

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION

In this section, we shall examine the field of communication to serve as a foundation to what follows in the course. Principally, we shall define communication; outline its elements, principles and its importance in academic and life in general. We shall also briefly examine the various types of communication.

Objectives of the topic

At the end of this topic, you should be able to:

- a) Define communication
- b) Discuss the elements that constitute communication
- c) Explain the importance of communication in academics and in life in general
- d) Outline the important principles of communication
- e) Discuss the various types of communication

What is Communication?

The term communication comes from a Latin word '*communicare*' which means to make common or share.

Therefore, communication is **a process** by which **meaning is exchanged** between individuals or an individual and a group through **a common system of symbols, signs and behavior**.

- The definition of communication is shared in the Webster's Dictionary as "sending, giving, or exchanging information and ideas," which is often expressed nonverbally and verbally.
- A plethora of authors have defined communication including Gamble and Gamble, who define communication as a desirable or accidental transfer of meaning.
- Communication is also a process of sharing or exchanging ideas, information, knowledge, attitude or feelings through certain signs, symbols and behavior.
- Communication is more than transfer of ideas and thoughts; it is a dynamic process of action and interaction towards desired goals.

1.2.1 Key phrases of definition

- a) **Communication is a process:** it is an activity which is an exchange of meaning that is dynamic. Communication is therefore not static. Communication as a process is a concept whose critical element is the changing nature of its occurrence.
- b) **Communication involves meaning:** meaning is shared understanding of message. The understanding of the meaning of another person's message only occurs when you elicit common meanings for words, phrases, and non-verbal messages.
- c) **Communication is a system of symbols, signs and behavior:** the system may be in form of language, gesture, demeanor, facial expressions e.t.c.

Importance of Studying Communication

Communication is central to human life. You cannot avoid communication and you will engage in communication nearly every minute of every day in your life. In addition, communication plays a major role in every aspect of your life. Effective communication therefore both enhances your daily life and at the same time solves problems in your professional and personal life. Communication experts believe that poor communication is at the root of many of our problems.

Therefore there are various reasons why studying communication is important:

- a) **Studying communication helps in understanding and insight of oneself and others.**
 - Self awareness is the way we see ourselves. Most of our self knowledge comes from communication with ourselves (intrapersonal communication) and communication with other people (interpersonal communication). The message and feedback we receive from others helps improve our self concept.
- b) Studying communication and using it effectively can lead to more positive feelings of ourselves. **Effective communication can improve our self worth** by enabling us to positively project ourselves in what is called **image management**.
- c) Studying communication can **increase our knowledge about human relationships** because studying communication includes learning about how people relate with one another and about what communication is appropriate for a given situation.
- d) Studying communication can **teach us important life skills**. For instance it can help us **acquire**

You should try to visualize your readers; their desires, problems, emotions, circumstances and possible reaction to your communication.

The following actions can ensure that your communication is considerate:

- Focus on 'You-attitude' instead of 'I' or 'We'
- Show audience benefit or interest in the receiver
- Emphasize positive pleasant facts

Look at the following examples:

NEGATIVE EMOTION/EXPRESSION	TRANSFORMS INTO
Anxious	A little concerned, expectant
Confused	Curious
Destroyed	Set back
Disgusted	Surprised
Failure	Learning
I hate	I prefer
Insulted	Misunderstood
Lost	Searching
Painful	Uncomfortable
Stressed	Busy
GOOD WORD	GREAT WORD
Attractive	Gorgeous
Confident	Unstoppable
Curious	Fascinated
Fast	Enthusiastic
Fortunate	Blessed
Interesting	Captivating
Like	Relish
Nice	Fantastic
Quick	Explosive
Smart	Gifted

Ask the following questions to test your communication for consideration:

be affecting your work and even your household.

Important aspects of time management

1. We have realized that there is a lot of time, which we do not usually put to effective use. However, we cannot control time but only plan to use it effectively.
2. Planning your time is a useful activity, as a student you must think and carefully plan your daily routine.
3. You will have to be self-disciplined and work hard. It takes a committed student to come home after a day's work, and sit down to study.
4. When you work hard and succeed (study and pass examinations), you will be motivated to continue and complete the course, which you have started.
5. You will need to be flexible in your schedule, because there will be unforeseen problems and unavoidable happenings. However when you fail to do what you plan at the time you have planned, then you must plan to catch up with what you have missed.

