

Soft Skills Module 5

Effective Communication: Listening, Speaking, Writing, Interpreting

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Summary	
<p>Goal:</p> <p>Equip students with practical, effective communication skills—listening, speaking, writing and interpretation.</p> <p>SMART Objectives: <i>Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-sensitive</i></p> <p>By the end of this module, students should be able to:</p> <p>Objective SS5.1: Be an active listener, listening with comprehension and understanding.</p> <p>Objective SS5.2: Speak clearly with efficiency and success in delivering the message.</p> <p>Objective SS5.3: Assess general non-verbal behaviors and respond effectively.</p> <p>Objective SS5.4: Interpret written information and respond suitably.</p> <p>Objective SS5.5: Write so others understand.</p>	<p>Instructor:</p> <hr/> <p>Delivery Method(s):</p> <p>Discussion; group activities, individual activities</p> <hr/> <p>Length:</p> <p>Six Lessons</p> <p>Total of 8 hours plus additional independent time for written activities and practice</p> <hr/> <p>Any Applicable Business and/or Soft Skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a Business Plan • Selling Secrets • Gaining the Customer Satisfaction Edge • Targeting New Markets <hr/> <p>Corresponding NLS Lesson #?</p>
<p>Take Away Message(s):</p> <p>The intent of this module is to assist students with communication skills that will serve them well as braille transcribers and micro-entrepreneurs in their communities.</p>	

Instructor Preparation

Title of Module: Effective Communication: Listening, Speaking, Writing, Interpreting

Instructor:

This module is one of practicality and application. During these and all subsequent lessons, encourage students to practice and apply effective communication skills in listening, speaking, writing and interpreting (printed materials, non-verbal behaviors, etc.).

All activities are based on the elements of effective communication applied to starting and operating a microenterprise.

Agenda – topics to be covered in the module and length of each item

<i>Topic: Communication</i>	<i>Time Allotted: 8 hours</i>
A. Communication	<i>(45 minutes)</i>
B. Active Listening	<i>(3.5 hours)</i>
C. Speaking Clearly	<i>(30 minutes)</i>
D. Non-Verbal Behaviors	<i>(1.5 hours)</i>
E. Interpretation of Written Information	<i>(30 minutes)</i>
F. Clear Writing	<i>(45 minutes)</i>
G. Creating a Master Checklist	<i>(30 minutes)</i>

Materials & Supplies – items needed in order to carry out the agenda and classroom activities

1. Handouts: Personal Listening Assessment (5.B.1), Listening Categories (5.B.2), Impressions (5.C.1), Focus Your Message (5.C.2), Non-Verbal Communication - Messages without Words (5.D.1), Observation Guide for Speaking Clearly (5.E.1), Emails Mnemonics Strategy (5.E.2), Social Media Do's and Don'ts (5.E.3), Writing Practice (5.F.1)
2. Foam ball/soft koosh ball
3. One minute timer/stop watch or clock
4. Small box without a lid

5. Slips of paper
 - a. (for the 1's) "You are the paraphraser – your job is to see how long you can keep your partner engaged in a conversation through active listening and by paraphrasing; remember you can only do paraphrasing – do not participate in the discussion."
 - b. (for the 2's) "You are the storyteller – choose one of the 'conversation topics' on the flip chart/board and talk about it."
6. Flip chart/pad with markers or board/markers for instructor
7. Video: 5 Things Not to Do on Social Media (5.E.4)

Classroom Preparation – *steps to follow when setting up the learning environment*

1. Students configured to facilitate group discussion as well as dyads and triads as needed
2. Writing paper and pencils for students
3. Flip chart/pad with markers or board/markers for instructor
4. Access to computer word processing
5. Adequate room to form a circle (standing up)
6. Ability to have chairs back-to-back and then face-to-face for an activity
7. TV or computer and screen ready to show the supplemental video

Curriculum Content

A. Communication

(45 minutes)

Objective SS5.1: Be an active listener, listening with comprehension and understanding.

CONTENT PRESENTATION AND LEARNER PARTICIPATION

Begin this series of lessons with the following discussion:

What is communication?

Have the group brainstorm answers/definitions. Facilitate by asking other questions that eventually lead students to responses that include listening, speaking, writing, and interpreting (non-verbal) skills.

Write responses on chart paper.

How do we communicate in today's world?

