# Chapter 2: Interpersonal Communication

## Assertive Behaviour

Learning Objective 2.1: Distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion and other-orientation

### Review Questions 2.1

**1a Contrast assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours.**

A person who behaves assertively acknowledges his or her rights as an individual as well as the rights of others. He/she has high levels of self-esteem, confidence and a positive self-concept. An aggressive person aims to win at all cost regardless of the negative effects on others. He/she is often in conflict and others dislike him/her. The submissive person is self-denying, unable to assert him or herself and may appear insecure and anxious.

**1b Describe the features of verbal assertion.**

A verbally assertive person states their wishes, thoughts and feelings clearly, openly and confidently while understanding other people’s point of view and without coercing them to relinquish their needs. Assertive people control their emotions and interact positively to focus on action and results.

**2a What does an ‘I’ statement do?**

‘I’ statements are assertive statements that help to send a clear message. They are a way of sharing emotions and letting others know how their behaviour is perceived and how it affects you.

**2b What does ‘own your reactions’ mean?**

‘Own your reactions’ means being able to recognise and identify your feelings.

**3a Briefly explain what it means to be other-oriented.**

Rather than simply focusing on their own interests, skilful interpersonal communicators consider the perspective, feelings and attitudes of the other person. To be other-oriented means to consider the other person’s thoughts and feelings when deciding how, when and where to communicate a message.

**3b Contrast the likely outcome from self-focused, self-absorbed communication with the outcome from other-oriented communication.**

Self-focused, self-absorbed, egocentric communicators focus on their self-interest without regard for the other person. Failure to consider the other person and to adapt the message to their needs, experiences and personality, or to the time and place of the interaction, may hinder communication. Rather than achieving the intended communication purpose, barriers may arise.

A person who is other-oriented is aware of other people’s thoughts, feelings, goals and needs and able to respond in ways that offer them support. An other-oriented person behaves thoughtfully, honestly and with respect for self and others. Rather than just agree or give in to the demands of others, they remain true to their own values and beliefs, and interact with integrity using verbal assertion, ‘I’ messages, positive nonverbal communication, and a range of listening and questioning skills. Other-oriented communicators are willing to adapt their message to the receiver, and to the situation, to ensure understanding and achievement of goals.

## The Role of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objective 2.2: Distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion and other-orientation

### Review Questions 2.2

**1a Identify the seven aspects of nonverbal communication.**

The seven aspects of nonverbal communication are:

* Body movement (kinesic behaviour)
* Physical characteristics
* Touching behaviour
* Vocal qualities (paralanguage)
* Space (proximity)
* Artefacts
* Environment

**1b What is the purpose of each of the five main categories of body movement identified by Ekman and Friesen?**

The five categories of body movement and the purpose of each are:

* Emblems: To reinforce or replace the words
* Illustrators: To accentuate or emphasise a word or phrase, or to complement what is said
* Affective or feeling displays: Unconscious displays reflect feelings, whereas intentional expressions can disguise or hide feelings
* Regulators: To maintain and control the flow of speaking and listening. Regulators indicate whether to continue, repeat, elaborate or change from speaker to listener
* Adaptors: To display instinctive responses

**1c Briefly explain the four types of space that dictate the rules of proximity in a society or culture.**

Hall (1969) identified four distances that people maintain between themselves and others:

* Intimate space is 0-45 cm.
* Personal space is 45-120 cm.
* Social distance is 1.2-3.6 m.
* Public distance is 3.6 m to out of sight.

**1d What part do artefacts play in nonverbal communication?**

Artefacts are objects used to convey nonverbal messages about self-concept, image, mood, feelings or style. Many artefacts are common to the group. Others (particularly clothing) are individual and highly visible, and may create a positive or negative first impression.

**2a Develop a list of up to five examples of nonverbal communication that strengthens or reduces the impact of verbal communication.**

Answers will vary, but some examples include vocab characteristics such as laughing, crying, sighing, yawning; vocal qualifiers such as pitch level; vocal segregates such as ‘uh huh’ and ‘um’ and silent pauses; along with other types of nonverbal communication such as body movements, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, proximity, and the use of artefacts.

**2b When faced with mixed signals between the verbal and nonverbal message, which part is a listener most likely to believe?**

Most likely, listeners will believe the nonverbal message.

