

Certified Travel Associate (CTA) Program

Professional Skills Course

*The Art
of Listening and
Communicating
Activities Workbook*

Lesson 1: The Nature of Interpersonal Communication

Quick Quiz

Test Your Understanding #1

Read the following example, then write the letter or letters next to the word that describes a corresponding element of the communication process.

A client walks into your office looking for help. You inquire “Hello, how may I help you?” just as your telephone rings. You finish the call, then repeat your question. The client responds by saying, “I need a vacation.” You invite him to take a seat at your desk.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| _____ Environment | a. a travel agency |
| _____ Sender | b. “Hello, how may I help you?” |
| _____ Channel | c. a telephone |
| _____ Message | d. you |
| _____ Receiver | e. your client |
| _____ Feedback | f. “I need a vacation.” |
| _____ Noise | g. in person |
-
-





At Work

Think of a recent interaction with a client that was especially productive.

What noise was present during this discussion (physical or psychological)?

How did you overcome it?

What did you do to make sure the meaning of your message was clear?

How did you clarify your client's message?

Did your attitude about your client or your job affect the way your conversation developed?

Ask yourself similar questions when an attempt to make a sale goes sour, or when your attempt to counsel an angry client results only in increased anger and frustration. Where did the breakdown occur? How could you have managed the process better?

How About You?

Are you a good communicator? Think about how you currently communicate, and circle T for true or F for false for each of the following statements.



- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. I always stop what I am doing when someone talks to me. |
| T | F | 2. I strive to listen to the words and emotions of the sender in all interactions. |
| T | F | 3. I am conscious of the nonverbal messages I send through various vocal qualities and my body language. |
| T | F | 4. I think consciously about the best time and place to deliver my message before I send it. |
| T | F | 5. I consider alternative methods of message delivery and choose the one that will have the greatest effect and benefit. |
| T | F | 6. I always follow through on promises in order to foster trust. |
| T | F | 7. I am conscious of the feelings of others. |
| T | F | 8. I openly solicit and act on advice from others. |
| T | F | 9. I solicit and give honest feedback when communicating with others. |
| T | F | 10. I encourage others to be all they can be, and I assist in their development. |

If you answered “true” to all of the statements, you probably are on your way to building powerful relationships. If you answered “false” to any of the statements, you need to work on improving your interpersonal skills.

From: *Coaching Skills* by Robert Lucas, McGraw-Hill, 1994. Reprinted by permission.



How About You?

Have you ever sensed that a client didn't trust you? Replay the scenario in your mind and examine your behavior. What communication behaviors led to the lack of trust?

What could you have done differently to improve the relationship?



How About You?

Which communication style best describes you?

Do the characteristics accurately describe your clients' perceptions of you?

If not, how do you filter the messages you send to alter your clients' perceptions?

Quick Quiz



Test Your Understanding #2

Can you name a strength and weakness for each of the styles?

Strength

Driver _____

Expressive _____

Analytic _____

Amiable _____

Weakness

Driver _____

Expressive _____

Analytic _____

Amiable _____



How About You?

Do any of the styles intimidate you or inhibit your ability to establish lasting relationships?

What interpersonal skills can you adopt to help you overcome the relationship barrier?



Quick Quiz

Test Your Understanding #3

Read the following true scenario, and answer the questions based on what you know about bypassing and verbal communication.

A travel agent and a new sales representative from a supplier were discussing the supplier's commission policy. The travel agent insisted that she always had received an override from this supplier, but every record the sales representative could find showed this agency had never received more than the standard commission offered by the supplier. Completely frustrated, the agent finally stammered, "Well, I got 10 percent commission in the past, so I'm entitled to the same override now." At that point, the sales representative realized that the agent's definitions of commission and override were the same, while her company defined override as any commission above 10 percent.

What type of bypassing occurred?

What caused the communication problem?

How could the error have been avoided?



Lesson 3: Nonverbal Communication



Time Out

What facial cues would you look for to determine if someone is being honest?