Most of all, you must organize your study environment and ensure that there is little distraction so that you create study mood every time you embark on your study.

If you do not have a space of your own to study at home, you will have to negotiate with the family members on how to share the facilities that are available. Some of us might be residing near public libraries, or have space at your work place. You negotiate with your self to find suitable time when you can study in that available space outside your home. You can also find that opportunities exist at the university for the use of the study facilities there, so you need to plan when you can use those facilities once in a while.

Besides identifying and planning for the study space, you should also identify and plan the best period to study. Human beings are programmed in a way that there are certain learning periods. This is the period when a person is ready to learn and understand more effectively. To some people it is early in the morning when there is little disturbance, to others; late in the night is preferred, when the environment is quiet. These periods are believed to produce major learning effect. So you need to identify your own critical learning period and put it to effective use.

GROUP/PEER WORK

Face-to-face

After you have established the members of your course who live around you or colleagues who are willing to work with you, you will now need to plan for the meetings with them. You must draw a programme and establish objectives for your meetings, so that you are not meeting to review your frustrations and end up not accomplishing any work.

When you consult with your peers and colleagues, you have a chance to ask questions and even express your opinions and also an opportunity to discuss pressing issues or those that you are not sure. When you discuss questions among your peers you will be more informed and can distinguish various concepts with ease. You will also feel responsible for your own learning and in that case you will definitely be motivated.

Do not however engage in unplanned for group or peer work. It will not be productive. You ensure that you have an identifiable aim of the group whenever you sit down. Allocate time to that activity that you wish to carry out to ensure effectiveness.

Correspondence

Group or peer work can be undertaken through correspondence. You need to identify colleagues and friends whom you could share your work with by correspondence. Here you will be talking to one another by post, e-mail, telephone, and even short messages. This will be very practical and useful especially as you work on your assignments. You may want to seek clarification of a task facing you, share your findings, or seek approval from the

other writings by several contributors. The intervals in which they are published could be fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, or once a year. Periodicals include:

- i) **Journals**, which are publications by a society, institution or professional body containing news, proceedings, transactions and reports of work contained in a particular field of study e.g. communication, linguistics, philosophy, political science e.t.c.
- ii) **Magazines**, which contain varied information written by various writers. They deal with general topics, and are non-professional and non-technical. Examples include *Parents, Adams, Time* and *Newsweek* magazines.
- iii) **Newspaper**, which contain recent news and may be published daily or weekly. The news items generally include politics, sports, business and advertisements among others.

6. Textbooks

A textbook is book written specifically for use by those studying for examination in a particular system. Textbooks discuss subject areas in details and are the main material found in academic libraries. They include most of course texts used in the university.

7. Recreational books

These are books read for leisure or entertainment and may not be meant for serious study. This includes mainly fictional works.

B. Non-printed information sources

These sources of information are those that are not books or periodicals or journals. These information sources are audio-visual or visual and they include materials such as films, video tapes, slides and internet material which is in soft form. Most of these materials require special handling and are an important source of varied information.

Organization of information sources in the library

Libraries do have a wide and enormous variety of information, which must be organized to make it easy to access by library users. As a library user, you need to understand how the sources are organized in order to benefit from information they contain. Library information sources are organized in two ways: **classification** and **cataloguing**.

a) Classification

Classification is arrangement of documents in a logical order according to their degree of likeness by either subject or form. Classification enables librarians to place documents in a particular order and the user to be able to locate these documents in particular places in the library. There are various classification schemes used in libraries. The common ones in Kenyan libraries are:

- i) **Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)**, which was invented by Melvi Dewey. This classification uses numbers to create division between subject areas and the topics. In this system, the main subject area is indicated numerals from number 1-999. The sub-division within the subject areas are further denoted by numerals 1-999 and those are separated from main subject area by a decimal i.e. 1.35, 685.7, 23.867.
- ii) **Library of Congress Classification (LCC)** was created by library of congress in America. Most libraries in Kenya use this system. The system uses alphabetical letters from A to Z which are used to classify the main subject areas. For instance:

A – General works.

B – Philosophy and psychology

Spend time thinking about and planning each question

Do this before you start writing it up (eg. 5–10 minutes per question, leaving 30–35 mins for writing up). Don't be panicked by the 'scribblers'.

