

memos, email messages, reports, proposals, minutes, notes, professional summaries, and so on. Both professionals and students need excellent writing skills to survive and excel in their pursuits as there is hardly any academic or professional activity that does not require writing skills.

Table 1.6 Writing Skills*

General	Academic	Professional
	Writing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal letters • Personal e-mail messages • Notes • Comments • General articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination answers • Project reports • Lab reports • Synopsis • Thesis • Dissertations • Abstracts • Research papers • Scientific articles • Classroom notes • Lecture notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical reports • Industrial reports • Project proposals • Business proposals • Business letters • Electronic mailing • Memos • Notices • Agenda • Minutes • Technical abstracts • Job applications • Resumes

*The list is not exhaustive.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

As communication is a complex process, it is desirable to take care of communication interference and the barriers in communication that may hamper the smooth flow of effective communication. These barriers may emanate from either the sender/receiver or the circumstances of communication. However, we need to avoid them to become effective communicators. In real communicative situations, any interference or noise, as it is commonly referred to, may complicate the communication process and interfere with our message. Communication barriers arise during the communication process and may confuse the listener or reader, create misunderstanding and confusion, and may sometimes lead to communication breakdown.

A careful analysis of communication barriers reveal that they are generally created by

- improper encoding,
- bypassing,
- frame of reference,
- physical distractions,
- psychological and emotional interference, or
- cultural differences.

Let us discuss some of these barriers to communication in greater detail.

Improper Encoding

Improper encoding is a recurrent barrier in the process of communication. Since there is a lack of understanding on the part of the receiver, it leads to confusion and misunderstanding. Messages should be presented in a linguistic code familiar to one's audience. The sender must consider the cognitive knowledge the receiver has of the communicative code that is being used. If the audience is not able to follow the language/dialect, a communication breakdown will definitely occur. In addition, selection of an inappropriate medium or linguistic form also leads to communication breakdown due to misunderstanding or confusion.

Communication barriers include improper encoding, bypassing, frame of reference, physical distractions, psychological and emotional interference, and cultural differences.

Bypassing

The term 'bypassing' refers to misunderstanding resulting from missed meanings because of the use of abstract words and phrases on which both senders and receivers do not agree. Bypassing is probably the most common communication barrier that you have to deal with. Words mean different things to different people. Age, education, and cultural background are three of the more obvious variables that influence the language a person uses. In order to avoid bypassing, you should use familiar words with concrete meanings so that there is no scope for confusion. Moreover, it is also necessary to know the background of your audience.

For instance, an Indian asked his Arab colleague why he was a bachelor at the age of forty. The Arab replied innocently, "because of dowry...". The Indian responded, "You should not have been so greedy." The Arab was upset and confused because he could not understand why his Indian friend considered him greedy. There was a communication breakdown.

'Dowry' for an Indian is the money that the groom takes from the family of the bride while 'dowry' for an Arab is the amount of 'mehar' that the groom has to pay to the father of the bride.

Frame of Reference

Your weakness in viewing others within your frame of reference may also lead to confusion and misunderstanding. The moment you interpret others' point of view from your angle, you allow your preconceived notions and prejudices to start working for you. Your frame of reference is individual to you as it is based on your experiences, exposure, education, personality, and several other elements peculiar to you. In order to avoid communication failure, you have to be sensitive to this fact and try to put yourself in the other person's position.

Physical Distractions

Physical distractions can easily disrupt communication. For example, you are trying to give an oral presentation in the classroom but the room temperature is very high and there is no air-conditioner or fan in the room. Your discomfort may cause communication failure because a person who is physically uncomfortable can be neither a good speaker nor a good listener. You should avoid any physical discomfort during communication.

Psychological and Emotional Interference

Any psychological or emotional turbulence or disturbance can prove to be a barrier to effective communication because it leads to lack of interest and concentration. Feelings of sadness, fear, anger, anxiety, or jubilation influence our reception and receptivity to others' ideas. Communication is a purposeful activity based on rationality and reason and one must assure that one is not emotionally charged (for example, very excited/angry/nervous) before one takes part in a communicative interaction. One may find it difficult to concentrate on the content of the message if one is emotionally charged. Over arousal of emotions may adversely affect both encoding and decoding. Whether you are a sender or a receiver, it is necessary that you try to focus on the content of the message.

Intercultural Differences

As noted earlier, it is the receiver who assigns meaning to message cues and meanings are assigned in terms of a receiver's frame of reference. This interpretation of meaning can create misunderstandings during intercultural communication because the sender and the receiver belong to different cultures and share different values. In fact, our values are our personal guides to thought and behaviour, and exert a strong influence on us. We should be sensitive to cultural differences and take into account the values of our listeners/readers while communicating with them.

Checklist for Communication Barriers

- Know your audience before you communicate with them. Try to know their needs, perceptions, and expectations from you.
- Try to experience the world from the receiver's perspective.
- Use an appropriate and effective personal style and avoid using a negative or angry tone.
- Use an appropriate form and style of communication.
- Encode your message well.
- Avoid physical and psychological barriers.
- Listen and read carefully.
- Be precise and to the point. Avoid information overload.
- Be open, frank, and positive.
- Appreciate and understand cultural differences.

Progress Check 6

Study the following communicative situations to identify communication barriers in them. If the situation involves a communication barrier, tick Yes but if it does not involve a barrier, tick No.

- (a) One of your colleagues has misbehaved with you. You are very upset and you want to complain to the director of your company.
Yes/No
- (b) Suppose you are working in a company and you have thought of a brilliant idea to solve the technical problems of your company but you are not sure whether your colleagues will agree with you or not. You are very nervous as you do not know the response of your colleagues. However, you want to share your ideas with all your colleagues.
Yes/No

- (c) A friend wants to know why you are doing B.Tech in Computer Science and Engineering. You are not very clear about the reasons for joining the course but want to respond to his query.
Yes/No
- (d) You have some problems with one of your assistants. He has insulted you. You are very angry and upset, and immediately want to express your feelings to your immediate boss.
Yes/No
- (e) You have to attend a meeting where you have to present a proposal but you are very disturbed because your sister is very sick.
Yes/No
- (f) You are not happy with the internet facilities in your department and want to propose major changes. You want to share your innovative ideas with the head of the department.
Yes/No
- (g) You want to propose major changes in the computer facilities provided by your institution. You want to share your innovative ideas with all the students of your class.
Yes/No
- (h) Your communication teacher is very angry with you because you did not submit an important assignment as per the deadline set by him. You want to explain the reasons for the delay. You go and meet him personally.
Yes/No

EXERCISES.

1. Please list below the names of persons with whom you have communicated in English during the last three days—even if only for a moment. Answering the following questions will provide you with the guidelines and basics of your communication:
 - (a) List of names
 - (b) With how many people did you actually communicate?
 - (c) What were the reasons for communicating with each person?
 - (d) What did they communicate about?
 - (e) What were the forms of communication that you used?
 - (f) How important is it to be able to communicate?
 - (g) What would it be like if we could not communicate with others?
2. Write short notes on the following:
 - (a) Ideation in technical communication
 - (b) Informal channels of communication
 - (c) Downward communication
 - (d) Organisational competence
 - (e) Communication barrier
3. Answer the following questions as briefly as possible:
 - (a) What is communication?
 - (b) What are the steps in communication?
 - (c) What makes technical communication different from general communication?
 - (d) Which communication channel is the most important? Give reasons to support your answer.