How About You?

How would you describe your handshake?

What does your handshake communicate?

What makes a bad handshake different from a good one?

Lesson 4: Listening

How About You?

Are You a Good Listener?

How would you rate yourself as a listener? Take this quiz to give you an idea of how you perceive your own listening effectiveness. Place a checkmark in the appropriate column. Answer based on how you actually behave, not on how you think you should behave.



	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. When someone speaks to me, I stop what I am doing to focus on what the person is saying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I listen even if I disagree with what is being said.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. When I am unsure of someone's meaning, I ask for clarification.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I avoid daydreaming when listening to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I focus on main ideas, not details, when someone speaks to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. While listening, I am also conscious of nonverbal cues sent by the speaker.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I consciously block out noise when someone speaks to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I paraphrase the messages I receive to ensure that I understood the speaker's meaning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I wait until I have received a person's entire message before forming my response.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. When receiving constructive criticism, I listen with an open mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Rating key: Always=5 / Sometimes=3 / Never=0. Add your total score. If you rated:

40-50	Your listening is excellent.	15-19	Your listening is fair.
30-39	Your listening is very good.	0-14	Your listening is poor.
20-29	Your listening is good.		

With this insight about listening skills, focus on the methods outlined in this chapter for increasing your listening effectiveness.

From: *Effective Interpersonal Relationships*, McGraw-Hill, 1994. Reprinted by permission.



How About You?

Do you know your emotional hot buttons? Everyone has subjects or words that evoke a defensive response. Below is a list of subjects. Next to each, identify the intensity level of your feeling, with 1 indicating a mild response and 5 indicating an extremely strong response. Then check whether your feelings are positive or negative about this subject. What other words would you add to your list?

Subject	Level of Response	Positive	Negative
Commission caps	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
Agent bypass (via Internet, supplier direct phone lines, etc.)	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
Card mills	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
_____	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
_____	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
_____	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
_____	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____



How About You?

Do You Talk Too Much?

Answer “yes” or “no”:

Yes **No**

1. Do you use any of these expressions frequently?

Are you listening to me?

Did you hear what I said?

You really need to hear this.

Listen up.

2. Do you find yourself interrupting others, or are you tempted to interrupt others with your thoughts or ideas?

3. When communicating with slow, deliberate speakers, do you find yourself finishing statements for them in the interest of saving time?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, try talking less, and listening more, during your conversations.



Time Out

Poor listening habits can serve as guideposts to more effective behavior. Beside each of the following characteristics of ineffective listeners, write the opposite behavior.

Ineffective Behavior

Effective Behavior

Attention to speaker’s style over message content

Emphasis on facts

Desire to ambush the speaker

Susceptible to emotional triggers

Quick to judge

Easily distracted



Time Out

Test Your Understanding #5

Write an appropriate paraphrase for each of the statements below. Be sure your response reflects the speaker's concerns.

1. Why don't you clean off your desk? It looks like a dump.

2. That was the worst flight I ever took. I'll never fly that airline again.



Quick Quiz

Test Your Understanding #6

For each of the following questions, determine what type of question it is (open or closed) and the primary reason for asking the question (to seek information, check interpretation, or clarify).

	Type of Question
1. How would you describe your ideal vacation?	_____
Reason _____	
2. How would you define "luxury" in the vacation you've just described?	_____
Reason _____	
3. So you're looking for a deluxe suite and gourmet meals, is that right?	_____
Reason _____	

Application Activities

Part 1: Adapting to Various Communication Styles

The following activity will help you recap what you've learned and test your understanding of how good interpersonal skills are particularly relevant to you in your role as a travel professional. Because communication style is a very personal thing, there are no exclusively right answers for this activity. However, suggested responses are provided in the Answer Key at the end of this booklet. Please write your responses to the best of your ability before you refer to our suggested responses. Feel free to reference materials contained in this course to help you formulate your answers. Specifically, you may want to refer to the section called Communication Styles in *Unit 1: The Nature of Interpersonal Communication* and the Supplemental Reading to assist you in this activity. Have fun!

