Effective communication is one of the most important life skills we can learn - and yet it's not something most people put a lot of effort into. We accept that some people are naturally good at public speaking, or are really good at getting their point across in meetings. The truth is, effective communication is a skill, and like any skill, with practice you can improve.
The Theory

Albert Mehrabian, a professor of psychology at UCLA, identified three core elements of human communication and this is widely referred to as the 7, 38 and 55% rule. According to his research, only 7% of communication is based on words. 38% is based on volume, pitch and tone of the voice and a full 55% is based on facial expressions and other non-verbal communication.

Wordless communication or body language, includes facial expressions, body movement and gestures, eye contact, posture, the tone of your voice and even muscle tension and breathing.

The way you look, listen, move and react to another person tells them more about how you’re feeling than words alone ever can.

You can increase the likelihood that other people connect and understand you if you know how to use non-verbal communication effectively. You will be able to express what you really mean, navigate challenging situations and build better relationships and work.

There are basics to body language that most of us are aware of. Such as making sure your arms are uncrossed, standing with an open stance and maintaining eye contact with the person you are talking to.

But there are more subtle nonverbal skills we can practice to really become an effective communicator. By following the four secrets of nonverbal communication, you will become a communicating master!
Human communication is like a puzzle and our spoken words are just one piece of it. Each movement or non-movement in a conversation tells part of the story as well.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal cues are more reliable than the spoken word. People aren’t always aware of the nonverbal signals they send, so the truth might be hidden in them.

List as many forms of non-verbal communication you can think of:
SKILLS TO PRACTICE
“Fake it till you make it”

#1 Don’t cross your arms and legs – this can make you seem defensive or guarded.

#2 Have eye contact, but don’t stare – when talking to someone or a group, give them all some eye contact to create a better connection and see if they are listening. Giving no eye contact can make you seem insecure.

#3 Don’t be afraid to take up some space – taking up space, such as standing with your legs apart a bit, signals self-confidence and that you’re comfortable in your own skin.

#4 Relax your shoulders – When you feel tense your shoulders can often be the first place to show it. Try to relax them and move them back slightly.

#5 Nod whilst listening – ok, so you don’t want to overdo it, that would look odd, but if you nod occasionally whilst someone is talking to you, it shows you are listening.

#6 Stop slouching – if you slouch in your chair it can look as though you are disinterested. Try sitting up straight, but not too formally.

#7 Lean, but not too much – When you want to look interested in what a person is saying, try leaning towards that person.

#8 Smile and Laugh – People are more inclined to listen to you when you are a positive person.

#9 Avoid touching your face – This can be very distracting to the person listening to you and can also make you seem nervous.

#10 Keep your head up – Don’t keep your eyes on the ground, it will make you seem insecure and a bit lost.
#11 Slow down – this is a great stress buster! Take your time walking, or turning your head. It will make you look more confident and will help to alleviate stress.

#12 Don’t Fidget – Fidgety movements like tapping your fingers, swinging your legs or tapping your feet can make you seem nervous.

#13 Express using your hands – Put your hands to good use now they aren’t scratching your face or tapping the table. Use them to communicate what you are trying to say.

#14 Lower your drink – holding a drink too high (around your chest, or worse face) can make you seem guarded.

#15 Keep your distance – Lots of people get weirded out by a close talker. Let people have their own personal space when speaking to them.

#16 Mirror to build rapport – If you get on with someone, chances are you mirror a lot of their behaviour unconsciously. When you meet somebody new, try a bit of proactive mirroring to get an instant connection.

#17 Feel Positive – Make sure you feel good. It will come through in your body language.

Remember – you don’t need to try all of these at once. That will leave you really confused and most likely looking very strange!

Take a couple of these body language tips and work on them every day for 1 month. You’ll find that you change your habits to the point you don’t even have to think about doing it. You’ll be a body language master!
The way you look, listen, move and react to another person tells them more about how you’re feeling, than words alone ever can.

Try to match your non-verbal signals with your words. If you don’t, you will appear untrustworthy.

If you don’t use open body language you risk looking rude and unapproachable.

Live in the moment when communicating and don’t become distracted.

Think and act positive even when you don’t feel it. You will feel more self-confident and help put other people at ease.

Trust your instinct when reading other people’s body language. Your unconscious mind automatically reads other peoples subtle signals, you just need to learn to read and adapt to them.
The Theory

Listening is one of the most important aspects of effective communication. In today’s high-tech, high-speed world, we seem to devote less and less time to really listening to one another.

