

Communication Exercises

You find here some methods for developing communication

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Training Perception

Exercise 1: Selective Perception - Gorilla Experiment

Application

1. Show the video "The Monkey Business Illusion" by Daniel Simons: https://youtu.be/IGQmdoK_ZfY
2. Have the students count how many times the white-clothed players pass the ball.

Objective

The students will experience how our perception is filtered subjectively. And we do not even notice that.

Reflection

- What does this mean for our communication?
- How is the way we perceive each other in everyday situations filtered by our habits, expectations, Interpretations, judgement, beliefs, and current condition?

Exercise 2: Perception, judgement and interpretation

"Right" and "Wrong" are not the categories that help us in our personal development. The same is true of good and bad judgements. However, if you observe yourself in everyday situations, you may notice that such evaluations are often found.

Take the simple question "How do you feel?" for example. Common answers are "Good" or "Not so good". A truly descriptive answer to the questions (e.g. happy, a bit weary, stressed, relaxed) is rather uncommon.

On the one hand, perception is subjective and on the other hand, it is always influenced by situational factors.

Take a lecture for example, which you found awesome yesterday because it was presented slowly and thus well understandable for me. On another day, when I have a headache and want to get out of the warm room as quickly as possible, it could possibly be too slow and too tiring for me. Or maybe a student speaks far too quietly for me, but at just the right volume for the person sitting next to me.

Discovering communication is not about doing things right or wrong but about getting to know more about us, the way others see us and how we perceive the world. A useful exercise is therefore to practise describing - without evaluating and without interpreting.

Application

To do this, you can either prepare slips of paper with statements or have students write down their own sentences and put them in order.



| Perception | Judgement | Interpretation |
|------------|-----------|----------------|
|------------|-----------|----------------|



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| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| It's five past three. | They overreacted. | I think she liked it. |
| | You work too much. | |

Objective

The students are aware of the difference between perception, judgement and interpretation and can assign statements to the three categories.

Next step

Students pay attention to evaluations and interpretations in everyday life. Everyone reports on an experienced situation that has stuck in their memory in the next session.



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Working on the Blind Spot - Giving and Receiving Feedback

The comparison of self-image and external image is a necessary requirement for the development of communicative skills. **Feedback** is the only way for us to learn about our "blind spot" (the unconscious part of our communicative behaviour, see [Johari Window Model](#)) and thus reduce it.

Giving feedback is not easy. Giving methodical feedback usually takes more than two lessons, and it requires patience and focus on the part of the teacher. Often we are so stuck in our everyday patterns, such as

- "Do I like this or not?"
- "What did he mean by that?"
- "How am I supposed to understand this?"

that we have to reflect on our thinking in order to be able to engage with giving feedback. Therefore, be sure to start with yourself and try out feedback in your everyday life ([See here for more details regarding feedback](#)).

What is feedback?

- It is a gift one is free to accept or not.
- It is descriptive.
- It is honest.
- It is subjective.
- It is concrete.
- It is direct.
- It is prompt.
- It is desired.
- It is constructive.
- It is balanced.
- It is referring to behaviours.

And what is it not?

- It is neither a judgement nor an assessment.
- It is not forced.
- It is not interpretive.
- It is not generalising.

Attention: Many students confuse feedback with criticism and want to hear "what they can do better". But one of the most important goals of feedback is to recognise one's own strengths, not just to improve what is supposedly bad.

How to give feedback?

To introduce feedback and a real feedback culture in the course, it is useful to visualise the most important points and have them visible on the whiteboard or wall.



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When giving feedback, it is the task for the feedback givers to

1. Describe only

- What did you see? What did you hear?
- As exact as possible.
- Make it “photographable” (this avoids interpretations, assumptions and judgements)

2. State the affect on their selves:

- How did it effect you?
- How did you feel?
- Giving some examples (on the whiteboard) can be helpful:
 - It confused me.
 - I had fun listening.
 - It drew my interest.
 - I got bored.
 - It distracted me.
 - It made me laugh.
 - It shocked me.
 - It motivated me.
 - I enjoyed listening.
 - It annoyed me.

Many curricula include student presentations. These are good for introducing methodical feedback in the group.

What methods of giving feedback can be used?

1. Unstructured Feedback

Objective

The students know the methodical steps for giving feedback. They can give feedback in a non-judgemental and constructive way with preparation.

Procedure

1. The students give their presentation.
2. The facilitator or teacher asks the students questions about how they have been and how they feel. This step is crucial. It gives space for the presenters' need to share. If you skip this, it is more likely that they will feel the need to comment, explain or justify during the feedback.
3. The seminar group gives feedback to the presenters. Here, the students can take over moderation. Make sure that the presenters who receive feedback do not justify or apologise.
4. The facilitator or teacher gives feedback. Facilitator feedback often pursues a didactic goal. Therefore, it can contain hints and suggestions, such as "Next time see if you can reduce your keyword concept: Formulated



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2. Structured Feedback

To enable even more detailed feedback from the group, there is the method of structured feedback. An additional advantage of this method is that the feedback givers additionally train their perception by focusing on specific areas.

