Communication happens between the one who communicates that is sender of information and one who responds or the receiver. Both have an important role to play for smooth and efficient communication. Listening is one of the important elements of communication. A message is said to be well communicated only if it is listened by the receiver and responded properly. Many people find talking more interesting than listening.

**Meaning**

Listening and hearing are two different concepts. Listening is a conscious activity which involves both physical and intellectual functions. It is a dynamic process. In other words, when a person carefully pays attention to the words that he hears and understands them he is said to be listening. Hearing is the physical activity carried out by the ear involuntarily. Whether a person wants to hear a sound or not, the ear will accept. Listening on the other hand is different. Even while sounds of the words are heard by the receiver, if the receiver is inattentive and uninterested, he may not understand the message. He will not be able to become a part of the communication. Thus, listening is an active process while hearing is a passive activity.

Listening means understanding the message given by the speaker and interpreting it correctly. It can be achieved by improving patience and concentration.

**Features of listening**

A good listener enhances the quality of discussions. Following are features of listening:

1. A dynamic process: Effective listening is the characteristic of a good communicator. It is an active process in which the listener pays attention to the message, spoken and not clearly spoken by the speaker. He then interprets and evaluates the message. Giving
feedback is important to show involvement in dialogue. Feedback can be in gestures or simple sounds of agreement.

2. Aims: Depending upon the audience, the aims of listening are different. Sometimes it also depends on the content or the speaker. The audience sometimes appreciates the views and ideas expressed by the speaker. e. g. during the speech of a political leader in his rally. Sometimes they listen and empathize with the speaker e. g. students listening to experiences of alumni. A listener sometimes listens to selectively only that content which is relevant to him. Judges in any competition always have a critical mind and listen with the aim of evaluating the speaker.

3. Obstacles: Certain problems can affect the process of listening. Following a few of them:

a) Force: if the audience is forced to listen to the speaker, they cannot concentrate.

b) Language: if the audience is not well versed in the language in which the speaker speaks, they may not be able to understand the message even if they are willing to pay attention.

c) Emotional barrier: if the listener is upset or disturbed emotionally then he will not be able to pay complete attention to the speaker.

d) Environmental problem: noisy environment or uncomfortable space can disturb the listener, affecting the listening process of the audience.

1. Retention of information: the listener interprets and understands the speaker’s message. However, after a period of time, not all the information listened can be retained by him. To increase the retention of the listeners, speakers should take aid of visual aids and examples to communicate the information. The information should be presented in such a way that it relates to every audience, so they can retain it for their benefit. Taking notes while listening to the speaker can help the listener to have reference points with him even after a long time.

2. Requires patience: Listening requires involvement in communication. A good listener is one who listens patiently to the speaker and makes a mental note of all points covered by him. A listener should patiently wait for his chance to speak. In case of discussions or debate, a listener should wait for an opportune moment to speak about his views. After attentive listening he will
be in a good position to score points for him. Patient listening allows the listener to understand the speaker and his message well. Thus the listener doesn’t make any opinions based on ill judgment but based on proper information. Listener should avoid interrupting the speaker unnecessarily.

3. Listening can be improved: There is formal training for improving communication skills in reading, writing and speaking. There is no such training available for listening. Listening requires a correct attitude and interest. This positive attitude can be brought by developing the willingness to listen. By bringing discipline and self-control one can improve his listening skills.

Importance of effective listening

Studies have shown that human brain’s listening capacity is much higher than its speaking capacity. We should utilize this feature of our brain to develop effective listening. Listening not only improves communication but also develops good relationships and delivers good results. Following points bring out the importance of listening:

1. Effective communication: The listener is an essential part of communication. Effective listening ensures clear transmission of information from speaker to listener. By attentive listening the listener can appreciate the speaker’s efforts to communicate properly. He can also bring out defects in the speaker. E.g. students who listen attentively can point out if any wrong information is given by the teacher, or convey to him during the lecture that the concept is not clear.

2. Develops better understanding: By effective listening misunderstandings can be avoided. Since sometimes there is no written record of spoken message, misunderstandings can occur.

3. Improve relationships: It can help to solve several problems in relationships. Elder members of the family feel satisfied and loved when they get a chance to share their experiences with people who listen carefully to their talk. Parents can help identify problems of their children if they listen to them attentively and look for unspoken messages and emotions in their talk.
4. Help to obtain information: The speaker expresses his ideas and emotions through his talk. Effective listening can help a person to get information from the talk directly or indirectly. The listener can develop his own ideas based on the information given by the speaker.

