to some of these unhelpful approaches occasionally. A number of these barriers are caused by habitual behaviours learned from childhood. Breaking old habits is difficult. Irrespective of how skilled the speaker is at speaking or communicating the message, if the receiver does not listen, the communication will fail.

Robbins and colleagues (2006, p. 633) cite research that shows: ‘The average person normally speaks at a rate of 125 to 200 words per minute. However, the average listener can comprehend up to 400 words per minute.’ The difference between the speaking rate and comprehension may allow idle thoughts about holidays, sporting events, children and next weekend to create distractions. Listeners who take responsibility for their listening participate to move the meeting, negotiation or other activities towards effective outcomes.

Table 3.9: The impact of a listener’s ineffective verbal response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of a barrier</th>
<th>Receiver’s response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordering, directing or commanding: ‘Stop it or else . . .’; ‘You must do this . . .’</td>
<td>Resentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning and threatening: ‘You’d better do this or else . . .’</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturing or preaching: ‘It’s in your own best interest to do this . . .’</td>
<td>Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judging, criticising: ‘I think you’ve gone too far this time . . .’</td>
<td>Offence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreeing: ‘I think you’re totally wrong . . .’</td>
<td>Put-down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming: ‘It’s all your fault . . .’</td>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name calling: ‘You’re stupid . . .’</td>
<td>Distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using ridicule or sarcasm: ‘Someone like you is not expected to know . . .’</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REVIEW QUESTIONS 3.3

1. a Identify the five stages of the listening process.
   b Briefly outline the abilities of an effective evaluative or critical listener.
2. a Explain the cluster of active listening skills.
   b Think of a person you regard as a good active listener, and then think of one who is a poor active listener. Identify three aspects of their listening techniques that make them either a good listener or a poor listener.
3. a List four barriers to effective listening caused by the listener.
   b Briefly explain four behaviours displayed by a poor listener.

APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

ATTENDING AND ENCOURAGING LISTENING

1. Work in pairs to practise attending and encouraging listening skills. Take turns to act as speaker and listener. As the speaker, choose a controversial topic on which you hold a very definite position, or a topic you feel strongly about, and speak to your listener about this for three minutes. Use familiar, comfortable language you both normally use and understand.

   As the listener, use the following guidelines to focus your listening:
   a Show your interest in the speaker by your body movement. Face the speaker. Make eye contact. Lean forward, keeping an open posture.
   b Notice the speaker’s body movement. This may indicate the feelings underlying the spoken message.
   c Use feedback to invite the speaker to continue by using minimal responses.
PART 1  THE COMMUNICATION FACTOR

d  Ask as few questions as possible. However, if you do ask questions, use attending and encouraging questions.
e  At the end of this exercise, discuss with one another your effectiveness as listeners. Refer to points (a) to (d).
f  Think about your own ineffective listening behaviours. Choose two and decide how you could improve these behaviours. Practise using them over the next week.

2  a  Explain this statement: ‘Active listening goes one step further than mirroring the content and feelings in the message.’
b  When is active listening most useful?
c  List four benefits of using active listening skills.

3  Work in small groups.
a  Share situations when barriers to listening have adversely affected a group of people or an organisation.
b  Choose one of the situations and discuss:
   -  What were the barriers?
   -  What was, or could have been, done to overcome them?
   -  How effective in eliminating the barriers was/would have been this intervention?
c  Report your findings to the large group.

THE ROLE OF QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

At work, people ask questions and give and receive feedback in personal and professional situations. Asking questions requires the other person to listen, think and respond. Giving and receiving effective feedback supports, values, encourages and underpins positive relationships. It lets people know how well they are performing, and how their work contributes to their team’s and organisation’s goals. Constructive feedback lets others know what they are doing well and how they could improve. Regardless of whether the feedback is positive or negative, the total feedback message—words, nonverbals, questioning and listening—should always be constructive.

The value of questions

A skilful questioner asks the right question for the desired result. The outcomes from effective questions include:

-  positive connections with clients, colleagues and other stakeholders
-  greater understanding of the needs of your clients
-  gathering of better information from a variety of sources
-  improved negotiation and conflict-management skills
-  capacity to receive positive and constructive feedback
-  facilitation of solution-oriented problem solving and decision making
-  acknowledgement and encouragement of others to cooperate and collaborate
-  ability to work more effectively with your team and to help others to take responsibility for their actions.

Some types of questioning are effective, while others are ineffective. Table 3.10 provides examples of different types of effective and ineffective questions.

Open questions

By asking open questions the listener is able to encourage the other person to share their more personal feelings and thoughts. Open questions ask ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘how’ or ‘who’. In combination with effective listening, open questions gather specific, precise and sometimes revealing information. The following are examples of open questions that are useful in a range of situations, such as client interviews, meetings and negotiations; when gathering further information; when you want to find out what someone has already done to resolve a problem; or when working with others to plan how to do a task or take action.