**2c Explain why they are likely to believe that part.**

A nonverbal message that does not align with the spoken message can contradict the verbal component of the total message. The message is two-edged because the facial and vocal expressions, postures and gestures do not match the words. The percentages for the three components that make up total feeling in Mehrabian’s (1971) formula (see p. 30) show that facial expressions have the greatest impact on the message. The cues in the vocal qualities have the next greatest impact. The experiment shows that, when we are resolving the general meaning of an inconsistent message, words make up the smallest percentage of the message.

**3a List three universal communication body movements.**

A smile, tears, and expressions of surprise.

**3b Discuss with examples at least three aspects of behaviour influenced by a nation’sculture.**

* Linear-active cultures are calm, factual, task-oriented, decisive and highly planned, and prefer doing one thing at a time—for example, Germans, Swiss and Britons.
* Multi-active cultures are warm, animated and loquacious, and prefer to plan and do many things at once—for example, Latin Americans, Arabs and Italians.
* Reactive cultures are called ‘listening cultures’. They are courteous, accommodating, compromising and respectful—for example, Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese.

**3c Discuss strategies you can use to build positive intercultural relationships.**

Positive intercultural relationships can be built by acknowledging cultural differences and developing cultural awareness and sensitivity. Development of an other-orientation towards people from other cultures and a willingness to move away from your cultural mindset in order to behave flexibly in intercultural interactions improves intercultural relationships.

**4a ‘Any nonverbal communication needs to be seen against related cultural norms’. Explain this statement.**

National cultures influence how people communicate, behave, conduct work, negotiate, and solve challenges, problems and conflicts. The combination of values (beliefs) and behaviours they share supports cultural norms. Deference to cultural norms regulates communication (verbal and nonverbal) and interactions between those in the culture.

**4b Identify and compare characteristics of a high-context and a low-context culture.**

In a high-context culture, a large part of the message is influenced by the background and basic values of the communicator and is implied in the message’s context. Typical characteristics of high-context cultures are high sensory involvement (high-contact touch behaviour and close proximity due to low personal space needs). The message conveys only a limited portion of the meaning in what is said and must also be interpreted in terms of how and where it is said, and the body language of the speaker. Time sense is polychromic, so things may happen simultaneously and proceed at their own pace.

In a low-context culture, the words in the message are explicit and nonverbal cues have less impact on the intended meaning. Typical characteristics of low-context cultures are low sensory involvement (low-contact touch behaviour and high personal space needs). The words in the message convey explicitly most of the meaning in the communication. Nonverbal cues have less impact. Time sense is monochromic, so things happen one at a time and in sequence, and planning and punctuality are a priority.

### Apply Your Knowledge

#### Work individually

**1 Reflect on a recent communication interaction in which someone gave you feedback that met the verbal assertion guidelines discussed in this section of the chapter. Did that person understand you? Did your interaction have the intended effect? How did the interaction make you feel?**

Answer: Personalised answers required

**2a Use the table to conduct a survey (over the next week) of assertive and submissive behaviour. Record examples you observe of assertive responses in column 1 and a list of submissive behaviours in column 3.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Survey findings** | | | |
| **Assertive behaviour** | **Outcome from assertive behaviour** | **Submissive behaviour** | **Outcome from submissive behaviour** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**2b In column 2, identify the outcome from assertive behaviour; and in column 4, the outcome**

**from submissive behaviour.**

Answer:

Personalised answers required.

**2c In a short written answer, suggest interpersonal strategies that could change the**

**submissive responses in column 3 into assertion.**

Answer:

Personalised answers required.

**3 Imagine your shared house mate is driving you crazy: she uses your things without**

**asking, she never does the dishes, and she often has her friends stay over without askingyou first.**

**3a How would you respond assertively? How would you respond passively? How would you**

**respond aggressively?**

Answer:

Personalised answers required.

**3b Write two or three paragraphs detailing how other-orientation could help you come up with a reasonable solution together.**

Answer:

Personalised answers required

**4a Differentiate the four different nonverbal communication roles identified by Argyle (1983) in a short written answer (about 250 words).**

Argyle identified four different nonverbal communication roles:

* Communicating interpersonal attitudes and emotions. From birth, we see and read messages sent by nonverbal communication. It is an innate part of our social behaviour ‘used for negotiating interpersonal attitudes, while the verbal channel is used primarily for conveying information’ (1983, p. 44).
* Self-presentation. The self-presentation role conveys information about our self-concept, image and feelings. Artefacts such as badges, clothes and hairstyle send information about the self nonverbally.
* Rituals. The patterns of behaviour used in rituals and ceremonies, such as university graduations, school speech days, engagements and weddings, confirm social relationships and send messages about status or changes in status (such as from undergraduate to postgraduate).
* Supporting verbal communication. The role of nonverbal communication in supporting verbal communication is shown in vocal cues such as timing, pitch, resonance, rhythm and articulation. They support the verbal message.

