

# Tools and Techniques for Effective Communication Skills

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**Abstract** Communication is the lifeblood of any relationship: personal, professional or a temporary transaction among individuals. People communicate every second consciously or sub-consciously. People who want to improve their communication and make it more and more effective with experiments, practice and variety of techniques. The techniques and tools of communication, however, vary from person to person, situation to situation and medium of communication. What is good in oral communication or rhetoric may not be so effective in written communication or vice versa. Some of the tools or techniques of communication have been used effectively by many successful people, orators and writers. These tools range from use of rhetoric, intonation, storytelling, poetry or couplet recitation, reciting shlokas or aayats from religious scriptures, figures of speech like similes, metaphors, pun etc. This research article strives to answer questions like which tools are more effective? Which tools can be used as per situation? How can they make communication more effective? Can all the tools be used simultaneously? How should they be used judiciously? What is the effectiveness parameter as per the medium of communication? How does medium of communication encourage or discourage use of particular tool or technique? How can a communicator inculcate the habit of using tools and techniques for more effective communication?

**Keywords** Communication, Business Communication, Personal Communication, Professional Communication, Interpersonal Relationship, Storytelling, Poem and Communication, Visualization, Visual Effect, Effective Communication, Public Speaking, Presentation Skills

## 1. Introduction

Communication is the lifeblood of any relationship: personal, professional or a temporary transaction among individuals. People communicate every second consciously or sub-consciously. People who want to improve their communication and make it more and more effective with experiments, practice and variety of techniques. The techniques and tools of communication, however, vary from

person to person, situation to situation and medium of communication. What is good in oral communication or rhetoric may not be so effective in written communication or vice versa. “Communication is thus a process by which meaning is assigned and conveyed in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process, which requires a vast repertoire of skills in interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, gestures, and evaluating enables collaboration and cooperation.” [1]

Some of the tools or techniques of communication have been used effectively by many successful people, orators and writers. These tools range from use of rhetoric, intonation, storytelling, poetry or couplet recitation, reciting shlokas [Sanskrit verses used in Hindu scriptures] or aayats [Arabic verses used in Islamic scriptures], figures of speech like similes, metaphors, pun etc.

This research article strives to answer questions like which tools are more effective? Which tools can be used as per situation? How can they make communication more effective? Can all the tools be used simultaneously? How should they be used judiciously? What is the effectiveness parameter as per the medium of communication? How does medium of communication encourage or discourage use of particular tool or technique? How can a communicator inculcate the habit of using tools and techniques for more effective communication?

## 2. Discussion

We strive to improve and make communication more and more effective. This is required in any medium like writing, speaking, discussion or arguments, rhetoric etc. in competitive world and to be popular among the social and professional circles. The two impressive traits of human personality, apart from the God gifted looks and voice, are good communication skills and dress sense. When we say communication, we include the words, language, sentence construction and appropriate body language to deliver it. This skill is of utmost importance to professionals who deal with humans, deliver public lectures, attend meetings, social gatherings etc. The resplendent delivery of communication can make a lasting impression of a person in social and professional circles. Moreover, it also has that ‘feel good’

factor to the communicator.

The main tools or techniques which can be employed for communication range from story, anecdote, poem, shloka or aayat from religious scriptures, humour, pun, simile and metaphor, quotations, rhetorical questions, figures of speech etc. However, every tool may not be effective with every situation or medium of communication. "You may wonder if all authors produce books in this way; they do not. The reason is that spoken and written language are not the same, so it is not sufficient just to transcribe a talk and put it onto paper. Authors lie to use a proper written style so they are quite specific about their choice of adjectives, conjunctions and closing sentences." [2] Let us take an example: use of a couplet or shayri or rhetorical question if recited with good intonation and stress will be more effective in oral communication and use of pun worded well or story narrated with care and strategically placed punctuations will be more effective in written communication. The effect of the tool employed also depends a lot on the presentation. A moving tale told badly will not have a positive effect or a humour worded with poor grammar will not be precise or reach the desired effect in written communication.

Let us see the relationship of the above mentioned techniques of effective communication to elaborate the discussion with medium of communication:

#### Oral Communication

Oral communication has been given the highest importance among the masses owing to the challenges like: spur of the moment thinking and delivery, public speaking and presentation skills, stage fright etc. The people who have good oral communication skills are more sought after and popular. The challenges like public speaking, camera consciousness and stage fright are always daunting without practice. The best way to hone oral communication is to listen to good speakers and try to imbibe their successful techniques and practice as much as possible. In oral communication, aspects like tone, pitch, eye contact and gestures, fluency, pause and space play significant roles in making it successful or failure. Tools like poetry and couplet, stories and anecdotes, humour etc. can be used in a speech or presentation discreetly. "Practical language uses words to accomplish a goal, but poetic language is oriented towards the words themselves. Thus, practical language seeks to be transparent, whereas poetic or literary language is deliberately difficult so that we pay attention to it." [3]

The challenge of a communicator who uses these tools is like an artisan who has the raw material, concept and the image in mind. But he must become an expert in using the tools. He/ she must know when to use which tools. Over use of the tools will also not create that desired effect. A professor dealing with a topic or lawyer arguing a case narrates stories and anecdotes or tosses shayri or shloka to explain or subtly drive home the point can reach the audience and be popular as well. But the caution again is discretion and avoidance of over use as it may convert him/ her into a storyteller or a poet instead of an expert in his/ her field or

subject matter.