-  To identify an issue: ‘What seems to be the problem?’ ‘How do you feel about . . .?’ ‘What do you think about doing it this way?’
To gather further information: ‘What do you mean by ...?’, ‘Tell me more about ...’, ‘What other ways have you tried so far?’, ‘Do you think you can do the project scoping, and how will you involve the external stakeholders?’

To plan how to do a task or an action: ‘How do you want ... to turn out?’, ‘What is your desired outcome?’ ‘If you do this, how will it affect ...?’, ‘What are your next steps?’

Open questions help improve your communication and understanding of a client or colleague because they encourage the speaker to answer at greater length and in detail. In contrast, closed questions can close down communication because they usually elicit a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer—for example, ‘Is there a problem?’ Avoid asking ‘why’ questions because they can be interpreted as interrogative and personal. Instead of encouraging the speaker to explore their actions, ‘why’ questions encourage them to justify their actions. The speaker may feel threatened because the ‘why’ question sounds as if the listener disapproves of their actions.

The value of feedback

Effective feedback is always timely, appropriate and constructive. Regular feedback ensures there are no surprises. It creates a positive communication climate, which in turns creates an open and encouraging organisational climate. Figure 3.2 identifies characteristics of feedback that is effective.

In contrast, ineffective feedback can create a rigid or competitive environment that can make many people reticent or hesitant to communicate and provide ideas. How feedback is given, and the type of feedback, has an impact on motivation, performance, interpersonal relationships and the communication climate in an organisation.

By giving and receiving feedback it is possible to understand the expressed idea, opinion or attitude from the other person’s point of view. An understanding connection is made. By acknowledging, owning and expressing feelings as feedback, a relationship is built on trust and openness. Feedback lets people understand instructions and what needs to be done; as a result, activities are easier to understand and are completed accurately and to the required standard.

---

**Table 3.10: Effective and ineffective questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective question types and purpose</th>
<th>Ineffective question types and problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open questions invite the other person to talk. ‘How is the project progressing?’</td>
<td>Multiple questions that cover a number of issues. ‘Do you think you can do the project scoping, and how will you involve the external stakeholders?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed questions invite the other person to give a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. ‘Do you have concerns about the project?’</td>
<td>Ambiguous or vague questions that confuse. ‘To what extent did using project management software and the company intranet help various stages of the project?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing questions gain more details. ‘Could you provide more information about how you reached your conclusion?’</td>
<td>Implied value questions that reflect your values. ‘Do you agree that project communication plans are more trouble than they are worth?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective questions restate and clarify what the other person said. ‘Then you haven’t had time to work on the new project?’</td>
<td>Aggressive questions that attack the other person. ‘So what are you going to do, pull a fast one on us?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge questions examine assumptions, conclusions and interpretations. ‘How else might we account for the increasing number of equipment failures?’</td>
<td>Leading questions to get the answer you want. ‘With all these benefits we’ve highlighted, don’t you think that the benefits of this approach make it the best way for all of us to go forward?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetical questions probe and explore options. ‘If you were project leader, how would you proceed?’</td>
<td>Rhetorical questions that do not need an answer. ‘Isn’t it obvious that we should proceed to the next stage?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is generally accepted that human behaviour is goal-oriented. People have a need and are motivated to take some action to satisfy that need. Motivation is the desire or will to do something. Motivation directs behaviour or actions towards a goal. Relevant and timely feedback is motivating.

**Types of feedback**

Different types of feedback used within organisations and businesses include informative feedback, immediate and specific feedback, positive feedback, negative feedback and no feedback at all. Table 3.11 shows the purpose and strategies used to achieve each of these types of feedback.

**Constructive feedback**

Feedback should be constructive, rather than destructive. Constructive negative feedback is preferable to destructive negative feedback. An example of constructive negative feedback is: ‘From what you contributed in that meeting, it was clear that you had done little research on the topic. Before the next meeting, please find time to research thoroughly. We really need your contribution.’ An example of destructive negative feedback is: ‘From what you contributed in that meeting it was obvious that you did no research. You always expect others to do the hard work. Next time get it done.’ It is destructive to bring up past behaviour and grievances. Instead, make feedback timely and deal with the current situation.

On occasions when you hear feelings as well as content in a message, in-depth listening to both content and feelings will help you give feedback that reflects the meaning accurately. An in-depth listener hears the paralanguage in the message in the tone, volume, pitch, rhythm, speed and resonance. An in-depth listener can engage in **verbal following** by using probing questions to move beneath the surface.