Directions: Consider how your primary communication style relates to the other styles as you read the following four scenarios. Each scenario assumes you are a travel agent; if in fact you hold another travel-related position, simply tailor the situation so it is realistic for your own job setting. Base your responses on how you would adapt your style to your communication partner in each scenario. After you read each scenario, complete the Communication Profile provided for the appropriate individual. Use your accumulated knowledge of effective interpersonal skills to fill in the requested information. When you finish the activity, check your responses with the sample profiles provided in the Answer Key.

Scenario #1

On a rather slow morning in the office, a fashionably dressed woman in her late fifties approaches your desk for assistance. You say in a pleasant voice, "Good morning. How may I help you?" She quickly answers, "Yes, I'd like to go to Paris for two weeks next month." Having some time to spend on a thorough consultation with this client, you invite her to take a seat at your desk. She refuses, saying she prefers to stand because she is in a hurry. Before you ask her specific travel dates, you try to get a feel for other needs she may have, such as additional sightseeing that may affect her travel itinerary. Tapping her fingers on your desk, she looks you directly in the eye and decisively explains that she will be staying in Paris and asks you what other information she needs to provide you so you can determine the best airfare.

Communication Profile #1

The customer's primary communication style is: _____

The verbal and nonverbal cues I read to determine communication style include:

My objective of this interpersonal interaction is: _____

The verbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The nonverbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The listening skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

Scenario #2

Just before lunch, you receive a call from a client for whom you booked a tour package to Orlando about two months ago. You remember him as a good-natured father of two teenaged children who was very pleasant during all of your previous interactions. In his soft voice, he apologizes for bothering you but slowly tells you of his concern that he hasn't yet received his travel documents with just two weeks left before he is scheduled to depart. You express your appreciation for his concern and promise to look into the matter and call him back that afternoon. He calmly assures you there is no rush and warmly thanks you for your assistance.

Communication Profile #2

The customer's primary communication style is: _____

The verbal and nonverbal cues I read to determine communication style include:

My objective of this interpersonal interaction is: _____

The verbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The nonverbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The listening skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

Scenario #3

The owners of your agency have decided that a newsletter is just the marketing tool needed to help attract new customers and retain existing clients. They have appointed you and one of your coworkers to design and develop the newsletter. Your coworker has been easy to work with in the past and you look forward to working with him on this joint venture. At your first planning meeting, he comes armed with article and design ideas that he shares in rapid succession, emphasizing each idea with animated arm movements and facial expressions. He seems intent on persuading you to adopt his creative ideas.

Communication Profile #3

The customer's primary communication style is: _____

The verbal and nonverbal cues I read to determine communication style include:

My objective of this interpersonal interaction is: _____

The verbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The nonverbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The listening skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

Scenario #4

You've been working for several months with a young woman to help her plan her honeymoon trip to Bermuda. After many consultations, you've finally booked a package that you believe suits all her needs. It has been difficult to determine what travel experiences really appeal to her because she never appears excited or enthusiastic about anything you mention. Her main concern all along has been the specific costs of the trip, right down to how much she can expect to pay in tips. Now, her final payment is due in full or her reservation will be canceled. You need to call her this afternoon to remind her to provide payment today.

Communication Profile #4

The customer's primary communication style is: _____

The verbal and nonverbal cues I read to determine communication style include:

My objective of this interpersonal interaction is: _____

The verbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The nonverbal skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

The listening skills I will use to achieve my objective include:

Application Activities

Part 2: Analyzing Your Personal Listening Skills

The following activity provides you with an opportunity to assess your personal listening characteristics then develop and use a personal plan of action to improve your listening skills. Because the responses to the following activities will be based on your personal strengths and weaknesses, there are no exclusively right answers for this activity.