**4b Brainstorm to create a list of examples of each of these roles.**

Answer: Examples included above, but students may generate other examples as well.

**4c In which of the four nonverbal communication roles do you feel most comfortable?**

Answer: Personalised answer required

**4d In which of the four roles do you feel least comfortable?**

Answer: Personalised answer required

**4e What actions could you take to make yourself feel more comfortable in that role?**

Answer: Personalised answer required

#### Work in groups

**5 Work in pairs.**

**5a Discuss a situation when interpreting nonverbal messages through your own gender and cultural rules caused miscommunication.**

Answer: Personalised answers required

**5b Describe the results of the miscommunication.**

Answer: Personalised answers required

**5c Suggest strategies you could use to bridge the differences between background and culture.**

Answer: Personalised answers required, but students should suggest strategies that deal with acknowledging cultural differences and developing cultural awareness.

**5d Report back to the large group.**

Answer: Personalised answers required

**6 Work in pairs by standing together. While person A stands still on exactly the same spot, person B positions themselves comfortably in relation to person A. Person B, who has made the decision on comfortable distance, then says what made them choose their position. Person A, who is standing still, then talks about how they feel—that is, whether person B is standing too close, the angle, the amount of contact, the impact of height difference, gender issues, body size and body space.**

Answer: Personalised answers required

## The Listening Process

Learning Objective 2.3: Describe the listening process, and explain how active listening has value in personal and professional situations

### Review Questions 2.3

**1a Identify the five stages of the listening process.**

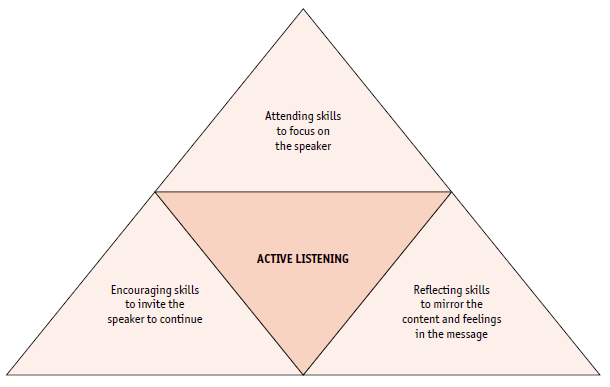
Listening is a five stage conscious, knowing response to the message in which the listener hears sounds, interprets those sounds and attaches meaning to the sounds in the message. The five stages are: receiving the verbal and nonverbal messages; understanding the speaker’s thoughts and emotions; remembering and retaining the message; evaluating or judging the message; and responding or reacting to the message.

**1b Briefly outline the abilities of an effective evaluative or critical listener.**

An effective evaluative or critical listener has the ability to: form an opinion about what is being said; assess strengths and weaknesses, agreement and approval; listen to the speaker’s ongoing words and at the same time analyse and relate what is being said to existing knowledge and rules; assess the objectivity of what is being said; evaluate what is said against own values and assess as good or bad, ethical or unethical; distinguish between subtleties of language and comprehend the inner meaning of what is said; think critically and ask questions; and weigh up the pros and cons of an argument when the speaker is trying to persuade a change in behaviour or beliefs.

**2a Explain the cluster of active listening skills.**

Active listening is empathic listening without two-way emotional involvement to the verbal and nonverbal components of a message. Bolton (1987) describes active listening as a cluster of attending, encouraging and reflecting skills used together in order to pay attention to the content and feelings that comprise the whole message. See Figure 2.2.



**2b Think of a person you regard as a good active listener, and then think of one who is a poor active listener. Identify three aspects of their listening techniques that make them either a good listener or a poor listener.**

Answers will vary depending on the characteristics of the chosen person, but points should be discussed with reference to the cluster of active listening skills identified in 2a.

**2c When is active listening most useful?**

One profession where an active-listening approach is essential is marketing and sales.

**2d List the benefits of using active listening skills.**

Active listening:

* helps the listener to bypass the personal filters, beliefs assumptions and judgements that can distort the speaker’s message
* acknowledges and provides feedback to the speaker, as well as verifying what the listener has heard
* enables the person to reach their own decisions and form their own insights
* confirms communication.