As you give feedback, ask questions related to the speaker’s message. Follow up on the meaning of the message in order to gain a shared understanding of the speaker’s ideas. Check the nonverbal messages being

---

**Figure 3.2**

Characteristics of effective feedback

- Focuses on behaviour, rather than the person
- Empowers the receiver to ask more questions or take action
- Shares information without judgement or damage to receiver’s self-esteem
- Is constructive and takes into account the needs of the receiver
- Is specific and appropriate to the situation
- Is clear communication with a positive intent
- Allows time for the receiver to seek clarification
- Provides positive reinforcement and acknowledgement

**Verbal following** probes more deeply into what the speaker has said.
sent—for example, by your stance. Body orientation sends a message about the relationship between you and the other person. Standing at a 90° angle to the other person as you give or receive feedback indicates a cooperative stance, while facing the other person directly may indicate intimacy or aggression. Nonverbal behaviour—such as smiles, head-nods, an attentive posture and eye contact—demonstrates the listener’s involvement and interest. One nod gives the speaker permission to continue. Alternatively, rapid nods may indicate the listener’s wish to speak (Fiske 1990; Givens 2014). As you give feedback, the receiver’s impression of you and their response to the feedback is affected by their perception of your verbal and nonverbal communication. The ability to give feedback well enhances your performance and credibility in the workplace.

Being able to receive as well as give feedback in personal and professional interactions improves understanding, the flow of information and performance. Useful strategies to use when receiving feedback include:

- being open, receptive and assertive
- separating objective and subjective information
- listening, paraphrasing and asking questions
- avoiding emotional responses such as defensiveness, aggression, excuses or blaming others
- considering feedback information and focusing on areas of improvement
- incorporating useful feedback, planning future outcomes, taking action and following up.

### Table 3.11: Types of feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Informative feedback  | To show understanding, and to reinforce positive behaviour or results.   | - Provide factual information about the situation and use effective listening skills.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Focus on the content of the message; identify the other person’s purpose and main ideas by rephrasing or summarising.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Withhold judgement and empathise with any unexpressed feelings.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Share perceptions and feelings about the message.  
| Immediate and specific feedback | To describe what has been done, or needs to be done, rather than judging or threatening the other person. | - Keep feedback clear, specific and tied to actual behaviour; e.g. ‘This file could do with a tidy up’, instead of ‘Your files are always untidy’.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Avoid abstract, vague and sweeping statements.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Respect the other person’s right to respond.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Take the time to listen, and acknowledge their response.  
| Positive feedback     | To acknowledge the role and contribution of the other person. Positive feedback encourages the repetition of behaviour. | - Provide timely feedback in an appropriate context.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Be specific about the behaviour and listen to the other person’s response.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Invite feedback from the other person: ‘What do you think about my suggestions?’ The feedback flow becomes an open-ended, two-way process.  
| Negative feedback     | To correct and change unsatisfactory behaviour or results.               | - Provide definitive, responsive feedback.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Orient the feedback on the task; do not criticise the personal characteristics of the other person.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Give feedback at an appropriate time and place.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Only include behaviour that the receiver is able to change, and only what the receiver can handle at the time.  
| No feedback at all    | To procrastinate and avoid any unpleasantness.                          | - Ignore team members and colleagues.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Let both poor and good performance pass without comment.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Let things slide.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Complain about a person behind their back.  
|                       |                                                                          | - Believe that people think no news is good news.  

Sample pages
Reframing

The meaning of any situation or of any set of circumstances is found in the frame of reference of the person viewing it—that is, their unspoken assumptions, including beliefs, values and attitudes, that influence their perception of the situation. Differing frames of reference mean people experience and interpret the same event in different ways. If any part of that frame of reference is changed, the inferred meaning of the concept or situation may change.

Reframing means stepping back from what is being said and done to consider the frame, or ‘lens’, the other person is using in the situation. Reframing expands our own and others’ perceptions by understanding something in another way—providing a new frame through which to view a concept or situation. The listener recasts the speaker’s words to give new meaning to the statement. Reframing can also help to view a problem as an opportunity; for example, ‘You say it can’t be done in time. But what if we staged delivery or got in casual help?’ or ‘Let’s look at it another way.’ When negotiating or interacting in a potential conflict situation, reframing is a useful strategy to:

- defuse the parties’ strong, negative emotions
- shift attention away from positions and towards interests
- focus the parties on broadening and choosing mutually beneficial options, rather than focusing on win–lose or lose–lose outcomes.

For more information on reframing, see Chapter 5.

By practising and using feedback skills at work, people come closer to understanding the verbal, nonverbal and undercurrent messages sent by others. An undercurrent language is something the sender wants to conceal or is unable to convey (feelings and/or content). In addition, practice facilitates understanding of your own communication and of how to communicate well.