5. Helps in making decisions: Listening to the concerned groups ideas and opinions can help authorities make proper decisions. For e.g. by listening to the suggestions and opinions of both the superiors and juniors, management can make decisions that can benefit the organization as a whole. It can help the organization to form better policies which offer solutions to the grievances of its employees.

6. Provide encouragement: Effective listening provides encouragement to both the listeners and the speakers. Speakers get encouraged to communicate more effectively looking at the involvement and response of the listeners. Listeners are encouraged to participate in the communication when they listen effectively especially during group discussions. Effective listening equips a person with an open mind. It helps him explore new ideas, appreciate other people and also evaluate them based on their ideas.

VERBAL AND NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The method of communication differs in all cases. It depends on several factors such as the information provider, the target audience, type of message and many a times on the place in which the communication is taking place. Throughout human history, several modes of communication are developed by man and the list is growing with new technology. However, basically, there are two Major ways of communication namely verbal and non verbal.

1 Verbal communication

Verbal means relating to words or use of word, written or spoken. Thus verbal communication includes oral and written communication.

2 Oral communication

Man learnt writing much later. Thus for a long period of human existence communication among people was largely in oral form. Any form of communication with the help of spoken
word is oral communication. Oral form is used both in formal and informal communications. Speech connects to people more than any other method of contact.

Oral communication can be classified further in personal and non-personal types. Personal communication is in which there is face to face dialogue. e.g. discussion in classrooms, seminars, speeches, gossip, interviews etc. Non-personal communication does not include face to face dialogue. e.g. radio shows, telephonic conversation etc.

3 Written communication

Effective writing requires planning. One has to use proper words and form the matter in such a way that the message is clearly understood. It is an important form of communication in formal world in the form of letters, memos, reports, acts, laws etc. It is also used for informal communications like letters, invitations, notes etc.

Advantages –

1. Permanent and legal: Written communication can be preserved permanently and can be referred when required in the future. If written communications has signature of a person or seal of an organization then it gains legal status and can be produced in court as legal evidence.

2. Accurate and precise: The writer plans the content to convey message to the concerned receiver. Thus written communication is accurate and precise. This reduces the chances of misunderstandings as well.

3. Accountability: Since the name, place of the sender of the written message can be traced down even if it is not mentioned on the written document, the sender can be held accountable for his message. In official communications, the message contains the name or signature of the sender.

4. Large and widespread audience: If the message has to reach a larger number of receivers then written communication is a better option. It helps to communicate the message in exact same form at the same time. It is also viable option for audience spread across geographical areas, like various branches of the office.
5 Non Verbal Communication

Any form of communication that does not involve the use of words instead communication takes place through gesture, display of emotions, movements, eye contact etc. is said to be non verbal communication. Sometimes non verbal form is used along with verbal form. However, on its own too, non verbal form can be used to convey messages along with feedback.

1 Sign language:

Audio visuals signs are used by people to indicate a certain message.

Various forms of visual signs are posters, colours, graphical representations etc. Posters signs represent a certain idea or message in a combination of pictures and slogans. They are used during rallies and drives for a cause, such as anti smoking drive. A sign board with a picture can tell a message too, e. g. a skull on the electric meter board or drawings of men and women on doors of public toilets. Each colour represents a specific emotion. For e. g. blue indicates cool and calm feeling while red indicates passion. Data is presented in graphical formats like pie charts, graphs and tables to show relationship between various elements or compare data.

Some sounds are used in specific areas to convey messages. For e. g. the factory siren indicates lunch time for workers. In BEST buses the conductors ring the bell in various combinations to communicate with the driver to move or stop etc.

1. Body language

The science related to the study of the way human body communicated without the use of words through movements of its parts is known as Kinesics. It includes facial expressions, postures and physical appearances.

a) Facial expressions: It is often said that human face is the monitor of the human mind. What a person feels or thinks is shown by the various forms of facial expressions. As smile conveys compassion, tight muscles of cheek and clenched jaw show anger. Thus one should control what kind of expressions is reflected on their faces.
b) Posture: Whatever the size and shape of the body be, one can tell about the state of mind of a person by studying their body posture. A person with self confidence walks with shoulders spread and raised chin. A bend in the back while sitting or standing shows tension and lack of confidence.

c) Gestures: Certain movements of arms, legs, head and hands can be used to indicate our emotions and thoughts. A gesture is strong way of letting people know about thought without words. Gestures such as nodding, eye contact, tilting the head during a talk made by audiences shows their involvement and attention towards the speaker. Throwing a fist at somebody shows anger, fiddling with objects during a talk or shaking leg shows nervousness. Certain gestures in different cultures may mean different things. For e.g. nodding of the head up and own means saying yes in India but it means a no in Bulgaria.

d) Physical appearance: The complete personality of the person that reflects by his physical appearance i.e. clothing, hair etc tells about his opinions and ideas. The colour of the clothes, their style, and style of hair reflects the person's confidence.