However, a sample Listening Plan is provided in the Answer Key at the end of this booklet. Please write your responses to the best of your ability before you refer to the sample for help. Feel free to consult materials contained in this course to help you develop your plan.

Overview

Section A of this activity asks you to identify your personal listening characteristics. This type of self-analysis is an important first step as you strive to improve your listening skills.

In **Section B**, you will develop a plan for improving your listening skills. Follow the directions in Part II to guide your responses.

Section C asks you to test your plan in a practice activity.

Section A: Analyzing Your Personal Listening Skills

Answer each question thoughtfully. Place an X in the appropriate column. After you've completed all the questions, write your score in the space provided for each question according to the scoring directions provided on the following pages.

	Almost Never	Occasionally	Often	Almost Always	SCORE
1. I pretend to be listening.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. I can't wait to display my knowledge.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. I listen only for facts.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. I interpret things logically without much regard to feelings.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. I listen only for things I like to hear.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. I do all the talking.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. I have a tendency to daydream when someone is talking.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. I find it difficult to maintain eye contact in conversations.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. I am constantly thinking of my next response.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. I steer the conversation to bring it around to what I want to talk about.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. I think about how the other person might react to what I say.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

	Almost Never	Occasionally	Often	Almost Always	SCORE
12. When the other person expresses an interesting point, I acknowledge it.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. I listen to the other person's viewpoint, even if it differs from mine.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. I take notes when necessary to help me remember.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. I try to listen to the speaker without judging or criticizing.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
16. I give some thought to the best time to say what I want to say.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. I think about the purpose of my communication.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
18. I let the other person finish talking before I react.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
19. I repeat in my own words what the speaker just said.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
20. I practice to improve my listening skills.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Directions for Scoring

Write the score in the space provided above for each statement, according to the following directions. Then add the individual scores to obtain your Total Score, and write that number in the space provided below. An analysis of your Total Score is provided in the Scoring Box.

For Numbers 1–10, give yourself the scores indicated:

- Almost Never: 4.
Occasionally: 3.
Often: 2.
Almost Always: 1.

For Numbers 11–20, give yourself the scores indicated:

- Almost Never: 1.
Occasionally: 2.
Often: 3.
Almost Always: 4.

Your Total Score: _____

Scoring Box

- 68–80 You are a superior listener. You already employ most of the effective listening strategies described in this course and should continue to refresh your knowledge and skills to remain effective.
- 56–67 Your listening skills are above average. You perform effective listening strategies better than most of your peers but should spend extra time concentrating on your weak areas in order to achieve listening excellence.
- 44–55 You are an average listener. While you practice many good listening strategies, you tend to adopt some of the poor listening behaviors described in this course. Decide which poor behaviors you exhibit, and concentrate on improving in those areas.
- 32–43 Your listening skills are fair. Many of the skills described in this course are unfamiliar to you, and a thorough study session combined with thoughtful practice will help improve your listening ability.
- 20–31 You are a poor listener. Take a close look at your responses to the statements above to determine your many weak areas, and carefully review the effective listening strategies described in this course to help you break your bad habits. Plan study and practice time to improve your listening skills.

B. Write your listening improvement plan.

- Step 1:** Choose five areas from among the behaviors you listed on your Improvement Worksheet, and write them after the words, *“I will increase my listening skill in the area of”* on the Listening Improvement Plan on the following page.
- Step 2:** Describe how you will attempt to achieve each objective. For example, if your objective is to “Resist distractions,” you might write “Turn off the ringer on my phone when I’m with a client.” Write a method for each objective after the words *“The behaviors I will use to accomplish this objective are”* on the Listening Improvement Plan.
- Step 3:** Establish a timeline. Give yourself time to implement the changes successfully (some behaviors will be more difficult to change than others for you), and write a realistic date that you believe you can accomplish each objective after the words *“I will accomplish this objective by this date”* on the Listening Improvement Plan. Four to six weeks generally is sufficient.
- Step 4:** Measure your progress. Each week, review your plan to determine your progress. You can feel confident that you have achieved your objective when the skill becomes natural, no longer requiring conscious effort on your part. When that occurs, write the date of accomplishment in the space provided on your Listening Improvement Plan.