Feedforward

Appropriate, constructive feedforward says something about the message yet to be sent. DeVito (2000, pp. 16–17) says that feedforward can carry out four functions in the communication process:

1. It opens the channels of communication and focuses attention on the coming message.
2. It previews the message to be sent by giving and receiving advance information.
3. It disclaims or denies a connection with the statement to follow.
4. It places the receiver of the message in a specific role, requiring them to respond in a certain way.

Feedforward previews the message and opens the channels of communication. It allows a person to say something about the message before it is sent; for example, a smile indicates that the message will be pleasant or contain good news.

Feedforward also lets the other person know what to expect from the message before it is sent. Appropriate feedforward is brief and clear. The receiver will be side-tracked and have doubts about the sender’s motives if feedforward takes too long. Appropriate feedforward is followed through; for example, a smile followed by an angry response is inappropriate.

Feedforward can disclaim the main message when the sender feels it might offend the receiver or reflect badly on them. They might disagree, for example, by saying: ‘I’m not really expert in the area but . . .’ In this way, they express their disagreement by using the feedforward part of the message to indicate the coming disagreement. At the same time, the speaker lets it be known that the listener can reject the message without rejecting the speaker. How often do you hear, placed before a message the sender feels may be poorly received, a disclaimer such as: ‘I’m not a racist, but . . .’?

Another way to prepare the receiver for the message is to altercast; that is, to cast or place the person in a specific role and ask them to respond from that role—for example, ‘If you were a rock musician, how would you feel about jazz?’ Alternatively, speakers can place themselves in another role to show their point of view—for example, ‘If I were a rock musician, I’d have little time for jazz.’

In some cases, feedforward helps the sender to present a differing point of view. In others, it restricts the receiver’s response or manipulates them into doing something—for example, ‘I’m moving on Saturday. You’re my brother and I need your help to move my furniture into my new apartment.’ A knowledge of feedback and feedforward increases awareness of the constant flow of communication between people. In this flow, feedback takes place after the message has been sent, while feedforward occurs before the main message is sent.
CHAPTER 3  INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

REVIEW QUESTIONS 3.4

1  a  Briefly explain this statement: ‘Avoid “why” questions because they can make the other person defensive.’
   b  What role does feedback play in the listening process?
2  a  Discuss the characteristics of effective feedback.
   b  Identify five types of feedback used in organisations and explain the purpose of each type.
3  a  What does reframing do?
   b  What functions does feedforward have in the communication process?
   c  What is the purpose of verbal following?

APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

QUESTIONING AND FEEDBACK

1  Work in small groups.
   a  Briefly discuss the outcomes from effective questions.
   b  What is the value of open questions in professional situations?
   c  Choose three types of ineffective questions and identify the problem(s) caused by each.
   d  Discuss strategies to overcome or avoid these problems.

2  Work individually.
   a  What is the main purpose of:
      i  encouraging listening?
      ii  reflective listening?
   b  Define the term ‘paraphrasing’ and explain its purpose as a listening response.
   c  Define the term ‘clarifying question’ and explain its purpose as a listening response.
   d  Define the term ‘summarising’ and explain its purpose as a listening response.

ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Effective communication is based on a person’s willingness to communicate openly and their skill in adjusting their communication approach to suit the other person and the situation. Those who behave assertively are acknowledging both their rights as individuals and the rights of other people. This is the ideal attitude to have at work and in our everyday lives. People who exhibit assertive behaviour tend to demonstrate open, expressive and relaxed behaviour when negotiating, making requests, refusing unreasonable requests, standing up for their opinions, asking for favours, and giving and receiving compliments in a range of situations. They are able to build honest, fulfilling relationships. Such people feel comfortable with themselves and with others, and are able to satisfy their own needs and the needs of others.

When the occasion demands, assertive people can disagree, stand up for their own rights, and present alternative points of view without being intimidated or putting the other person down. Assertive people can select suitable behaviour for each situation and recognise when their own behaviour is assertive, aggressive or non-assertive. Assertive people are confident and can communicate openly. Although assertive people want to be heard and acknowledged, they are able to accept that others may have different perceptions and opinions. Assertive people are generally respected and liked by others.

OBJECTIVE 3.5

Distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion.