The element of humour is also an extremely effective tool for oral communication. Humour can defuse a tense situation, break the ice, make the environment lively and establish the popularity of the speaker. Like other tools discretionary use of humour has to be done. Here the discretion depends on situation, audience, and occasion. There is ample supply of all the tools except spontaneous humour. The challenge is again how to use it? The element of humour or wit if not used properly may misfire. While using humour one has to be cautious in use of words- it may turn into an insult if caution is not used.

"There is a thin line of difference between humour and insult. Often people do not deliberately cross the line. Humour means laughing with people. Insult means laughing at people. One has to understand the difference between the two." [4]

Oral communication is like live performance where the artist has to use his/ her presence of mind and skills acquired in years of practice. He/ she has to employ memory for using tools like stories, anecdotes or couplets and sense of humour. The tools can be acquired by variety of methods like memorizing, keeping notes while delivering a lecture, making a presentation or arguing a case etc. A well maintained list of stories or couplets sorted as per topic or concept will always be convenient in preparation and presentation. However, in oral communication the art is how to deliver. The communicator has to use befitting tone, variation of pitch and stress, creation of mystery while narrating a story, imagery while describing and of course appropriate or well-planned gestures. One can master it by practice, conscious observation of self and others while delivering and imbibing modifications.

"A powerful way to persuade people is by '...uniting an idea with an emotion. The best way to do so is by telling a compelling story. In a story, you not only weave a lot of information into the telling, you also arouse your listener's emotions and energy'. [5]

Oral communication is much like sports wherein every game or match is different and the player cannot plan beyond a point. He/ she has to resort to his/ her skills, techniques and practice to perform well. Planning a public speech may work alright but when it comes to presentation planning is required. One must also be ready for any eventuality. While discussing in a meeting or arguing a case in court room planning will help but again skill and spur of the moment thinking is mandatory. The tools of communication, here are like the tools of an artisan but a bad stroke by the artisan will ruin the sculpture. The communicator has to use discretion, handy notes, change the point or alter the use of tools as required. The limitations of the medium of oral communication itself can be handicap. If the communicator has mastered the art and is always ready with his tools, he can turn the tables or the tempo of the audience. The communicator, however, has to be conscious of the situation and the tools at hand.

#### Written Communication

Importance of written communication in business, government and legal transactions is undeniable. Written communication is also given more importance over oral communication owing to its significance of documentation and legality, impact on class and mass alike and challenges in mastering this skill. "To write and convey your thoughts clearly during a presentation are essential skills that are required for success in any business. If you have positive ideas but are unable to express them, it is very hard to be successful...It is necessary that you use the right approach, right words and right style that most suit your message and readers." [6]

It is also believed that mastering written skill is more difficult than oral communication. As oral communication has challenging aspects like stage fright and extempore speaking; written communication has challenges like the spellings, impeccable grammar and punctuation and setting of tone. An expert communicator develops both oral and written communication skills.

There are various techniques and methods to hone the written communication skills but our research here deals with the employment of tools like stories, anecdotes, humour, poetry, shlokas or aayats. How can these tools make written communication effective? Written communication has primarily two branches: creative which includes poetry, fiction, essays, and captions and official or formal like letters, business correspondence and legal documents.

The use of these tools depends on the individuals. We cannot use the tools for formal and to the point business communication but they can be employed if the purpose of communication is general or the relationship with audience is not strictly formal. A manager or CEO writing motivating email or letters to his/ her team mates may use humour or story or poetry to bridge the gap and drive the point effectively. "Along with its strategic value as a branding concept, storytelling can also be hugely effective in operational communication purposes. One example is when we use stories to communicate our purpose in a given context e.g. a simple anecdote that we share with our colleagues when explaining a point, or reinforcing an argument. Even the smallest anecdote contains the four key elements of storytelling and it travels by word of mouth." [7] Storytelling is quite effective in motivation, management meetings, education and training.