There are four key skills which you can learn to unlock the power of effective listening:

**SKILL #1 - FOCUS FULLY ON THE SPEAKER**

You need to really concentrate on the person speaking and pay special attention to their body language and other nonverbal cues. If you start to daydream, doodle or check social media, then you are certain to miss nonverbal cues in the conversation. Ok, some speakers can be really, really boring, so if you’re finding it hard to concentrate, try repeating their words over in your head. It will reinforce their message and help you stay focused.

**SKILL #2 - AVOID INTERRUPTING**

It’s very common for people to interrupt one another when communicating. There are simple tricks you can practice to interrupt your interrupting behaviour.

For example, try to close your mouth whilst listening. People often open their mouths to signal to the other person that they are ready to talk. When in a conversation, imagine a drop of glue on your lip. Focusing on keeping your mouth closed will stop you interrupting someone.
In order to communicate effectively with someone, you don’t have to like them or agree with their ideas, values, or opinions. However, you do need to set aside your judgement and withhold blame and criticism in order to fully understand a person. The most difficult communication, when successfully executed, can lead to the most unlikely and profound connection with someone.

**SKILL #3 - AVOID SEEMING JUDGEMENTAL**

You need to look interested in what the other person is saying. Try to nod occasionally, smile at the person talking and make sure your posture is open and inviting. If your goal is to fully understand and connect with the other person, then listening effectively will often come naturally. If it doesn’t, you can remember the four key skills you’ve just learnt. The more you practice them, the more satisfying and rewarding your interactions with others will become.

**SKILL #4 - SHOW YOUR INTEREST**

When you do it, regardless of the subject, change your focus to listening. See if you can apply the skills we’ve just looked at and see if you notice any differences. Make a note of the positives. Try this with different people in work and home life.
When listening you need to:
• Focus fully on the speaker
• Avoid interrupting
• Avoid seeming judgemental
• Show your interest

Improving your listening skills you can make a speaker feel heard and understood. This helps build stronger, deeper connections between you and your colleagues.
The Theory

Voltaire said “Judge a man by his questions rather than his answers” and he makes a very good point. It’s often said that the quality of your life is defined by the questions you ask, because the quality of the question determines the quality of the answer.

So it stands to reason, that if you can get better at asking questions, you can get better answers. Better answers result in a whole host of benefits. For example, being better informed allows you to make better decisions.

But being better at answering questions doesn’t just mean getting better answers. Obtaining information is just one outcome of questioning. Questions can be used for controlling a conversation. This can be particularly useful during an argument or negotiation.

Questions can also be used as a way of showing interest. Showing an interest in other people can help to build relationships and showing an interest in a subject can open up opportunities to become involved.

What’s more, questions can be used to explore people’s personalities or to diagnose problems as well as being the common way of testing people’s knowledge, such as exam questions.

Questions can also be used to encourage further thought, or used to emphasise a point. For example, this can be done using a rhetorical question.

Finally, ever heard of an ice-breaker? Well questions can be used to encourage a discussion amongst a group and promote conversation amongst people who don’t know each other.
Questions in their simplest form can either be open or closed.

**Closed questions** are questions which require a short answer, often one word and chosen from a limited set of possible answers.

For example, yes or no questions, or multiple choice questions or a question to get a specific piece of information.

**An open question** asks the respondent for his or her knowledge, opinion or feelings about something and the response is usually more qualitative than quantitative. They usually begin with “what”, “why” or “how” but “tell me” and “describe” can also be used in the same way.

**ADVANCED QUESTIONING**

There are also a few advanced questioning techniques you can master. Let’s now take a look at how they work.

**Leading Questions** - where you lead the respondent towards giving you a particular answer which is more favourable to you.

**Probing Questions** - Asking probing questions is another strategy for finding out more detail. Sometimes it’s as simple as asking your respondent for an example, to help you understand a statement they have made. At other times, you need additional information for clarification, “When do you need this report by, and do you want to see a draft before I give you my final version?”, or to investigate whether there is proof for what has been said, “How do you know that the new database can’t be used by the sales force?”

**Funnelling** - allow you to cleverly funnel the respondent’s answers. You do this by asking a series of questions that become more, or less, restrictive at each step. You start with open questions and end using closed questions, or vice-versa.

**Rhetorical Questions** - Rhetorical questions are often characterised by being questions which do not require an answer. Sometimes the question is unanswerable but usually the answer is obvious. So obvious in fact that you wouldn’t answer it. It has been asked to demonstrate a point and said for effect.
ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

This exercise contains a very simple but powerful action learning tool. It will help you find a question that matters, and then improve that question.

