

# 5 Ideas for Better Communication

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# You can do this

I know you're busy. You'd love to produce better writing. You'd love to be clearer when you're speaking to people. You just don't have the time to work on it.

The problem is, you probably don't have time for frustration or conflict. You don't have time to do the same thing twice because your message didn't get through the first time. You need to take half an hour and get clear about what you're doing before you make the same mistakes all over again.

This book is your half hour. Nothing in it is complicated and nothing in it is really new. You don't have time for new and complicated. Instead, here are 5 clear ideas to guide you to communicate more effectively more often.

The framing might be new to you, but the ideas themselves describe what you already do when you are clear and effective.

Whether you spend most of your time talking, sending short messages, or developing documents, you'll be able to put these ideas to work immediately. And I can guarantee that when you do, you'll get results.

I can guarantee this because these ideas are not a theory of what might work. They're a description of what has always worked when two people connected, communicated, and grew bigger ideas than they could reach on their own.



# 5 Ideas

Look both ways



Use Common Sense



Edit with Empathy.



Stick to Your Plan



Connect with Humans



Look for the logo in the bottom right corner of a page. It will bring you back to this menu.



# Look both ways

Parents drill it into their children. When you come to a road, look both ways before you cross. It's good advice for communication, too.

Our brains are great at jumping to conclusions. This allows us to rapidly compare a current situation to all our memories and generate a response (in much less time than it takes to read this sentence). This is a super power.

But it's a problem for communicators because other people have different experiences in their heads and they will be jumping to different conclusions. They won't understand you.

So look both ways. Take a very quick moment and look back in time and out at your audience. Practice saying "based on my experience. . ." before you make a statement or announce a plan. Then ask: "how does that fit with what you expect?"



## Speaking

It might seem like double checking your conversation would slow it down. This is definitely a case of slowing down to go fast.

Your first step is to listen before you talk. Ask questions so you know more about how the other person (or group) is already thinking about what you want to say.

After you've asked questions and listened, it will be your turn. Start by looking to what you know about the other person. Say something like "this is what I hear you saying about [topic]." Then look the other way and say, "and this is the experience or values I am using to think about [topic]. Once you've looked at how the other person is thinking and at the experience or information that is shaping your thought, you'll be ready to simply say what you have to say.

Then hand the conversation back to them by asking, "can I ask how what I said lands with you?"

## Writing

It's harder when you write. You need to look before you write and you can't change your approach based on how the other person reacts.

You'll be tempted just to plow through your main information or message. But that's like running out into the street. Instead, start by looking away from what you want to say. Look at what you know about your readers. What do they expect you to say and how do they expect to feel about it?

Now look back at the information that supports the message you want to send. What do you know or believe that makes you think this is the right message? Do you know something that your reader doesn't know?

When you're ready, connect the dots. Start where your reader will start and add in the background or information necessary to help them understand why you are writing what you are writing. Especially when you are asking them to make a change.



# What difference will it make?

How often are you irritated because someone draws a conclusion out of nowhere? Or maybe they react as if your perfectly clear idea came out of nowhere?

When we communicate our thoughts as if they will be clear to others because they are clear to us, we jump to a conclusion that gets between us and the impact we want to make. It is true that, in general, people muddle through to some sort of understanding. But it is also true that not checking in creates frustration at both ends of the connection.

Could you use less frustration and more connection?

You can't stop yourself from jumping to conclusions. It's how human brains work. But you can practice building bridges between the expectations of the other person and the message you want them to understand.

This means being clear about the difference between their point of view (looking one way) and your point of view (looking the other).

And as you communicate, you can check in. Ask some version of "how does what I've said fit your expectations?"

Even if you're working on a presentation or document (where the other person won't get to respond immediately), checking in acknowledges that different people might be influenced by different experiences and priorities. It eases the frustration in trying to jump to the same conclusions.

Less frustration means more motivation to connect.





# Use common sense

Common sense is a term we use to describe something that we expect most people to agree with. But it also points to the way we process information. No matter how different our backgrounds or values, we all use our physical senses to gather new information and remember other experiences.

We all search for information through our senses and then make mental maps we can use to process or anticipate new information. We might have different backgrounds or use different kinds of reasoning. But all of us start with the experience we have through sight and sound and feelings.

This is true even when we are processing abstract information. The more we engage our senses in connecting to the idea, the better we understand and remember it.

When you want to be clear, connect the ideas you are expressing to sensory experience that is easy to imagine and remember.





# Speaking

Do you know a great communicator? Do they pepper their conversation with little stories or analogies to things that are easy to imagine?

Both stories and analogies move information between abstract reasoning and the senses. This means that when you attach an analysis to something people can visualize (or imagine in another sense), it becomes easier to understand.

We say that bad situations “stink” and that a smile “brightens up the whole room.” You don’t have to be especially literary to use more sensory information. Most sensory references come naturally in conversation.