Responses should include phone (cell and landline), social media, internet, newspapers, radio, television, verbal, etc.

Write responses on chart paper.

How many of these forms of communication will you need to use in your home-based business? Put a checkmark ✓ next to those students identify.

Introduce the following basic questions to consider when practicing and applying effective communication:

What is the intent or purpose of the communication?

What is or needs to be communicated?

To whom is the information being communicated?

What do you know about the individuals receiving the information?

How are you going to communicate the information?

B. Active Listening

(3.5 hours)

Objective SS5.1: Be an active listener, listening with comprehension and understanding.

The target of the lesson is to assist students in becoming better active listeners resulting in higher levels of comprehension and understanding of customer needs.

PREINSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Have students do the **Personal Listening Assessment (5.B.1)**; a self-assessment of their listening skills and behaviors – give the answers but do not explain them; tell students the answers will become clear as they work through the lessons.

Answers: 1.T, 2.F, 3.F, 4.T, 5.F, 6.F, 7.F

Answers: 8-15 are personal/individual.

CONTENT PRESENTATION AND LEARNER PARTICIPATION

Pose the question:

What is the difference between listening and hearing?

Activity

This activity helps students understand the complexity of listening.

Write three questions on the chart paper or board so everyone can see them, and make sure they pertain to the students and will elicit some variety in responses; sample questions might be:

How did you hear about the braille transcription program?

What are your goals for the future?

What was your favorite subject or class in school?

If you could go anywhere, where would it be?

What type of books do you like to read?

Have students stand in a circle.

The instructor holds a small soft foam ball or squishy (koosh works nicely), says his/her name and answers one of the questions.

The instructor tosses the ball to a student who says his/her name and answers one of the questions.

This process continues until everyone has introduced themselves and answered one question.

Students return to their seats and write down peer students' names and any corresponding information they can recall.

Close the activity with a discussion of the ease and/or difficulty of concentrating and focusing, listening and remembering throughout the activity.

Activity

This activity promotes an awareness of what it feels like to listen to others and be listened to.

Ask students to generate a few "conversation topics."

Write them on chart paper or the board.

Introduce the "listening box" (small box, easy to hold, preferably no lid) as well as the "timer/stop watch or clock" which times each student for one minute.

Students can speak when they are holding the box; otherwise, they must listen and remain silent.

The instructor puts the box on the floor and allows any student to begin by picking up the box.

The student holding the box gives his/her opinion about one of the topics written on the chart paper or board (opinions must be directed toward the earlier generated topics, not new ones) within the one minute time period.

The student speaking, when finished passes the box to someone else; at that time the new student begins to speak for his/her minute about one of the topics on the chart paper/board.

Proceed until all have spoken.

After all have spoken, ask students to sit down and journal about their thoughts and feeling about the exercise; how did it feel to listen to someone else? How much can they recall? Did they go into any "tune-out modes?"

Next, introduce the **Listening Categories (5.B.2)** and ask students whether there were times that they wanted to respond in any or all of these ways; point out that none are good or bad, but that engaging in them does not promote active listening in the true form.

Review the definition of active listening and the tips at the bottom of the handout.

Activity

This activity promotes an understanding of the concept of paraphrasing to ensure clarity of understanding and present strong active listening skills.

The instructor and one student model the following interaction: the instructor asks questions, the student responds. The instructor (the paraphraser) then models good listening skills by paraphrasing what the student (the storyteller) said (e.g., so, what you are saying is that...).

The student sits down and the instructor asks for feedback from the rest of the students on how she/he listened. Then, the instructor introduces the concept of paraphrasing as a listening skill.

Ask students when they have paraphrased recently or to give an example of when they might do so, especially as a braille transcriber/contractor.

Have students discuss why paraphrasing is important.

Write phrases on the chart paper or board for the students to use in a paraphrasing role; ask students what else might be added as a prompt.

- What I hear you saying is...
- In other words you feel/think that...
- Am I correct in assuming that you think/feel that...?
- I think I understand where you are coming from; your thought is that...

Have students count off – 1, 2, 1, 2, etc. All the ones (paraphrasers) get a slip of paper that tells them their job is to see how long they can keep their partner engaged in a conversation through active listening and by paraphrasing – emphasize they can only do paraphrasing – not participate in the discussion.