After you have accomplished your first set of objectives, write a new set of five objectives, establish a new timeline, and continue to measure your progress. If one objective takes you longer to accomplish than the others on your list, simply carry it over to your new list and proceed. Your ultimate measure of accomplishment will come when your clients, friends, and coworkers begin to say, “You’re a really good listener!”

Listening Improvement Plan

I, _____, will commit myself to changing my listening behavior in the following ways during as many telephone and in-person interactions as possible.

Objective #1:

I will increase my listening skill in the area of: _____

The behaviors I will use to accomplish this objective are:

I will accomplish this objective by this date: _____

Date accomplished: _____

Objective #2:

I will increase my listening skill in the area of: _____

The behaviors I will use to accomplish this objective are:

I will accomplish this objective by this date: _____

Date accomplished: _____

Objective #3:

I will increase my listening skill in the area of: _____

The behaviors I will use to accomplish this objective are:

I will accomplish this objective by this date: _____

Date accomplished: _____

Objective #4:

I will increase my listening skill in the area of: _____

The behaviors I will use to accomplish this objective are:

I will accomplish this objective by this date: _____

Date accomplished: _____

Objective #5:

I will increase my listening skill in the area of: _____

The behaviors I will use to accomplish this objective are:

I will accomplish this objective by this date: _____

Date accomplished: _____

Section C: Putting Your Plan into Action

Remember, there is no substitute for good, old-fashioned practice. It's one thing to write a plan of listening improvement objectives, but it's quite another to actually put them to work.

Directions

- A. Write the five objectives you identified in your Listening Improvement Plan in the spaces provided on the Listening Skills Feedback Sheet on the following page.
- B. Ask a friend or coworker to help get you started on practicing your listening skills. Begin by explaining the following scenario to your partner, and ask him or her to assume the role of the dissatisfied client. You will play the role of the travel agent. Simulate a realistic 10- to 15-minute discussion based on how you would handle the consultation with this client. Concentrate on practicing your five listening objectives.

Trouble in Paradise*

Because your agency sends so many customers to the Caribbean islands during school breaks, you have been appointed the on-site coordinator during a holiday season in the Caribbean to help deal with any problems. Normally, problems are few, but this time one of your clients has been so obnoxious to the management of his hotel that he has been asked to leave. The problem started when he claimed that his room had bugs. He complained at length, in the lobby, and made such a fuss that the management told him he had 24 hours to check out. Now, he wants you to find him a new place to stay. This is a big problem. The island is packed, bursting at the seams.

You are now at the hotel to meet with your client. During your consultation, try to reach a mutually acceptable solution with him using effective communication and listening strategies.

C. When you have completed your simulated consultation, ask your partner to complete the following Listening Skills Feedback Sheet. How well does your partner feel you accomplished each of your listening objectives? Why or why not? Don't be discouraged if your partner noticed little improvement during this first attempt. Effective listening takes a lot of time and practice, and this dry run will better prepare you to practice while you're on the job or at home when distractions and pressures surround you.

Optional: Record the conversation so you can critique yourself.

**Adapted from *Travel Sales and Customer Service*, Roberta Schwartz, The Travel Institute, 1999.*

Listening Skills Feedback Sheet

Directions to Client

Fill out this worksheet to evaluate the listening performance of the travel agent in your simulated consultation from the "Trouble in Paradise" scenario. In the Performance Rating space provided, assign a number corresponding to your perception of the individual's skills for each of the listening objectives provided, as follows:

3 = Good 2 = Fair 1 = Poor

Write any additional comments in the space provided below.

Listening Objective

Performance Rating

Travel Agent: Write the five objectives from your Listening Improvement Plan here.

Client: Write 3 (Good); 2 (Fair); or 1 (Poor).

1. _____

2. _____