When we are in jargon-filled environments, we sometimes lose touch with our natural sense-filled strategies. That shuts out people new to our jargon and makes it easy for them to miss a point. Deliberately adding a reference to sight, sound or feeling will balance the jargon with something you can both imagine and remember.

# Writing

While the use of stories or analogies is natural in speaking, it can feel forced when writing. Fortunately, we have lots of ways to engage the senses when we are putting together presentations or documents.

In short messages, we frequently use emojis or images to add sensory impact to a message. You might think of this as signalling emotion, but the way we recognize emotion is that it changes our physiology and perceptions.

In longer messages, the look of the presentation or document often makes the strongest sensory impression. Colours, fonts, spacing, images, and design all contribute to the way we remember. This is why it’s easier to remember something you read in a physical book than something you read in an e-book. The physical book engages the senses in more ways and attaches those senses to the message inside.

When you are preparing a written message, take a moment to look at what you have produced. How does the look contribute to making the meaning clear and memorable?



# What difference will it make?

Have you ever listened to someone and then realized you had no idea what was just said?

Abstract words don't take root when they are only attached to other words. What we are likely to remember is a connection between a word and a feeling, sight or sound. Adding the senses to your writing and speaking will make your communication clearer and easier to remember.

Think of the word resilient. Now think of a picture of someone pulling themselves out of the mud during a race. With the word, you get a dictionary meaning. With the image, you get a vivid sense of what the word means to the person who needs to be resilient.

Getting people to agree with your ideas or information is worthless if they won't remember it in ten minutes. You need to make your message stick. And you can do that by dressing it in the sensory information that human brains use to connect to the past, understand the present, and predict the future.



# Edit with empathy



You know that you should fact-check information before you share it and that you should correct your written work for problems with grammar. These are both good, but they are not enough. You can be correct and still be unclear.

The step you need to add is to edit your communication with empathy. When you are speaking or writing informally, this means noticing the response you get and making changes to get the result you want.

When you are preparing presentations or documents, you need to add another step. Editing with empathy means looking at what you are preparing and asking: what will my audience notice that I am missing? There might be information that needs to be explained. Some points might need to be set up to produce a different emotional response. You might have skipped steps or put in too many steps.

You'll only notice these obstacles if you imagine stepping into the shoes, background, and experience of your audience or readers.



# Speaking

We do not usually think of it as editing: it's only natural to change your words as a conversation develops. You say something and then you hear or see the response from the other person.

Editing a conversation feels like navigating to a destination: you change your direction according to whether or not you are getting closer to the result you want.

Sometimes you add detail and sometimes you skim over it. Sometimes you make changes in technical language or jargon. And sometimes you adjust the emotional tone of your message.

When you are able to see and hear the other person as you speak, you can clarify whether they are ready to move on or need you to back up and explain in another way.



# Writing

It's hard for most people to feel confident about editing a document. After you've put your best effort into preparing a presentation or document, it is hard to step back and consider making significant changes.

You will be tempted to edit to make the document look and sound better to you. This is the wrong approach. You already know, understand, and can remember your message. You are not your target audience.

Your target audience will connect your words to their own memories, expectations, and goals. That means you need to connect with their experience, priorities, and sensory processing. Seen in this way, your work might seem very different than it seemed in light of your own experiences and expectations.

A few people are naturally good at considering other points of view. Most people find that it is difficult to imagine another way of looking at the world. They struggle to connect to what their audience might be thinking or feeling.

Try a checklist. Write down a list of what you know about your audience as it relates to your message. Consider the kinds of words they use, their background, needs, and priorities. Will you be meeting their expectations or trying to change them?

When you have the checklist, go back and make changes to your document so that the way it looks, sounds, and works will meet the needs of the audience.



# What difference will it make?

Have you ever skipped through a document you were reading and missed something important? Or maybe you drifted off while someone else was presenting.

Have you ever agreed to something and then found out it wasn't what you thought it was?

When a communicator stays within their own perspective, the facts they communicate can be correct and useful, but they might not be transmitted to their audience. That depends on the audience being willing and able to enter into the mindset, background, and priorities of the communicator.

It's more reliable for the communicator to adjust to the mindset, background, and priorities of the audience. This way, even if the message is not wholly understood or accepted, you will build enough connection to try again another way.

Communication is always about growing a relationship, sometimes so you can interact again in the future and sometimes so that the audience will remember and think about the message further. And we're all more likely to build relationships with people who show they are paying attention to how we think and what we need.



# Stick to your plan



I know that this sounds like a contradiction. But editing does not mean changing your plan. It means using what is available to ensure that your plan sticks.

First, the plan needs to stick in your mind. As you consider the perspective and priorities of your audience, another idea might seem promising. But if you follow your new train of thought, you'll end up on the wrong track.