Then give the twos (storytellers) a slip of paper that says choose one of the “conversation topics” (generated earlier in the lesson activity #2) listed on the chart paper or board and talk about it.

Students get into pairs (a one-paraphraser and a two-storyteller) and begin.

Note: the listening partner/paraphraser is not allowed to contribute in any way to the discussion other than by paraphrasing.

Finish the activity by having students write their thoughts/notes down describing how it felt for them to be in their particular role.

ASSESSMENT

Have students take the **Personal Listening Assessment (5.B.1)** again. This is a re-assessment of their listening skills and behaviors. Give the answers and have a brief discussion of the kinds of changes they see in their knowledge, skills and abilities.

Answers: 1.T, 2.F, 3.F, 4.T, 5.F, 6.F, 7.F

Answers: 8-15 are personal/individual.

C. Speaking Clearly

(30 minutes)

Objective SS5.2: Speak clearly with efficiency and success in delivering the message.

The target of the lesson is to assist students in preparing and presenting clear and efficient verbal or oral messages, successfully connecting with the listener.

CONTENT PRESENTATION AND LEARNER PARTICIPATION

Share the following as an introduction to Speaking Clearly with students.

This lesson focuses on being a good conversationalist. Being able to communicate orally is an essential skill required when in business and in most careers. When you are speaking there are several elements that should be considered, such as:

- Presenting organized ideas
- Speaking clearly
- Communicating appropriately to listeners/customers based on the situations
- Participating in conversations, both formal and informal
- Using correct grammar and respect diversity
- Asking questions when needed

Have students review the handout on **Impressions (5.C.1)**.

Next, review the handout **Focus Your Message (5.C.2)**.

Make sure to go in depth and fully explain each handout as well as provide the students adequate time to review, ask questions and become comfortable with the information.

Review the **Observation Guide for Speaking Clearly (5.C.3)** with students; clarify any unknowns and questions.

Using the three handouts: **Impressions (5.C.1)**, **Focus Your Message (5.C.2)**, and **Observation Guide for Speaking Clearly (5.C.3)**, have each student prepare for a conversation using you as the customer. The scenario:

You understand that the student, a braille transcriber, is new in town and you want to meet to learn more about her/his business, pricing structure, and skill levels. You have invited the student/new braille transcriber to come to your office to meet.

The rest of the students should observe during each role play and using the **Observation Guide for Speaking Clearly (5.D.2)** as a guide provide at least two positive comments and one area for improvement.

NOTE: this activity can be done over the course of a week allowing students to plan and prepare or can be done in one class. No role-play should be more than two to three minutes.

D. Non-verbal Behaviors

(1.5 hours)

Objective SS5.3: Assess general non-verbal behaviors and respond effectively.

The target of this lesson is to assist students in monitoring personal non-verbal behaviors as well as assessing and responding appropriately to non-verbal behaviors displayed by customers.

CONTENT PRESENTATION AND LEARNER PARTICIPATION

Introduce the concept of non-verbal versus verbal communication.

Activity

Have each student pick a partner.

Sit back-to-back with the partner. Make sure no parts of the chair/bodies are touching. Position the chairs so the partners can talk easily without seeing each other.

Once seated, partners should carry on a conversation for two minutes on any acceptable subject. The only restrictions are that the partners neither look at nor touch each other. They should communicate only by using words.

Next, partners turn around and face each other. Position the chairs at a reasonable distance to have a conversation. Continue the conversation for an additional two minutes.

Finally, partners stop talking but continue to face each other. For the next two minutes partners communicate only through facial expressions and appropriate gestures. Students should be sure to remain silent.

At the end of the activity have students discuss what occurred in each element – how did they feel, was communication better at certain points, were they comfortable or uncomfortable, etc.

Discuss with students the meaning of the term non-verbal communication.

Some elements and discussion points to capture as you facilitate the dialogue are:

- Your stance – present yourself as a person who knows – stand tall;
- How you sit – calmly and with a posture of interest;
- Facial expressions – show interest and enthusiasm;
- Eye contact – depending on culture, maintain eye contact; never wink or roll eyes;
- Gesturing and fidgeting – shows disinterest; wait to pack up until meeting is done;
- Nodding – lets your customer know you understand.

Distribute the **Non-verbal Communication - Messages without Words (5.D.1)** handout for review and discussion.

