

Miscommunication

Course: AECC –English

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Often we don't get things done properly or on time because of a miscommunication. We must try on all cost to avoid miscommunication on both professional and personal front.

These are some of the reasons for miscommunication:

1. Misaligned Vocabularies

“Plain language” refers to the preference for words that are in everyone’s vocabulary – what linguists term the “core vocabulary” – consisting of about 200 to 300 words. These words are mostly verbs, pronouns, and demonstratives, such as “his” and “that,” which help distinguish the subject the speaker or writer is referring to. These words are used frequently and across many contexts to express meaning and intent, usually without misunderstanding.

As the initiator of communication, the speaker or writer must choose words that are easily understood by the listener or reader. For example, a 10-year-old is unlikely to understand the meaning of “plethora,” so “plenty” or “a lot” would be better choices. A communicator should always consider his or her audience when communicating.

2. Messy Thinking

Messy thinking results in messy speaking, which usually occurs when someone begins speaking before completing his or her thought process. As a consequence, listeners are taken on long, convoluted journeys filled with contradictions, extraneous information, and premature conclusions. Messy thinking usually happens during periods of stress or high emotion.

3. Faulty Definitions

Homophones are words that sound alike or nearly alike, but have different definitions. For example, “discreet” means careful and circumspect, while “discrete” means distinct or separate.

Other examples include:

- abhorrent – aberrant
- alternate – alternative

- disassemble – dissemble
- emigrate – immigrate
- flounder – founder
- horde – hoard

Your choice of words is important because the wrong word can confuse the listener or reader. When in doubt, consult a dictionary – or simply don't use the word.

4. False Civility

While civility is a desirable trait in all societies, it's often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Civility is a matter of context – what might be considered rude or thoughtless in one situation could be proper in another. A parent warning a child to get out of the street shouldn't value the child's feelings over his or her safety; a supervisor disciplining a subordinate for poor results shouldn't dilute or confuse the message in the hopes of being perceived as “nice.” Civility means being conscious and considerate of how actions and words affect others, but it does not mean beating around the bush or faking emotions.

5. Sloppy Language Habits

Unconscious patterns of thinking, speaking, and interacting are developed over time. These habits affect your daily activities and your relationship with your environment. They surface in speaking and writing, and they often lead to miscommunication.

Be careful when you use the following:

- **Acronyms.** Acronyms are abbreviated versions of phrases or organization names that are formed by combining alphabetical characters to create a new word. Acronyms save time and may improve recall of the underlying meaning. Unfortunately, acronyms are so ubiquitous in speech and print that their meanings are often misinterpreted. For example, the meaning of the acronym “ACA” could be correctly interpreted as “Affordable Care Act,” “American Correctional Association,” “American Camp Association,” or “American Chiropractic Association.” If you use an acronym, be sure to provide its meaning so your audience is not confused.
- **Jargon and Colloquialisms.** Many social, business, or professional groups develop special vocabularies to describe concepts and activities specific to their group (“jargon”). Examples include “baluster” in architecture, “arabesque” in ballet, and “all in” in poker. Colloquialisms are phrases and words from specific geographic regions typically used in conversation, but not formal writing. Jargon and colloquialisms can add color to speech and writing, even enhancing understanding where their meanings are understood, but the possibility of misunderstanding remains high.

- **Assumptions, Stereotypes, and Allusions.** It's well known that the use of assumptions – taking something for granted or without proof – can make you look bad. Stereotypes (inaccurate simplistic generalizations) and allusions (indirect, often incorrect references) can have the same result: muddying your intended message and confusing listeners or readers. There is little to gain from their use and much to lose, so avoid them whenever possible.
- **Buzzwords.** Words that sound impressive but convey no special meaning are in a special class by themselves. They have no place in intelligent speech or writing. Use of buzzwords is so flagrant that drinking games are built on their use in political speeches. However, politicians are not the only guilty parties – some corporate cultures are infamous for their use.

6. Government-Speak and Legalese

Legal and regulatory documents are especially open to confusion due to both their use of technical terms and a culture that often rewards quantity of words over quality and intent. “Hard-to-understand rules are a lawyer’s best friend, and the need for companies to lawyer up is a huge [competitive] advantage to large or established entities.”

So, unless you deliberately want ambiguity, use a plain language in your professional writings.

Final Word

Plain language, when combined with other good communication skills, helps to increase accurate communication of pertinent information. By incorporating an iterative “feedback loop” into important or critical communications, you can dramatically improve understanding and retention of spoken and written word. Simply ask the listener or reader to repeat back his or her understanding of the communication in his or her own words to ensure that the correct information has been received and remembered.

“Constantly talking isn’t necessarily communicating”