Assertive behaviour is based on high self-esteem and an acceptance of self.
In contrast, people who exhibit **aggressive behaviour** may try to win at all costs, even to the point of humiliating others. They are often in conflict and may be disliked by others. At the other end of the scale, people who exhibit **submissive behaviour** are unable to assert themselves or promote their point of view. They are worried, anxious and lack confidence, and may be disliked because of their insecurity. Table 3.12 contrasts the characteristics of **assertive**, **aggressive** and **submissive** behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
<th>Submissive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is self-enhancing of others</td>
<td>Is self-enhancing and dominating of others</td>
<td>Is self-denying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May achieve desired goal</td>
<td>Achieves desired goals regardless of others</td>
<td>Does not achieve desired goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a positive self-concept</td>
<td>Devalues the contribution of others</td>
<td>Feels hurt or anxious often</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes decisions for self</td>
<td>Makes decisions for others</td>
<td>Allows others to make the decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is expressive</td>
<td>Is expressive and often overbearing</td>
<td>Is inhibited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels comfortable with and equal to others</td>
<td>Feels uncomfortable with and superior to others</td>
<td>Feels uncomfortable with and of less worth than others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is able to present a point of view and accept a different point of view</td>
<td>Is able to present a point of view and may try to impose it by dominating</td>
<td>Is unable to present a point of view</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Verbal assertion skills

Butler-Bowdon (2007, p. 36) states: ‘The whole point of assertion statements is to produce a change without invading the other person’s space. There is no power or coercion involved as the focus is on a result.’ Skills in verbal assertion are useful, for example, when a team leader gives team members a first look at the plans to enter a new market segment. Verbal assertion skills enable the manager, supervisor or team leader to counter objections, gather new ideas, engage in decision making and generally promote the proposed change. In an effective performance appraisal, manager and employee apply the relationship management skills of self-awareness, self-management, situational awareness and assertion. The quality of their interpersonal skills creates a positive communication climate that encourages open, honest exchanges rather than defensive, self-protective responses.

The following acronyms provide a useful framework for giving specific positive or negative feedback assertively:

- The **STAR** acronym is used for positive feedback that confirms behaviour or outcomes:
  - **S**ituation or task (what the person was doing) is identified.
  - **T**he action (what they did) is discussed.
  - **A**ctual result (the outcome) or benefits of what they did is acknowledged.

- The **STAAAR** acronym is used for constructive negative feedback meant to correct behaviours or actions that led to inappropriate results:
  - **S**ituation or task (what the person was doing, or should have been doing) is identified.
  - **T**he alternative action (what to do in the future) is discussed.
  - **A**lternative result (the planned outcome) is identified to enable the receiver to apply the learning from feedback to future situations.

The steps detailed in the acronyms enable you to give powerful assertive feedback designed to acknowledge effective outcomes or to change behaviour and improve performance. An example is shown in Table 3.13. The process provides a way of giving assertive but negative feedback constructively.
Table 3.13: Using the STAR/STAAAR acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAR</th>
<th>Example of POSITIVE, constructive feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>'I liked your last monthly report.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>'I thought the way you ordered the information in the report and used graphs was professional.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>'You highlighted progress to date and detailed next month’s activities in a way that made the contents easy to understand.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAAAR</th>
<th>Example of NEGATIVE, constructive feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>'I thought you began the negotiation well by separating the people from the problem.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>'I think you could have engaged more positively by focusing more on the interests and finding common ground, rather than taking a position. Once a position is taken, it is difficult to generate different possibilities.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>'Focusing on interests allows you and others in the negotiation to work together to generate a range of options. It is then possible to choose together the option that best meets the interests of the negotiators.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘I’ statements

A useful technique to demonstrate assertion and show openness with others is the ‘I’ statement or ‘I’ message. ‘I’ statements are a way of sharing emotions and letting others know how their behaviour is perceived and how it affects you. One of the most effective ways to begin assertive statements is to say: ‘I feel . . . when . . .’ For example, the message may be: ‘I feel annoyed when you don’t let me know you will be late.’ People can express their needs and wants with an ‘I’ message. It shows their personal involvement plus a willingness to share their feelings. It also lets them own their own reactions.

‘I’ messages can be used to express both positive and negative feelings; they may talk about behaviour that is acceptable and pleasing, or behaviour that is unacceptable and displeasing. Because ‘I’ messages dealing with behaviour that is unacceptable are more difficult to express, this section focuses on their construction. The formulae for two-, three- and four-part ‘I’ messages in Figure 3.3 provide a useful framework for offering constructive, non-threatening feedback.

In a two-part ‘I’ message, the speaker’s feelings are owned and the behaviour that is causing the feeling is described in concrete terms. Following the two-part ‘I’ message formula, a two-part assertive message could be: ‘I feel angry when the dirty clothes are left in the bathroom.’ In the second part, take care to describe the behaviour of the other person, rather than interpret, judge or evaluate it.