Review the **Observation Guide for Speaking Clearly (5.C.3)** with students; clarify any unknowns and questions.

Using the three handouts, **Impressions (5.C.1)**, **Focus Your Message (5.C.2)**, and **Non-verbal Communication - Messages without Words (5.D.1)**, have each student prepare for a conversation, using you as the customer. The scenario:

You understand that the student, a braille transcriber, is new in town and you want to meet to learn more about her/his business, pricing structure, and skill levels.

You have invited the student/new braille transcriber to come to your office to meet.

The rest of the students should observe during each role play and using the **Observation Guide for Speaking Clearly (5.C.3)** as a guide to provide at least two positive comments and one area for improvement.

NOTE: this activity can be done over the course of a week allowing students to plan and prepare or can be done in one class. No role-play should be more than two to three minutes.

E. Interpretation of Written Information (30 minutes)

Objective SS5.4: Interpret written information and respond suitably.

The target of this lesson is to assist students in the interpretation of written/printed information and provide a suitable response to customers.

CONTENT PRESENTATION AND LEARNER PARTICIPATION

This is a good time to introduce the **Word List (5.E.1)**. The purpose of this handout is to assist students with word meanings and spelling, particularly those that are common in the business venue. This tool should be used throughout the training and can be transferred to an electronic database once the business is in place and computer equipment available.

The following should be reviewed with students:

Email Culture

The key when receiving an email is to:

- Always respond, even if to say you will send a longer response later.
- Keep emails short and to the point.
- Do not get emotional.

Email is not an alternative when a phone call or face-to-face exchange is needed.

Also, review **Emails Mnemonic Strategy (5.E.2)** for addressing and writing email responses.

Social Media Culture

Review the handout on **Social Media Do's and Don'ts (5.E.3)**.

Watch the video:

5 Things Not to Do on Social Media (5.E.4)

Discuss with students what was learned/ observed.

F. Clear Writing

(45 minutes)

Objective SS5.5: Write so others understand.

The target of this lesson is to assist students in providing customers with informal and formal written documents and information in text that is clear and professional.

CONTENT PRESENTATION AND LEARNER PARTICIPATION

Business writing is somewhat different from writing a friendly letter or an essay for the GED test. Business writing always has a main purpose, which is stated in the first paragraph, similar to an essay introduction.

The business writing that a student might do as a result of a home-based business as a braille transcriber could include the following:

- Business plan
- Simple proposals and requests for qualifications
- Resumes
- Description of services
- Contracts for services
- Thank you notes
- Emails
- Reports and report summaries
- Progress status update
- Invoices
- Business correspondence/letters

Sample business letterforms can be reviewed and downloaded at:

http://www.google.com/images?q=business+letter+format&hl=en&rlz=1W1RNWI_en&prmd=ivns&ei=zBgSToiTCuXbiALegsmqAw&sa=N&aq=3&aqi=g10&aql=&oq=Business&oi=image_result_group&sa=X

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/BusinessLetter.html>

http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/index.cfm?guides_active=business&category1=37

Email templates and writing suggestions:

<http://ist.mit.edu/about/org/comm/email-templates>

ASSESSMENT

At the end of the paraphrasing activity in Topic B, students were asked to write a paragraph describing how it felt for them to be in their particular role (the storyteller or the paraphraser).

Based on that work and their paragraphs/notes, have the students write an informal thank you note to their partner.

➤ FOLLOW-THROUGH ACTIVITIES

Using the handout **Writing Practice (5.F.1)** have students write informally and formally to their customers; the writing should be based on the item chosen and could be done as a mock email or a WORD document as well as a handwritten note where appropriate.

In some instances, students may need samples and examples which can be downloaded from the internet on the sites listed above.

As students improve their MS WORD skills, they should be encouraged to put a portfolio together with the functional elements needed in the business writing category. This would include:

- Draft business plan
- Outline of what a simple proposal requires
- Basic outline with draft detail in response to a request for qualifications
- A resume
- A description of services that will be available through contracting
- Basic marketing descriptions
- Outline of a contract for services
- A template for business correspondence/letters
- A template for thank you notes
- A template for emails
- A template for progress status update
- A template for an invoice
- Sample reports and report summaries as applicable

G. Creating A Master Checklist

(30 minutes)

➤ FOLLOW-THROUGH ACTIVITIES

Master Effective Communication Checklist:

Put five pieces of chart paper on the walls labeled (each separately) Non-Verbal Behavior, Active Listening, Speaking, Clear Writing, and Print/Written Interpretation.