**3a Briefly explain four barriers to effective listening caused by the listener.**

Barriers to effective listening caused by the listener can include: boredom; dislike for personality or physical appearance of speaker; a desire to change the speaker; prejudging; intrusion of own values or attitudes; drawing early conclusions; selective listening; perception by the listener that the speaker lacks credibility; and preoccupation with other matters.

**3b Choose one of the barriers and discuss behaviours the poor listener can use to overcome the barrier.**

Answer: Personalised answer required.

## The Role of Questions and Feedback

Learning Objective 2.4: Discuss the role of questions and feedback in personal and professional interactions

### Review Questions 2.4

**1a Provide three examples of ineffective questions, and explain why they are ineffective.**

Answers will vary, but students should draw upon the types of ineffective questions included in Table 2.11, which include:

* Multiple questions that cover a number of issues
* Ambiguous or vague questions that confuse
* Implied value questions that reflect your values
* Aggressive questions that attack the other person
* Leading questions to get the answer you want
* Rhetorical questions that do not need an answer

**1b What is the purpose of open questions? Provide an example.**

Open questions encourage the other person to share their more personal feelings and thoughts. An example is ‘What seems to be the problem?’

**1c What is the purpose of closed questions? Provide an example.**

Closed questions usually elicit a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer and thus can close down communication. An example is ‘Is there a problem?’

**2a Discuss the characteristics of effective feedback.**

Effective feedback is always timely, appropriate and constructive.

**2b Identify five types of feedback used in organisations, and explain the purpose of each type.**

Five types of feedback, along with the purpose of each, are:

* informative feedback: to show understanding and to reinforce positive behaviour or results
* immediate and specific feedback: to describe what has been done, or needs to be done, rather than judging or threatening the other person
* positive feedback: to acknowledge the role and contribution of the other person
* negative feedback: to correct and change unsatisfactory behaviour or results
* no feedback at all: to procrastinate and avoid any unpleasantness.

**3a What does reframing do?**

Reframing recasts or reframes the words of the speaker to create new perspectives. This helps provide a new frame through which to view a concept or situation.

**3b What is the purpose of verbal following?**

Verbal following probes more deeply into what the speaker has said.

**3c Discuss strategies you can use when receiving feedback.**

Answers will vary, but some strategies students should identify are:

* being open, receptive and assertive
* separating objective and subjective information
* listening, paraphrasing and asking questions
* avoiding emotional responses such as defensiveness, aggression, excuses or blaming others
* considering feedback information and focusing on areas of improvement
* incorporating useful feedback, planning future outcomes, taking action and following up.

### Apply Your Knowledge

#### Work in groups

**1 Work in pairs to practise attending and encouraging listening skills. Take turns to act as speaker and listener. As the speaker, choose a controversial topic on which you hold a very definite position, or a topic you feel strongly about, and speak to your listener about this for three minutes. Use familiar, comfortable language you both normally use and understand.**

As the listener, use the following guidelines to focus your listening:

1a Show your interest in the speaker by your body movement. Face the speaker. Make eye contact. Lean forward, keeping an open posture.

1b Notice the speaker, keeping an open posture.dy movement. Face the speaker. Make e spoken message.

1c Use feedback to invite the speaker to continue by using minimal responses.

1d Ask as few questions as possible. However, if you do ask questions, use attending and encouraging questions.

1e At the end of this exercise, discuss with one another your effectiveness as listeners. Refer to points 1a to 1d.

1f Think about your own ineffective listening behaviours. Choose two and decide how you could improve these behaviours. Practise using them over the next week.

Answers 1a–1f:

Personalised answers required.

**2a Share situations when barriers to listening have adversely affected a group of people or an organisation.**

**2b Choose one of the situations and discuss:**

* **What were the barriers?**
* **What was, or could have been, done to overcome them?**
* **How effective in eliminating the barriers was/would have been this intervention?**

**2c Report your findings to the large group.**

Answers 2a–2c:

Personalised answers required.

**3a Briefly discuss the outcomes from effective questions.**

**3b What is the value of open questions in professional situations?**

**3c Choose three types of ineffective questions and identify the problem(s) caused by each.**

**3d Discuss strategies to overcome or avoid these problems.**

Answers 3a–3rd:

Personalised answers required.

### Activities and Questions

#### Work individually

**1 It is 3 pm. You feel tense because you have to respond to three emails from clients and finalise a major piece of work in the next two hours. A colleague asks you to help him immediately with the agenda for next week’s committee meeting. It has to be sent by email attachment this afternoon.**

**Write a four-part assertive message in which you state that you are unable to help with the agenda. Follow the four-part in the next two hour**

Answer:

Personalised answer required.