In a three-part ‘I’ message, the speaker’s feelings are owned, the behaviour that is causing the feeling is described in concrete terms, and the effect of the behaviour on you (i.e. the consequences for you) is stated in concrete, factual words. The statements may occur in any order. Following the formula, a three-part assertive statement could be: ‘I feel annoyed when you don’t let me know you will be late, because I’m unable to reschedule my timetable.’

In a four-part ‘I’ message, the feelings are owned, the behaviour that is causing the feeling is described in concrete words, the effect of the behaviour is stated in concrete, factual words, and an alternative acceptable behaviour is offered. Following this formula, an assertive message could be: ‘I feel annoyed when you don’t let me know you will be late, because I’m unable to reschedule my timetable. I would like you to ring me and let me know you will be late.’ The fourth part of the message is used to suggest, initially, an alternative acceptable behaviour or to negotiate a behaviour that is acceptable to both people.

‘I’ statements/messages are assertive statements that help to send a clear message. ‘I’ statements can have two, three or four parts.
Owning your reactions

Part of being able to give successful ‘I’ messages is ‘owning your reactions’. This means being able to recognise and identify your feelings. One way to own your reactions is to use the following two-part feedback formula:

- Describe the other person’s behaviour.
- Describe your reaction to it.

In this way, the other person’s behaviour is linked with your reaction. For example, if you say, ‘When you shout, I feel afraid’, you are describing your reaction to their behaviour. You have identified your feelings. On the other hand, if you said, ‘When you shout, you frighten me’, you are blaming them or holding them responsible for your reaction.

Successful ‘I’ statements communicate in a non-threatening way that is acceptable to the other person. They do not blame or interpret the other person’s conduct. Aggressive statements often start with ‘You make me feel . . .’ and blame the other person for their behaviour and your feelings. Once you become skilled in using ‘I’ messages, you will frame them in your own words and may omit the words ‘feel’, ‘when’ and ‘because’. ‘I’ messages are particularly useful when people need to give and receive information and reach agreement.

Review Questions 3.5

1. Contrast assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours.
2. How can understanding and using the acronyms STAR and STAAAR assist a manager, supervisor or team leader to communicate in a performance appraisal?
3. a. What does an ‘I’ statement do?
   b. What is the purpose of assertion statements?
   c. What does ‘own your reactions’ mean?

Apply Your Knowledge

Assertion

1. Recall an instance in which someone gave you feedback that did not meet the verbal assertion guidelines discussed in this section of the chapter. In what ways did the person’s feedback fall short of the guidelines, and what could the person have done to improve the feedback?
2 Tips for assertion. Assume your team leader has requested you develop a list of assertion tips for distribution at the next team meeting. Develop the list of tips. (Include a paragraph outlining the benefits of assertion.)

3 Research assertive and submissive behaviour
   a Use the Web (or your library) to find articles about assertive and submissive behaviour.
   b Using the table below, differentiate between assertive and submissive behaviour by creating a list of assertive responses in column 1 and a list of submissive behaviours in column 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertive behaviour</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   c Use the table to conduct a survey (over the next week) to tally the number of times you see or engage in each of these behaviours by placing a tick against the type of behaviour in columns 2 and 4.
   d List at least two articles you used to find examples of the behaviours.

4 Work individually. Imagine your flatmate is driving you crazy: she uses your things without asking, she never does the dishes, and she often has her friends stay over without asking you first.
   a How would you respond assertively? How would you respond passively? How would you respond aggressively?
   b Which of the responses in the checklist here is typical of you?
   c Write two or three paragraphs detailing how you could come up with a reasonable solution together.

### SELF-EVALUATE YOUR SKILL

#### ASSERTIVE, AGGRESSIVE AND SUBMISSIVE NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal behaviour</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>Submissive</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posture</td>
<td>Upright and relaxed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leaning forward</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shrinking away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>Firm and comfortable</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chin pushed forward</td>
<td></td>
<td>Head down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>Direct and regular eye contact</td>
<td></td>
<td>Staring, often piercing or glaring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Glancing down with little eye contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>Appropriate, courteous and friendly expression</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rigid and set</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hesitant, even smiling when upset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Confident with appropriate speed, pitch and volume</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loud, fast and dramatic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Soft, trailing off at ends of words or sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms/hands</td>
<td>Relaxed, moving easily and reflecting the verbal message</td>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled sharp gestures with fingers pointing and jerky movements</td>
<td></td>
<td>Still or slow, not reflecting the verbal message</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement/walking</td>
<td>Confident and measured pace appropriate to the context</td>
<td></td>
<td>Overly confident and heavy or fast, deliberate, hard</td>
<td></td>
<td>Slow and without confidence, or fast and uncertain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The power of questions

Evonne and Andrew are managers in Metwell, an engineering company. In a conversation during lunch they disagree about whether employees should be encouraged to create online profiles on LinkedIn and other business-oriented social networking sites. Evonne views these connections as valuable to the organisation; she believes the online profiles help employees interact with others in the industry and build valuable networks that have the potential to translate into new ideas and potential leads.