Give each student a marker and have them go around the room, writing their key ideas on each chart paper subject of good/effective communication skills and behaviors. Let students use their notes and handouts as needed.

Some examples of what might be on a master checklist – use clear language; vocabulary non-technical and understandable; no rambling-to the point; message clear; active listening skills (leaned forward, paraphrased, etc.).

Once students are done, create a master checklist for students to put in their notebooks to use in interviews and work-related tasks as they build their home-based business as a braille transcriber.

Soft Skills Module 5

Effective Communication: Listening, Speaking, Writing, Interpreting Handouts

Personal Listening Assessment (5.B.1)

Answer True or False to the following statements:

Statements	Now T/F	Later T/F
1. Many times errors happen not because of poor skills or performance but because of inadequate communication.		
2. Listening comes naturally to everyone; we all know how to listen.		
3. Listening and hearing is the same thing.		
4. An effective communicator listens more than talks.		
5. When someone is using effective listening skills they are focusing entirely on what is being said.		
6. What you hear is usually what was stated.		
7. When you are listening, you should just listen for the facts.		
8. A friend or family member would say that your listening skills are above average.		
9. Generally, you find yourself daydreaming when you try to listen.		
10. Most of the time you find yourself pretending to listen.		
11. You notice that you fidget a lot when trying to listen.		
12. You recognize you only focus on the points of interest to you.		
13. If you are listening to something you disagree with, you fold your arms and send a message that you have a different opinion or way.		
14. You find that you frequently interrupt and finish people's thoughts and sentences.		
15. You know you listen to part of the story, but then find yourself thinking about a story that will top the story being told (one upping the storyteller).		

Rank Yourself

Underline the word best describing your view of yourself as a listener:

Superior Excellent Above average Average Below average Poor Terrible



Listening Categories (5.B.2)



Active Listening Tips

Listen and reflect on two elements:

- Paraphrasing the speaker's thoughts
- Rephrase unspoken emotions (I can tell you feel...)
- Shut off your own voice when people are talking
- Identify your "tune-out mode" so you can notice and control it

5.B.2

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Impressions (5.C.1)

The following are important elements of verbal/oral communication.

Your Voice

- Pitch – highness or lowness
- Volume – loudness or softness
- Tone – emphasis and inflection
- Rate – speed
- Enunciation – distinction and correctness

Your Words

- Pronunciation – pronounce words correctly
- Grammar – usage and correctness matters
- Vocabulary – watch for over-use of words
- The “In” Words – Stay away from the popular phrases
- Slang and Swearing – Avoid at all cost

