

Academic Success for Student Veterans Communication

Communication can be difficult for anyone. Veterans can sometimes experience increased difficulties when talking with civilians, as communication is often less direct or murky. There are also many ways to communicate with people, and sometimes the *intent* of our message can get lost. This handout offers a few things to consider when communicating with people and a blank template on the last page to apply what you have learned.

What you say – The word-for-word content.

How you say it – The volume, speed, pitch, and tone.

- Tone can be particularly important to pay attention to. What you're saying can be perceived different ways with different tones.
- For example, if you want to convey a kind message, this will be perceived differently if a sarcastic tone is used.

How you *look* when saying it –

Personal space: How close are you to your audience? Consider how distance and/or proximity makes your audience feel.

Body language: What degree of interest or emotion is your body communicating?

For example, a body turned away might convey disinterest or feeling threatened. Having crossed arms communicates feeling closed off or defensive.

Eye contact: Are you or your audience paying attention to each other? Low eye contact might convey low attention or anxiety. Looking at your phone or other things communicates that full attention is not present. However, eye contact can be perceived differently in different cultures.

Facial expression: The look on your face conveys your feelings about and level of attention to what is being said. A 'blank' face impacts perception just as much as active expressions do.

Who your audience is – Friends, family, peers, professionals, professors, boss, etc.

We often modify how we communicate with people based on who our audience is. We typically do not communicate in the same way with our professors as we might with our friends. It's useful to think about who the audience is and then modify what you say and how you say it to match the audience appropriately.

How you are communicating – Face-to-face (in-person or a video call), phone call, email, text, etc.

- Each means of communication has pros and cons.
- For example, have you ever received an email that sounded rude or unsupportive, but when you talked with the person later, they said that wasn't their intention? Email might be a quick way to reach out, but you lose out on tone or how each person views and reacts to the message.

What your *emotions* are – What are your feeling with the message? What feelings would be useful for your audience to know?

For example, you might feel irritated. How could your irritation impact the message? Would your audience be open to experiencing your irritation, or might it put them on the defense? Your emotions are valid, and it can be useful to notice how emotions impact the perception of the message.

Consider your *intention* – So why are we breaking communication down this way? We all have intent behind what we want to say, such as wanting to problem-solve, learn information, communicate a feeling, etc.

The intent of our message may be misinterpreted by the audience whenever the intent is overshadowed by other factors of communication. Being aware of these factors can help you think about what things might be useful to modify during future conversations to help guide the audience closer to your message's intent.

Conversation Planning

Consider the different aspects of communication to help you prepare for an upcoming message you want to convey. Use this worksheet to help you prepare.

My audience:	
What I want to say:	
Intent or goal I want from this conversation:	
Means of communication: (Example: face-to face, email, etc.)	
What are the pros/cons/limitations of this kind of communication?	
Emotion: How do I feel about the message? Is it useful for my audience to hear it? If not, what might I want to show instead?	
How I will sound: (Example: volume, speed, tone, etc.)	

Academic Success for Student Veterans

To learn more, visit VA's free online
Academic Success for Student Veterans Course at
www.VeteranTraining.va.gov/success/index.asp

<p>How I will look: (Example: personal space, body language, eye contact, expression, etc.)</p>	
--	--