Andrew disagrees, saying: ‘Encouraging employees to become more widely known in the industry only invites competitors to head hunt them for their own organisation.’

Evonne decides to ask Andrew questions to better understand his point of view and try to persuade him to her point of view.

Questions

1. Develop a set of questions Evonne could use in her interactions with Andrew. Include at least one open, closed, probing, reflective, challenge and hypothetical question.

2. By consciously applying the appropriate kind of questioning in her professional life, Evonne can gather information, respond, influence and persuade more effectively. Develop a short written presentation titled ‘The Power of Questions’.

3.1 Differentiate between personal, cultural and universal nonverbal communication, and explain how cultural norms affect the nonverbal part of the message

Nonverbal communication is either personal to the individual, common to the group or culture, or universal. That part of the nonverbal communication that is common to a range of people is a clue to acceptable patterns of behaviour, whereas nonverbal communication that is part of a person’s unique behaviour pattern creates a picture of the sender’s personality through their gestures and mannerisms. Universal nonverbal communication has evolved as part of our biological heritage. Universal nonverbal communication crosses cultural and national boundaries.

Interactions create a frame in which the meanings of the verbal and nonverbal parts of the message are communicated. The purpose of nonverbal communication in this process is to repeat, contradict, substitute, complement or accent the words in the message. Nonverbal communication can also be used to control the flow of communication. In addition, it can give information about interpersonal attitudes and emotions, and play a key role in how we present ourselves and in rituals.

3.2 Explain the roles and different aspects of nonverbal communication

The seven aspects of nonverbal communication are body movement or kinesics, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, vocal quality or paralanguage, the use of space or proximity, artefacts and the environment. A combination of these aspects makes up the nonverbal part of the total message.

3.3 Describe the listening process, and explain how active listening has value in personal and professional situations

Listening is a five-stage process of receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding to a message. While hearing is the physiological process of sensing sound waves, listening is a conscious knowing response. Listening requires concentration and deliberate effort to interpret and respond to the speaker’s message. A range of different types of listening—discriminative, listening for comprehension, dialogical or conversational, biased, evaluative, partial false, attentive ‘data-only’ and active listening—are used as people engage in personal and professional interactions.
The purpose of active listening is to focus on the speaker, invite them to continue, mirror the content and feelings in the message, and show empathy with the speaker. Attending, encouraging and reflective listening are separate listening skills, which are combined as people interact with one another. As well as using each of these skills, an active listener demonstrates completeness when they understand the speaker’s full intended meaning. Effective active listeners use nonverbal and listening skills that complement their spoken communication.

3.4 Discuss the role of questions and feedback in personal and professional interactions

At work, people need feedback about their performance and acknowledgement of their efforts. Feedback is the connecting, continuing or completing link in the communication process. The four types of feedback are informative feedback, specific feedback, negative feedback and positive feedback. Constructive feedback can be positive in the case of work well done; constructive negative feedback is about shortfalls in performance and how to make improvements. Constructive feedback is impersonal, goal-oriented, balanced, actionable and timely.

3.5 Distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion

Assertive people take responsibility for their actions and respect the rights of others. Their perception of messages is usually correct, and their approach to people is motivated and confident. Assertive behaviour demonstrates a high degree of openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, confidence and the ability to be ‘other-oriented’. It avoids both aggressive and submissive behaviour.

‘I’ statements let others know how you feel about a situation, a circumstance of their behaviour. Verbal assertion skills encourage open, honest exchanges, rather than defensive, self-protective responses. People are able to interact and respond appropriately to feedback and influence others to achieve results.

**KEY TERMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>active listening</th>
<th>feedforward</th>
<th>reflective listening</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aggressive behaviour</td>
<td>frame of reference</td>
<td>reflective statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artefacts</td>
<td>‘I’ statements/messages</td>
<td>reframing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assertive behaviour</td>
<td>listening</td>
<td>reframing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attending listening</td>
<td>nonverbal behaviour</td>
<td>summarising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barriers to listening</td>
<td>nonverbal learning</td>
<td>undercurrent language</td>
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<td>clarifying statements</td>
<td>paralanguage</td>
<td>universal nonverbal</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural nonverbal</td>
<td>paraphrasing</td>
<td>communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>personal nonverbal communication</td>
<td>verbal following</td>
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<td>cultural norms</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>encouraging listening</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS**

1. Work in small groups to discuss the following research conducted by Argyle and Ingham (1972), cited in Forgas (1986): *In a typical two-person conversation, people look at each other about 61% of the time, and their gaze coincides (mutual gaze) about 32% of the time. Mutual gaze lasts on average only about one second, while each individual gaze is usually about three seconds long. The same person will look more when listening (75% of the time) than when speaking (41% of the time).*

   a. What are the implications of these findings for the use of eye contact in business and other professional situations?

   b. Think of an interaction you have been part of when an error was made in the use of eye contact. What was the cause? What could have been done to avoid it?

   c. Report your findings in a large-group discussion.