- **Read questions carefully**, underline key words etc. Notice if there are different parts to cover. Don't be sidetracked by similar questions you have tackled in the past eg. in TMAs. Remember the aim is to answer the specific question set, not just to air knowledge.
- **'Brainstorm'** – jot down relevant ideas as they come to you, in the answer book. Thinking about the questions should already have started to 'home you in' on relevant course material eg. particular unit or part of unit. Note down main themes and arguments, ideas and concepts plus authorities, illustrations and examples; often just a word or phrase is enough to capture a point – pattern / spray notes can be useful here. Do not censor ideas or the flow may dry up, you can strike out anything irrelevant afterwards, if the flow gets stuck write something silly like 'fish and chips'. Sometimes thinking about the TV programmes can jog your memory. If you're aware of any material that should be included but you just can't call it to mind, then 'send a message to your brain' and leave it (remember how many names etc. often come back to you when you stop trying to remember them).
***NB** Where a question is block related, material from that block should be to the fore but you can still cross refer to other parts of the course or to summer school material where relevant. Indeed examiners praise those who recognise interconnections in the course and can use material across the course to illustrate themes and issues.*
- **Sort out** the jotted points into a sensible sequence. Just put a number by each point to indicate the order you decide on. Cross out anything that doesn't look relevant; remember that exam answers should have an introduction, main body and conclusion just like TMAs.

Some final points on planning

- Examiners' reports praise evidence of planning – it leads to better structured answers.
- Jot plans in the answer book and mark them off neatly afterwards to indicate rough work, but make sure examiner can still see them – examiners want to see signs of planning!
- Some students like to plan the answers first, while others prefer to take each in turn – do what suits you best.

Writing up answers – some points

- There's no need to write out questions (unless it *helps* you to focus) as it can waste valuable time, but keep referring back to the question in your answer to keep you on course and show that you are addressing it.
- Do not forget introductions and conclusions. Use introductions to indicate clearly how you intend to tackle the question. If the question is at all ambiguous, state how you have interpreted it. Do not let your argument 'peter out', but draw it together clearly in a conclusion.
- Remember, the examiner does not know you, so cannot assume you know something that is not there. So do not be afraid to 'state the obvious'. Express yourself as clearly as you can.
- If you suddenly remember an important point, write it in a box with an arrow or asterisk to show where it *should* have gone – so you don't spoil the flow.
- Try to write legibly.

NB By adopting a stage-by-stage approach like this, you are not asking your mind to do too much at once. This makes for better answers. With piles of scripts to mark the examiner will warm to **your** relevant, well organised, clearly presented and legible answers!

Timing – remember to stick to timing as rigidly as you can:

- Remember how much time you have per question. Keep a careful eye on the time. When you are coming towards the end of the time allotted to a question, try to round it off and then move on to the next. Resist the temptation to over-run.
- If the worst comes to the worst and you do run short of time for the last question, put something down. A plan in note form is unlikely to scrape a pass. Probably better is to start the answer and finish with an

indication of where it was leading ie. *'Had I had time I would have ...'* **Best of all is not to get into this situation, so learn to budget your time carefully.**

A few practical hints – the following will help to avoid unnecessary worry or problems:

- Get well organised beforehand eg. check carefully when and where you have to go; make sure you have a spare pen; wear suitable clothes, you don't want to be too hot or cold in an exam.
- Take along anything (within reason) that will comfort you – sweets, a flask of coffee, a good luck charm, a photo, for instance of your family or your tutor, to calm or inspire you.
- Get to the exam in good time – you don't want anything to fluster you.
- If you are early avoid talking to others – it can be depressing.
- Once in the exam room, find your place, settle in, get your equipment organised, unwrap sweets etc. Do not let others disturb you.
- If you feel upset then write down on the paper how you feel – it can release tension.
- Afterwards avoid post mortems. Let a decent interval elapse and only then think back and try to learn from the experience.

One Last Comment – the strategies outlined in this handout are not intended as hard and fast rules but simply as initial guidelines that you may find useful. Examination technique, like revision technique, is a very personal thing, and what works for one person can be unhelpful for another. It is important to learn through experience what works for *you*, but some initial advice can form a starting point.

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