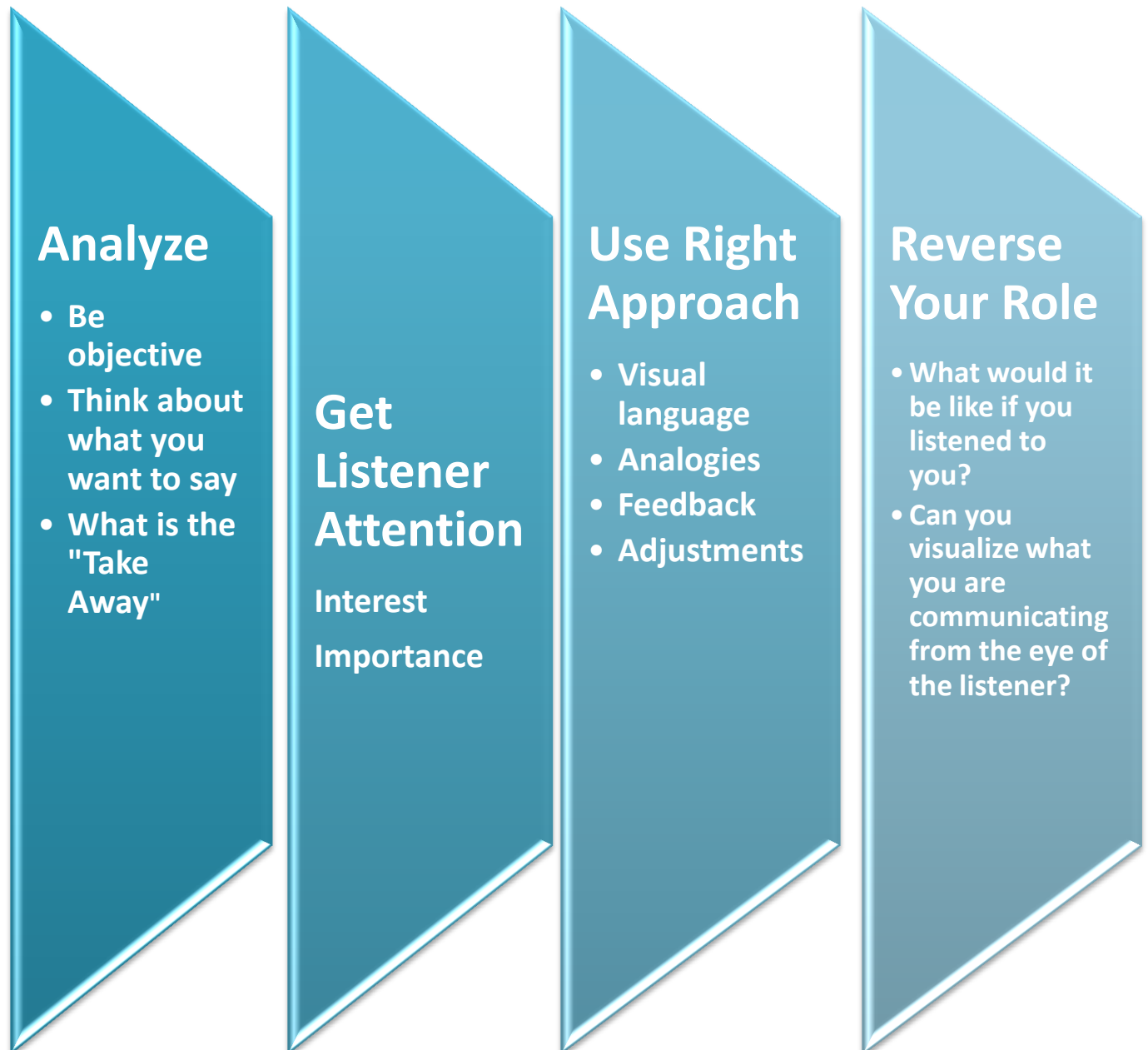
The Standard Stages in Conversation

- Introductions
- Warm-up or small talk
- Core conversation
- Wrap-up summary of decisions
- Exit with small talk

Diversity

- Use person-first language (a person who is blind)
- Avoid phrases and slang that target a culture or group
- Leave out the jokes

5.C.1

Focus Your Message (5.C.2)

5.C.2

Non-Verbal Communication – Messages Without Words (5.D.1)

Things that say something about you

Smiling	Frowning
Laughing	Crying
Standing too close to others	Sighing
Being stand-offish	The way you look
Hair	Clothing
Face	Body
Handshake style	Posture
Gestures	Mannerisms
Notebook/folder	Portfolio
Car	
Voice tone	Soft to loud Fast to slow Smooth to shaky

5.D.1

Soft Skills Module 5-20



Observation Guide for Speaking Clearly Activity (5.D.2)

Message Focus	Conversation Stages
Information understandable	Made introductions
Stated well	Pre-meeting small talk
Objective	Strong core conversation
Clear "Take Away"	Wrap-up summarized
Got customer attention	Exited with small talk
Focused on customer interests	
Understood customer need and importance	
Used visual (descriptive) language	
Used analogies	
Asked for feedback	
Made adjustments based on feedback	
Used appropriate language and words	
Pronounced words correctly	
Grammar was correct	
Did not use one or two words too many times	
Stayed away from the popular phrases	
Avoided slang and swearing	
Used person-first language (a person who is blind)	
Avoided phrases and slang that targeted a culture or group	
No bad jokes	
Non-verbal Communication	
Smiling	Laughing
Gestures good	Handshake style
Standing good distance to customer	Being stand-offish
Hair	Face
The way you look	Body
Clothing	Posture
Sighing	Frowning
Mannerisms	Crying
Notebook/folder	Portfolio
Voice tone	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitch – highness or lowness • Volume – loudness or softness • Tone – emphasis and inflection • Rate – speed fast to slow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smooth to shaky • Enunciation – diction/correctness