Objective

The students know the methodical procedure for giving feedback as well as four **feedback anchors** or **feedback categories**. They are able to give feedback in a non-judgemental and constructive way.

Procedure

The so-called **feedback anchors** (categories written on cards) are distributed either to individuals or to groups, each focusing only on the corresponding category. The presenters can also distribute the anchors him or herself. The feedback anchors are redistributed before each presentation. The task for the feedback givers is to focus on their anchor while observing and giving feedback.

For example, these feedback anchors can be used for giving structured feedback for a presentation of students:



1. Body (nonverbal means)

- Facial expression
- Gestures
- Proxemics - the way a person moves in the room
- Eye contact

2. Speaking (paraverbal means)

- Voice
- Tone
- Accentuation
- Tempo
- Pauses
- Melody
- Volume
- Pronunciation

3. Content

- Rigour
- Structure
- Emphasis and focus

4. Language (verbal means)

- Choice of words
- Sentence structure
- Vividness (examples, metaphors)



Training Presentation Skills

Presentation skills training can be particularly well integrated into university teaching. In many subjects, student presentations are already part of the semester routine. Properly guided, they can promote not only academic knowledge but also communication skills. A good presentation begins with preparation. Therefore, you should already support the students methodically during the preparation. The following steps to prepare a presentation can serve as a structural aid for students, e.g. in the form of a handout.

Preparation of a presentation

1. Analysing the situation (speaker-listener-occasion).

- Think about the situation for which you are preparing your presentation. The design of your presentation depends largely on this.

2. Finding a concrete topic

- Write down your concrete topic once.
- Write down the objective of your speech. What do you want to achieve with the audience (e.g. convince, inform, motivate, call for something)?

3. Gathering material

- Gather all the information (e.g. books, specialist texts, articles, online sources) that is relevant to the topic, the formulated goal and the listeners.
- This usually means creating an initial concept containing important ideas, models, theses, arguments, and examples.

4. Selecting the material

- Select what can be included and what can be deleted, taking into account allocated speaking time, objective and audience.

5. Arranging the material

- On the one hand, prepare a rough structure of the presentation (classical in the sense of introduction, main part and conclusion).
- On the other hand, prepare the internal structure in terms of logic, such as sequence of evidence and links between ideas.
- You can for example state the most critical or strongest argument as the last. However, in some cases it might be useful to structure the presentation from the specific (example) to the general (concept).

6. Make corrections

- Shape the presentation with examples, quotations, visualisations, and media content.
- Check the relationship of the parts of the presentation (introduction, main part, conclusion) to each other.
- Delete unnecessary parts (with regard to your objective).

7. Integrate formulations

- Develop ideas on the introduction and conclusion of the presentation as well as transitions between the different parts.
- Develop ideas on language style and rhetorical elements. Please keep in mind that formulated sentences should be the exception (e.g. as an opening sentence or at the end or if using quotations).

8. Develop a keyword concept/manuscript

- The keyword concept should contain as few formulated sentences as possible, but should serve as a structural aid and support for your thoughts. Use key points or catchwords and keep reducing as you work on them. Please avoid memorising.

9. Rehearsals (with the help of the keyword concept)

- Make at least one rehearsal or as many as you think are needed.
- Ideally, you rehearse on different days.
- Try to deliver the presentation anew each time.
- Use new formulations, do not repeat what you have learned by heart.
- Re-think your thought each time. Avoid using the same stresses, speech melodies, pauses, etc.
- Imagine your audience anew each time. You can ask family and friends if anyone has some minutes to spare to



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listen to your presentation.

- Time your speech and pay attention to the allocated presentation time.

Video recordings of presentations are often used in rhetoric training. Used correctly, this can be a great addition to the group feedback. It is important that no feedback is given on the basis of the video. What is noticed live at the moment of the presentation is important. If you watch the video again before giving feedback, you will suddenly notice new things that did not play a role the first time you watched it. The video should therefore ideally be viewed in excerpts (not completely) at the very end. This gives the presenter a visual impression once again and, if necessary, they can compare it with the feedback they have received. Often the presenters are also very excited so that they cannot remember exactly what they have done or said. Here, the use of video recordings can be very helpful.



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Conclusion of the Session

Reflection

At the end of the session, it is useful to give the students the opportunity to express themselves one more time and to take personal notes of what they have experienced.

Objective

The students finally reflect on their feelings and impressions. They verbalise new insights.

One possibility is to let the students write down on a whiteboard or flipchart answering the following questions:

- What do you take with you?
- What insight did you gain?
- How did you feel?



It is recommended to collect all the contributions on a whiteboard or a large piece of paper. In this way, everyone can also reflect on the insights and thoughts of the others.

Course feedback

A practical method for course evaluation is the five-finger feedback.



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It can be used both in writing/drawing (and thus rather anonymously) and orally (in smaller groups) by showing the appropriate fingers.



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