Your brain can do many things at the same time, but your thinking mind is more limited. You can't notice a new idea, imagine the way it will affect your other thoughts, choose a strategy for communicating and observe the other person all at the same time.

So make a note to think later, or break off your communication until you have a chance to think about your new idea. But don't think out loud. No one else can follow the connections you are making to your particular knowledge and memories.



# Speaking

Maybe you think that conversation is improvised. That's true from a certain point of view. But it's also true that even professional improvisers follow rules to make success more probable.

When you want to communicate a particular message, you think about why the communication matters and how and when and where you should discuss it. This plan takes shape quite quickly because it uses your habits for conversation. You are never starting from scratch.

We have learned strategies for expressing particular kinds of thoughts or communicating for specific purposes. For instance, to motivate someone to do something: connect to your listener's priorities, explain how your idea fits those priorities, tell them how to use the idea and walk them through applying it in the future.

You might have a different plan in mind. That's great. Any plan will help organize your communication so that your listener understands you.

# Writing

You might think that plans only apply to formal presentations or longer documents. But even a text chain can use a particular strategy to present an idea. Just as you can organize a spoken conversation, you can organize social media posts, texts, or instant messages.

The key is not paragraphing (although paragraphs are useful). The key is to have a strategy that attracts attention, builds connection, states the message clearly, and ends with next steps.

In longer documents or presentations, knowing how to strategically repeat the main message while following a plan like the one above allows you to be effective even when your audience is distracted.

As long as the document is structured effectively, the audience will be able to find and follow your train of thought.





# What difference will it make?

You might believe that everyone is strategic in their communication, that they use appropriate formats to convey clear, useful information.

How many times have you been frustrated by messages that are missing information you need? How many times have you been unsure of the tone or purpose of an instant message? How often do you feel that a conversation has changed direction and purpose halfway through?

A plan can provide the context that allows your audience to avoid these frustrations. It is a pattern for people to grasp (at least unconsciously) that will guide their interpretation of your specifics. But this only works if you stick to the plan.

Distractions don't just muddle one or two pieces of information. They steal the road map that allows someone to travel with you from where they start to where you want them to finish.

The shiny new information that takes you off course will not just distort what comes before and after. It will create uncertainty about both your credibility and your strategy.

When you stick to a well-thought out plan, your main point is showcased appropriately. This makes it more likely it will be accepted, and more likely it will be remembered.



# Connect with humans



We all know that AI can now write messages. You just need to learn the right prompts and your communication can be completed in seconds.

Not so fast. Really.

Communication is not a chore to be checked off your list. It's an opportunity to share ideas with other humans in a way that makes all of you better or more effective. Each time you turn communication into a chore, you miss an opportunity to learn, to be engaged, and to make a real connection with another person.

Humans are social animals: we have evolved to feel safe in groups and to use information that has been gathered or created by other people.

As you think about how to make your information clear and memorable for other humans, you strengthen your own mastery of your message. You don't just inform or influence; you develop your own strengths and skills.

When you have a chance to connect with humans, take it.



# Speaking

People connect to information when you connect to them. When you remember that you're talking to a human, you do things like make eye contact, match and mirror behaviours and voice, and repeat some of what they've said to show you're listening.

This doesn't mean you have to make small talk. It means your focus has to be on making the connection before you send the information.

When you hold onto your message until the other person signals they are ready to receive new information, you'll be clearer and more persuasive. And they'll feel more confidence in the information you give them.

# Writing

Writing for humans means thinking about the person who will read what you write. Your goal is to have a human being react to what you have written.

Your brain contains marvellous processes for simulating possible futures. When your goal is to get check a document off your to do list, that's all your brain will work to achieve. The result might sound something like AI generated writing.

If your goal is to change the way someone else thinks or feels, then your brain extends your goal beyond the moment when you press send. This means you are more likely to choose language, organization, and a point of view that reaches out to the person reading.

You'll plant clues that help the reader engage and take action.



# What difference will it make?

Human beings have evolved to feel both safe and engaged when they are with other people. They have also evolved to simulate presence through language. This means, that when your language is meant to connect with another human being, they feel better and you feel better.

It's possible to narrate something or to document it because you want to hear how it sounds or ensure that information is available later. These uses of language are not communication. They are ways of stabilizing thought.

If you want to communicate, it means that you want another human being to have access to information that is currently limited to you. At home, you might want to ask someone to do a chore. At work you might want to pass on your piece of the puzzle to someone who needs it to complete their own piece of the puzzle.

The human connection motivates the other person to pay attention to information before they know how it will serve them. Whether or not they are curious about the information, they have evolved to be curious about the priorities of the people who connect with them.

Whenever you speak or write, you have a an opportunity to connect with other humans in a way that gives them something they can use. You will do it by understanding your own message in new ways.