5.D.2



Word Lists (5.E.1)

	A	B	C
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
	D	E	F
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2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
	G	H	I
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2			
3			
4			
5			
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7			
8			
9			
10			

5.E.1



WORD LISTS (5.E.1)

	J	K	L
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4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
	M	N	O
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2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
	P	Q	R
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

5.E.1



WORD LISTS (5.E.1)

	S	T	U
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2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
	V	W	X
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2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
	Y	Z	
1			
2			
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5			
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7			
8			
9			
10			

5.E.1



Emails Mnemonics Strategy

Evaluate subject line

Make decision to respond

Answer email

Important points

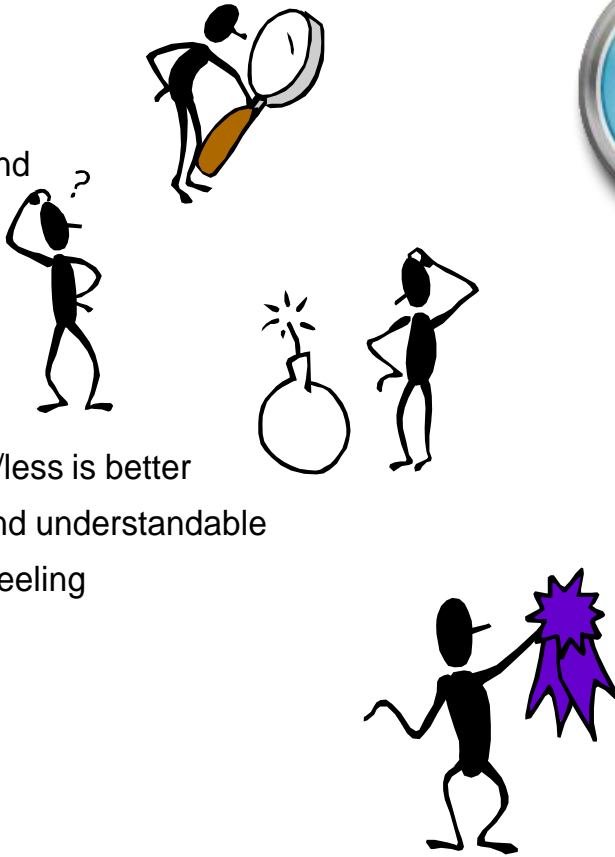
Look at response

Re-read – wordiness/less is better

Stated well – clear and understandable

Tone – thinking and feeling

Send



This strategy works well for students who encounter difficulty evaluating whether their response to an email is acceptable.

5.E.2



Social Media Do's and Don'ts (5.E.3)

- **Do** update your profile regularly.
- **Do not** put pictures on your social networking site that might embarrass you or send a negative message about you or your family.
- **Do** be very selective about which groups you join; your customers need not know what your preferences and choices are.
- **Do not** promote yourself without promoting others as well; it removes the sales-person mindset.
- **Do** play the offensive and stay away from the defensive posture and discussions.
- **Do not** bad-mouth anyone; it looks bad and your customers may wonder what you might say about them.
- **Do** keep personal information limited; too much can work to your detriment because customers want to build relationships but don't need all the personal detail.
- **Do not** forget others can see your family and friends unless you use the privacy controls.
- **Do** respond to comments and conversations from your customers; not to do so is rude and makes people wonder if you are networking to build relationship or just make money.
- **Do not** post or share links or things sent to you without checking them out first to ensure they are accurate.
- **Do** be positive; responding in a negative manner will not build customer relationships.
- **Do not** leap into social networking without a plan; managing the media takes time and requires a plan.
- **Do** remember that your customers and followers on a social networking site are human beings and deserve your utmost respect.
- **Do not** copy information from others and use as your own.
- **Do** create a social networking site and maintain it on a daily basis.
- **Do not** answer or respond to discussion, points of view, or posts when angry or offended; your response lays the foundation for your reputation and relationship with your customers.

5.E.3

Writing Practice (5.F.1)

- Introducing Yourself
- Asking for Someone
- Asking a Question
- Explaining Your Purpose
- Making a Request
- Complaining About Something
- Giving Unpleasant News
- Disagreeing with Someone
- Complimenting or Thanking Someone
- Leaving a Message for Someone
- Making Arrangements
- Updating the Work Status

5.F.1