**2 Givens (2016) points out that age in which you state that you are unable to help with the agenda. Follow the four-part in the next two hours. A colleague asks you to help him immediately with the agenda**

**2a Compare and contrast the kinds of nonverbal messages you give in your professional life and your personal life.**

**2b What, in Givenstrast the kinds of nonverbal messages you give in your pro**

Answers 2a–2b:

Personalised answers required.

**3 Assume your team leader has requested you to develop a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation on listening and feedback tips for distribution at the next team meeting. Develop the presentation. (Include at least two or three slides outlining the benefits of active listening.)**

Answer:

Personalised answer required.

**4 Reflect on interpersonal skills and how they help you in your current work situation or future career.**

**4a Nominate one behaviour pattern that interferes with your effectiveness at work, and identify one technique you could use to alter and improve this behaviour.**

**4b List four nonverbal behaviours that would be congruent with the new technique you have identified and aim to use to replace the old ineffective behaviour.**

**4c Describe a time when you have seen the effects of giving feedback on performance destructively rather than constructively. What were the outcomes?**

**4d Explain why the skills of active listening and giving effective feedback are important to your workplace performance.**

**4e Write a description of your findings in a short information report, and explain how the demands of the current business workplace require people to use their interpersonal skills more effectively.**

Answers 4a–4e:

Personalised answers required.

**5a Develop a matrix with four columns. The purpose of the matrix is to analyse your nonverbal communication in three behavioural states.**

* **In column 1, list the following five aspects of nonverbal communication: body movement, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, vocal qualities and use of space.**
* **Label column 2 st the following fi ‘Hostility’ and column 4 ‘Distress’. 5b Using columns 2, 3 and 4, indicate which nonverbal communication you display for each of the five aspects of nonverbal communication to express each of the three emotional states.**

**5c Reflect on your matrix. In columns 2, 3 and 4, indicate the nonverbal communication you would expect a person from a high-context culture to display. (Refer to Table 5.1 for examples of characteristics of high-context cultures.)**

**5d Understanding the different aspects of your nonverbal communication and how culture influences it (at least in part) is the first step in adjusting and modifying your nonverbal behaviour as appropriate for greater effectiveness in intercultural interactions. On the basis of this understanding, write a briefing note explaining to a team member (who will be representing your organisation at a global conference**

**next month) the reasons for being willing to adjust their mindset and behave flexibly in intercultural interactions.**

Answers 5a–5d:

Personalised answers required.

#### Work in groups

**6a People from different countries communicate in different ways. Briefly discuss typical characteristics of the three types of culture identified by Lewis.**

**6b Identify possible interpersonal communication barriers that may arise in business interactions between those from a linear-active culture and those from a reactive culture.**

**6c Provide an example of universal nonverbal communication, and suggest how the timing, energy and use of that innate nonverbal behaviour can be shaped.**

Answers 6a–6c:

Personalised answers required.

**7a Brainstorm and list the factors that contribute to effective listening.**

**7b Compile a short group report that:**

* **describes the main purpose of encouraging listening and reflective listening**
* **defines the term n purporasing’ and explains its purpose as a listening response**
* **defines the term n purporasing’ and explains its purpose as a listening responsetiming,**
* **defines the term n purporasing’ and explains its purpose as a listening respons**
* **explains the importance of effective listening and other-orientation in workplace activities.**

Answers 7a–7b:

Personalised answers required

### Case Study

#### Is Bella really listening?

**1a Identify the ‘I’ message in the case study.**

‘We’re trying to avoid a situation like that occurring again, which is why I need your help.’

**1b Is Emily an other-oriented communicator? Justify your answer.**

Answers will vary.

**1c Comment on the methods Emily has used to help Bella understand the message and the importance of implementing the innovative program successfully.**

Answers will vary.

**2 Discuss aspects of nonverbal communication that would indicate Bella is distracted rather than listening.**

Answers will vary but could include:

* Not making eye contact
* Not nodding to show comprehension
* Body posture that indicates distraction or boredom.

**3 How is Bella likely to feel, given the way in which Emily gave feedback about the need for good communication? Justify your answer.**

Answers will vary, but Bella may feel more engaged and empowered because Emily framed the situation as Emily needing Bella’s help.

**4 Develop a set of questions Bella could ask to check her understanding of Emily’s and the team’s plans.**

Answers will vary.

**5 Describe the type of listening that would help Bella understand Emily’s messages accurately and fully.**

By engaging in comprehension listening, Bella would be able to focus on the content of Emily’s message and understand accurately and fully.