#1 Chose a question

Spend a few minutes thinking of and writing down a few burning questions you are facing in the workplace or in your home life. Make sure that you are in the question.

Now choose one of your questions and think about how you have worded it. Write down the feelings that you have that accompany this question:

#2 Discover the experience behind the question

Where does this question actually come from? Try to recall an experience which led you to this question.... Take yourself back into the experience. Write down any important memories or observations. What feelings accompany this story?

#3 Share with someone

Tell your question and story to someone you trust (colleague, Manager, partner). Ask them what struck them about the story and question, and ask what they think is really happening? What advice do they have for your question?
#4 Rethink your original question

Now try to improve your question. Perhaps a better question comes to mind. Write it down.

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

#5 Think about your next steps

What will be your next steps towards answering your question?

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
IMPROVING YOUR QUESTIONING ABILITY WILL RESULT IN BETTER ANSWERS. YOUR LIFE IS DEFINED BY THE QUESTIONS YOU ASK

QUESTIONS CAN BE USED TO CONTROL A CONVERSATION

YOU CAN SHOW INTEREST IN OTHERS BY UTILISING QUESTIONS

EXPLORE OTHERS PERSONALITIES AND BUILD STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS BY ASKING QUESTIONS

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPEN AND CLOSED QUESTIONS AND LEARN TO USE THE RIGHT TYPE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE
The Theory

Being able to write a professional, business-like e-mail is an important life skill. The good news is you don’t need a degree in English or to be the next Shakespeare to get it right. We’re now going to look at some simple rules which if followed, mean you can’t go wrong.

#1 Start with a Salutation
Your e-mail should open by addressing the person you’re writing to. It’s fine to leave this out when e-mailing a quick note to friends, but business like messages should always include them.

#2 Write in Short Paragraphs
It’s important you get straight to the point. Don’t waste time waffling. Split your e-mail into short paragraphs, each dealing with different points. Also, consider using bullet points for extra clarity when listing several questions for the recipient to answer or suggesting a number of alternate options. You also need to put a double line break, rather than an indent between paragraphs.

#3 Stick to the Topic
If you need to write to someone about several different issues, such as updating your boss on a particular project, asking for a pay rise, and asking for some annual leave, make sure you don’t put them all in the same email. It’s really tough for people to keep track of different email threads when they’re all jumbled up.
#4 Use Capitals
It’s common for people to misuse capitals when emailing. Emails should follow the same rules of punctuation as normal writing. Make sure that you never write a whole sentence, or a whole email in capital letters. Be sure to always capitalise “I” and the first letter of proper nouns such as names. You also need to capitalise acronyms and always start sentences with a capital letter.

#5 Sign Off the E-Mail
For short internal company emails you can get away with just putting a double space after your last paragraph then typing your name.

#6 Use a Sensible E-Mail Signature
Ok, this might seem like common sense, but don’t cram your email signature with quotes from your favourite TV show or motivational speaker. You only really need to include your name, email address, telephone number and postal address. It makes it easy for your correspondents to find your contact details.
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE SENDING AN E-MAIL MESSAGE

Is this message suitable for e-mail, or could I better communicate the information with a letter, phone call, or face-to-face meeting?

What is my purpose for sending this e-mail? Will the message seem important to the receiver, or will it be seen as an annoyance and a waste of time?

How many e-mails does the reader usually receive, and what will make him/her read this message (or delete it)?

Does the formality and style of my writing fit the expectations of my audience?
How will my message look when it reaches the receiver? Is it easy to read? Have I used correct grammar and punctuation? Have I divided my thoughts into discrete paragraphs? Are important items, such as due dates, highlighted in the text?

Did I identify myself and make it easy for the reader to respond in an appropriate manner?

Will the receiver be able to open and read any attachments?
TAKEAWAYS

START WITH A SALUTATION

WRITE IN SHORT PARAGRAPHS

STICK TO THE TOPIC

USE CAPITALS APPROPRIATELY

SIGN OFF THE E-MAIL

USE A SENSIBLE E-MAIL SIGNATURE
# Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Skills (What are the key skills you have learnt during this course)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will you do differently in the workplace?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What obstacles might get in the way of you achieving this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What, or who may help you overcome these barriers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anyone who would like more detailed explanations or additional advice on the topic of Communicating Effectively should consult the following literature:

**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**
Albert Mehrabian

**JUST LISTEN**
Mark Goulston

**FIND OUT ANYTHING FROM ANYONE, ANYTIME**
James Pyle & Maryann Karinch

This workbook was produced by:

**LITMOS HEROES**
Saving the world from boring learning