2. Para-language

Paralanguage means the various features of speaking which communicate a message just—like language‖. Para linguistics is the study of pitch variation, speed of speaking, pauses, volume variation and use of fillers. The speaker has to control the manner in which he speaks to communicate his message in a better manner. The way in which the speaker speaks conveys his ideas as well. It can be understood better with the help of following points:

a) Pitch variation: Pitch of the voice is its range. The speaker can speak at a higher, lower or moderate pitch according to the intensity of the content or to draw attention of the listeners to some important message. Use of same pitch for a long time makes the talk boring. In general conversations the voice pitch shows the excitement levels of the speaker. A very low pitch shows bad mood while an angry person talks in a high pitch.

b) Speed of speaking: People who are scared of situation or nervous speak fast in such times. Control over speed of talk is important during lectures and presentations. If the lecturer
thinks that the students do not understand a certain concept then he can explain it again at lower speed.

c) Pause: Continuous speaking makes it difficult for the audience to understand the message. It is important to pause at appropriate times. A speaker may pause for some time before explaining new point to see if the audience has completely understood the earlier point. He may also pause expecting any remark or reaction from the audience.

d) Volume variation: It is important for a person to have control over volume of his voice. One can adjust the volume of voice depending upon the place where he is talking, number of people he is talking to etc. for example a person presenting before a group of 50 people speaks slowly then people away from him may lose interest because they are not able to listen to him.

e) Fillers: Non fluencies or fillers are short words which are used to connect to the audience in a better way. For e.g. the use of alright, ok, you know in between sentences helps to draw attention, maintain continuity and also make a special impact of a particular sentence. However, over usage of such words should be avoided. This can irritate the audience.

3. Silence

Silence can also convey the mood, message or response of a person. It can be used to indicate positive reactions like approval, consent or agreement. It can also show negative response such as disproval, anger or sorrow. During a talk silence can be used in pauses to give the audience time to think and react.

A) Space

The study of use of space for communication is known as Proxemics. The amount of space a person keeps with others during communication depends upon various factors like relationship, surrounding, social norms etc. The normal amount of space during casual conversations at personal level between the communicators is about 18 inches to 4 feet. When the relationship among people and the environment is formal, the distance may be between 4 to 12 feet. Beyond 12 feet the space becomes a public space. The relationships are formal and number of people involved in this is greater. The type of conversation also decides the use of space. Proxemics also
involves seating arrangement and territoriality. Example parking one’s vehicle in the same place everyday shows marking of personal space. If a person wants to be more involved with the speaker and is interested in the talk he may take a seat in the first few rows of the auditorium.

B) Time

The use of time by a person tells about his personality. A person who is punctual and manages time well is considered discipline and gains respect among colleagues and subordinates for this quality. Using one’s time well is also a quality. People who arrive late for meetings give a negative impression about themselves.

C) Touch

Haptics is the study of touching. In different cultures touching has different meanings. A firm handshake is a symbol of confidence. A hug may be considered friendly way of greeting in some cultures but in some cultures it is conserved offensive.

Advantages –

• 1.-Facilitates interaction: Non verbal communication is advantageous when the audience has certain imparities such as hearing problem, slow learning or even illiteracy. Even otherwise, the speaker can strike a good interaction with the audience because of his informal gestures and use of signs.

• 2.-Creates impact: Visuals and graphics make an impact on the minds of the audience. They are able to recall it even after a longer period of time and relate information with such visual memory. Positive gestures and confident body language creates a good impression on them. Thus it enhances communication.

• 3.-Develops relations: Positive body language and facial expressions attract people. They send vibes of warmth and happiness. So it helps to create and develop relationships in both formal and informal settings.

Disadvantages –
Problem of misunderstanding: Sign and body language can be misunderstood by the audience. Colours, visual signs and gestures may have different meaning to people from different cultures. Thus a wrong message could reach the people. People may also identify voice variation differently. For e.g. if the speaker is speaking in high pitch to emphasize on a point better the audience may see it is aggressiveness.