This is not just how we check something off a to do list. This is how we grow our capacity to think, relate, and invent.



# Clear Memorable Effective

Do you remember the five ideas that will make your communication clear, memorable and effective?

- Look both ways
- Use common sense
- Edit with empathy
- Stick to your plan
- Connect with humans

All of the ideas are simple. They describe how to make someone else care about your message long enough to include it in their own mental model so that they understand and remember what you have said.

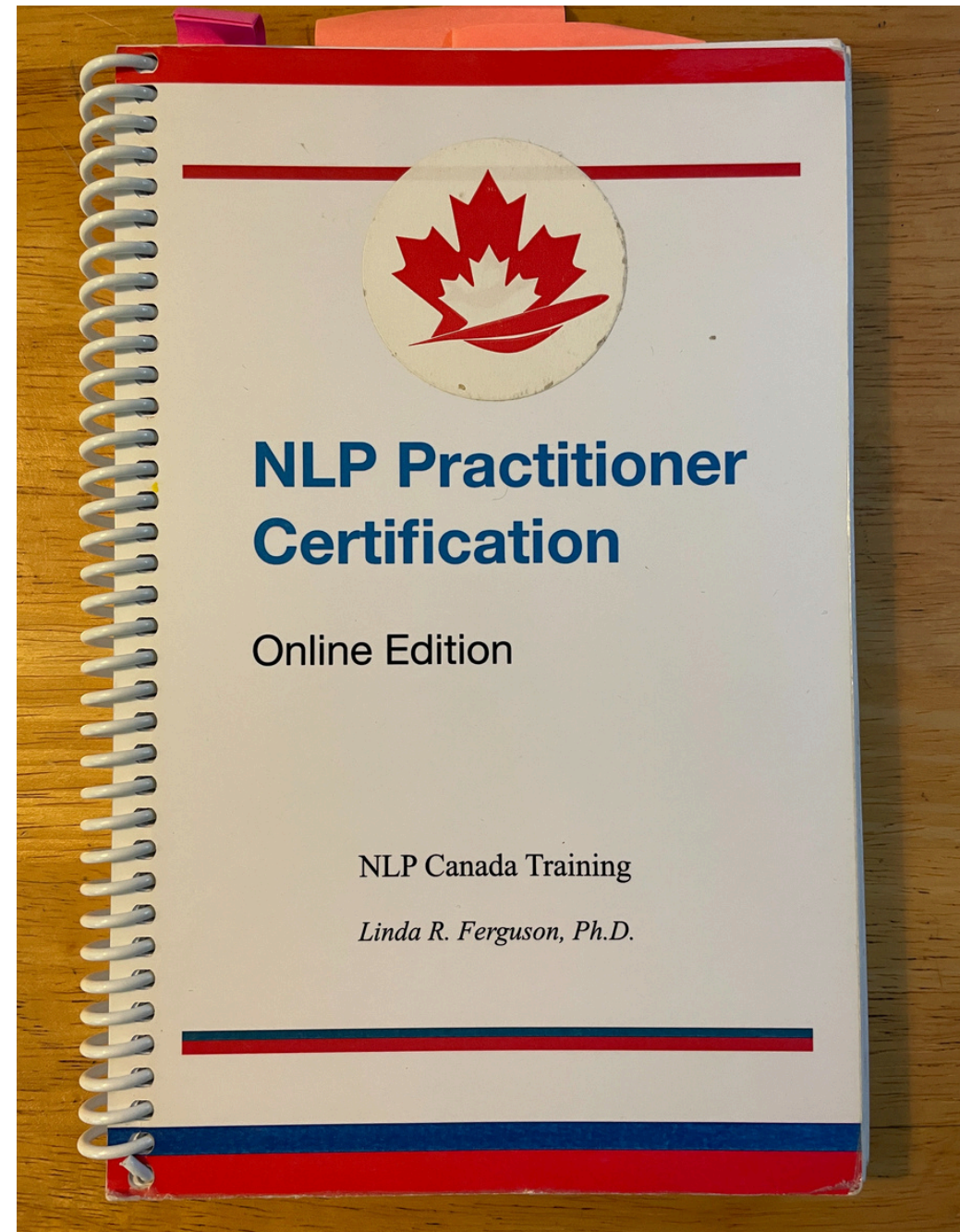
Think about the other person's history, perspective and priorities. Keep your language simple and use stories and analogies to connect to sensory experience. Edit with the other person in mind. Stick to your plan. And always remember that you are connecting with a human.

As you build these habits, you'll see results in your conversations, your instant messages, and your more formal communication. You'll be clear, memorable and effective. And so will your communication.



# Better faster

The best way to improve any skill, including communication, is to practice in lots of different ways. Our practitioner course is designed to grow your communication skills through meaningful practice and feedback. It's a fast, reliable way to learn to communicate better.



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