The tools are highly effective in oral communication owing to spontaneity, situational usage, effective tone and stress used accompanied with gestures and body language but if we compare their efficacy in written communication, there are some daunting aspects of the medium itself. The fineries of narration and recitation like the tone, stress, gestures and spontaneity cannot be used in written communication. That does not discard the use of tools in written communication. The medium of written communication has certain advantages and disadvantages for effective use of these tools. One needs plan the message, use apt language, heed the grammatical rules so that the message is not lost on the readers or does not backfire in impact and

purpose. "Most people tend to ramble on and on when writing a message. The reader becomes confused and communication is lost. You need to find the right balance of words and the right words for the balance." [8] Since written communication is not face to face there is always a tendency of misunderstanding if it is not drafted well. In written communication one can plan and do research before using a story, anecdote or a couplet. One can also plan the flow of the message, discussion or conclusion as well. If drafted well, it may serve as a wonderful piece of documentation for record and circulation.

#### Visual Communication

In the communication process visual images play a significant role be it in the form of visual aids like pictures, charts, graphs etc. or description narrated by the communicator. Many a times description with words is more effective to the listeners or readers as each one can derive his/ her own conclusion. Visualization is important for both the communicator and the receiver. The communicator has to prepare and choose words carefully to create the utmost effect so that the receiver can get better understanding by visualizing and involving his / her own imagination at play.

"Just as in telling of the presentation story, the audience receives the visual content at the level of the trees. And, just as in the telling of the story, the presenter's job is to rise up from the trees and give the audience a view of the entire forest. As always, presenter's mind job is to navigate the audience's minds, but now the presenter can also navigate the audience's eyes." [9] Visual effect can be used by narrating, describing, telling a story or even using quotations and poems. The communicator has to be conscious about the right choice of story, poem or quotation. A little self-exercise of visualization and sample on someone can be effective before delivering to a larger mass of audience. Once you become a seasoned communicator, creating visual effects will be imbibed in your communication delivery naturally. It is a powerful tool of communication to begin or end communication piece. It is useful even during the discourse to captivate the audience. Visualization captures audience and reader's attention and involvement. It also paves way for further curiosity and intellectual stimulus for better debate, thought process and conclusion.

There are however certain limitations of visualization that one has to keep in mind. Too much use of visualization will appeal to the imagination and the intellectual or debatable topic may be lost. Visualization can also misfire if not used properly. If the communicator fails to create the right effect with badly narrated or described piece, it will create more confusion and ambiguity. It is also a challenge to embed the visualization in the subject matter of communication going on. Visual effect may not be so effective or useful while dealing with abstract or philosophical topics in discussion or debate. Here quotations or poems can be used.

"We are concerned with the nature of communication implied through poetry. Poetic theories, a case has been put forward where it is necessary to construct a medium for

communicating what cannot be, to convey the formless through form, and to evoke an experience free from space-time reality. The construction of the poetic medium, however, correlates strongly with the zeitgeist.” [10]

“An endorsing quotation can capture your audience’s interest and give you credibility at the outset of your presentation.” [11]

Poetry and quotations are the most widely used portions of literature. The profound effect a well-composed poem or a flagrant quotation can make on the reader or audience is unparalleled. And if the verse or quotation is from a great thinker, it almost becomes gospel. However, it is also much needed to understand and use the right poem or quotation. A good communicator uses visualization sparingly and only uses poems or quotations to endorse the point or create the desired effect. Overusing would be disastrous to the effect and purpose of communication.

### 3. Conclusions

“Every communication medium has its own techniques for helping its audience remain oriented and follow the flow.” [12]

Communication being the life-blood of relationship must be purposeful and pure. It must have a proper flow. One must also not waste words and gestures but use them in the right manner. There are many purposes of communication. The first and the foremost is to clarify or satisfy. Communication appeals to intellect or emotions. The medium of communication could be oral written or non-verbal. There are other purposes for communication like creating a good impression, manifesting your language skills, knowledge, level of intellect, winning a favour etc. Simple communication in the form of oral or written piece would not serve all the purposes but accompanied with various tools like storytelling, poetry, quoting, visualization, humour, rhetorical questions etc. will definitely serve the main purposes of subject matter and create great impact on the audience and reader for the communicator. A seasoned communicator will be able to tell you the importance of these tools and how to get equipped with them. The art is not just in getting equipped with the tools but how and when to use them. Tools and techniques like rhetorical questions, poems, story-telling, humour etc. must be well used to master the art of communication. Let us see the references below of what some scholars say:

“For a short, pivotal transition, you can use the Rhetorical Question. Pose a question that grows out of your outbound point or one that leads logically to your inbound point, then provide the answer.” [13]

“Poetry should have a central place in all of our lives, not only for the aesthetic pleasure it affords, but also for its ability to awaken our senses, connect us with ourselves and

others, and lead us to think in synthesizing ways, as required by its use of the language of metaphor.” [14]

“The solid foundation of the well-developed story and graphics combined with Verbalization gave the apprehensive presenter the comfort level he needed.” [15]

There are innumerable advantages of these tools and techniques. There are also many ways and methods to master them and embed them in your communication, drafting, presentation, discussion etc. The greatest challenge that a communicator has to take care is to be aware about their limitations and what can go wrong. A better technique for its use can be developed with this in mind.

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