Irritation: Audience may get irritated with the use of fluencies if used frequently by the speaker. It may distract the audience as well.

Quality of communication: Sometimes the speaker maybe good in use of non verbal communication to keep the audience interested but may lack content in his talk. Quality of the communication is also important with attractiveness.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Public speaking means the process of speaking to a group of people in a structured manner. It is a powerful medium for motivation, influence, informing and entertainment. Many people have stage fear that is fear to speak in public while some can engage the audience for a very long time. Fear and nervousness can be overcome by practicing some basic steps and improving one’s confidence level. Following are a few of the essential elements to develop oneself as a good public speaker:

A) Structuring the talk: Whatever the purpose of the public talk is, the speaker should prepare the talk in stages of introduction, main explanation and conclusion. Such practice will help the speaker to convey message to the audience according to their understanding levels without making it boring. It will give the audience a clear idea of what they have to expect from the talk and also prepare questions at the end.

B) Preparation: Even experts need preparation. It is better to have an idea of the time allotted for the talk, the purpose and prepare accordingly. Preparation in advance will reduce the possibilities of mistakes during the talk.

C) Analyze the audience: The speaker should keep in mind the target audience and use language and examples accordingly. For e.g. an archaeologist will prepare a different
format of speech archaeology to present in a seminar in front of scholars; while the format will be different for the same topic if he has to present in front of students.

D) Short sentences: Short sentences are better to understand. They help to keep the audience interested. Audience may lose track of the actual content while listening to long and complex sentences. It helps to maintain the flow of communication.

E) Expressive speech: People lose interest if an interesting topic is presented in a boring manner. A speaker should use decorative language to describe the content and help the audience visualize the topic that is spoken about. He can draw examples from day to day life to help the audience relax with his talk. He should use humour to keep the audience connected and refresh them after some time. Information can be given through humorous instances. The speaker's enthusiasm for the subject should be seen in his speech.

F) Composed body language: The speaker can take control of attention of the entire audience only when he is calm and relaxed himself. Tension and nervousness of facing a huge audience takes away confidence. To deal with this the speaker has to perform this natural form. Being confident, cheerful creates a positive impact on the audience.

G) Seek feedback: Involvement of audience during a talk is important. One can ask a few rhetorical questions in between the talk. After the talk a feedback from the audience is advisable. One can ask questions to the audience and encourage them to participate. Questions from the audiences should also be welcomed.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

- Presentation is slightly different from public speaking and so it requires a different set of skills. The purpose of a presentation is always more formal than a public talk. Presentation is a professional practice to demonstrate data, research, reports or new information. They are done on several occasions by students for their projects, business persons to present data for clients, and also scientists to present reports etc. The presenter has to keep in mind the following point to make an effective presentation:

- Structure the presentation: Presentations are scheduled for events. Thus a presenter should utilize time well to prepare the presentation. He should see to it that the presentation should convey all points he wants to say, is based on the theme of the event and has a proper direction to it. Brief the audience about the topic before beginning with
complete details. Include a lot of examples to make the presentation interesting. Make a neat and point style presentation.

- **Presentation:** Appearance of the presenter makes an impression on the audience. It is important for the presenter to be formally dressed and to be neat. Appearance of the PowerPoint presentation is equally important. A power point presentation having paragraphs, bold font, too many images with no caption, makes the audience lose connect and concentration with the main content. It also shows lack of research by the presenter.

- **Knowing the audience:** As in any public talk it is important for presenter to know his audience. The audience expects information from the presenter. He should be able to give it to them and in the way they understand. Audience evaluates him not only on the content but also on the way it is presented.

- **Controlling the environment:** The presenter should be comfortable in the environment he is presenting in. It is better to make all preparations like set up, checking mike, checking if PowerPoint works on the laptop etc. on his own before the presentation. It is also important to get a feel of the environment and get to know things like knowing from where he will be presenting, whether he will be able to move around or not. This will enhance confidence, help to keep calm and concentrate completely on the talk.

- **Keep track of time:** Usually presenters have to present within a given time slot. It is important to finish within the given time. This gives a proper impression of positive time management to the evaluators and also gives the presenter time to answer audiences questions calmly. It also shows that he respects the time of the audience. Rehearsing the presentation is important to be able to manage time as well as completely cover the topic.