2. Work individually. *’I’ language assertiveness*

   It is 3 pm. You feel tense because you have two telephone calls to make and a major piece of work to finish in the next two hours.

   A colleague asks you to help him immediately with the agenda for next week’s committee meeting. It has to be sent by email this afternoon.
Write a four-part assertive message in which you state that you are unable to help with the agenda. Follow the four-part ‘I’ message formula.

3 Work in small groups to discuss and record the following issues in detail.
   a Why are the skills of active listening and giving effective feedback so important to the leader of a small to medium-sized organisation?
   b Are the skills of active listening and giving performance feedback constructively as important to the leader of a large corporation? Give reasons for your answer.
   c Describe a time when you have seen the effects of giving feedback on performance destructively rather than constructively. What were the outcomes?
   d Are current changes in the business world placing more or fewer demands on leaders to use their interpersonal skills effectively? If more, what actions would you recommend to increase a leader’s effectiveness? If fewer, why?

Role-play: Active Listening

Form into groups of five. Nominate one person to play the part of Susan and one to play the part of Jacob. The other three act as observers.

Susan
You have walked past the supervisor’s office and witnessed Jacob, your colleague, presenting your report to the supervisor. You heard the supervisor say to him, ‘You’ve done an excellent job.’ You are angry because Jacob has presented your work as his own. You go to his office and wait for him.

Jacob
You have taken Susan’s report to the supervisor. The supervisor puts it aside and begins to discuss progress on the project you started last week. This project is now ahead of schedule. As you are about to leave, he says: ‘You’ve done an excellent job.’ You go back to your office to find Susan waiting for you.

Observers
You are to complete three tasks.
   a Use the ‘Active listening role-play’ checklist below to assess the listening skills used by Jacob as he responds to Susan’s anger.
   b List any barriers created by either Susan or Jacob.
   c Lead a discussion as a group of five and give feedback to the people playing the roles of Susan and Jacob. Suggest alternative responses they might have used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVER’S CHECKLIST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active listening role-play</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Did the person playing Jacob use:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a body posture and position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c facial expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that conveyed to you a feeling that Susan was being listened to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Did Jacob use:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b tone of voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c rate of speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that you felt comfortable with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Did Jacob provide enough encouragement for Susan to continue, either by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a minimal but positive responses, or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b supportive body movement?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXPLORING THE WEB

1. Learn more about nonverbal communication by viewing the Nonverbal Dictionary of Gestures, Signs and Body Language Cues online at <http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/6101.html> and browsing some of the entries in the dictionary.
   a. What is the nonverbal world?
   b. Explain the principle of nonverbal independence.
   c. What percentage of our communication is nonverbal? What makes it difficult to verify this figure?
   d. How does posture impact on the message?

2. Learn more about the benefits of active listening in personal and professional situations by viewing:
   a. ‘Active listening: hear what people are really saying’, by MindTools at <www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>
   b. Briefly outline the three degrees of active listening.
   c. What role does assertion play in active listening?
   d. Discuss the features that make active listening a model for respect and understanding.
   e. How can you make improvements in your nonverbal and listening habits?

BUILDING YOUR SKILLS

1. a. Develop a matrix with four columns. The purpose of the matrix is to analyse your nonverbal communication in three behavioural states.
   - In column 1 list the following five aspects of nonverbal communication: body movement, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, vocal qualities and use of space.
   - Label column 2 ‘Respect’, column 3 ‘Hostility’ and column 4 ‘Distress’.
   b. Using columns 2, 3 and 4, indicate which nonverbal communication you display for each of the five aspects of nonverbal communication to express each of the three emotional states.
   c. Reflect on your matrix. In columns 2, 3 and 4 indicate the nonverbal communication you would expect a person from a high-context culture to display. (Refer to Table 6.1, p. 133, for examples of characteristics of high-context cultures.)
   d. Understanding the different aspects of your nonverbal communication and how culture influences it (at least in part) is the first step in adjusting and modifying your nonverbal behaviour as appropriate for greater effectiveness in intercultural interactions. On the basis of this understanding, write a briefing note explaining to a team member (who will be representing your organisation at a global conference next month) the reasons for being willing to adjust their mindset and behave flexibly in intercultural interactions.

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