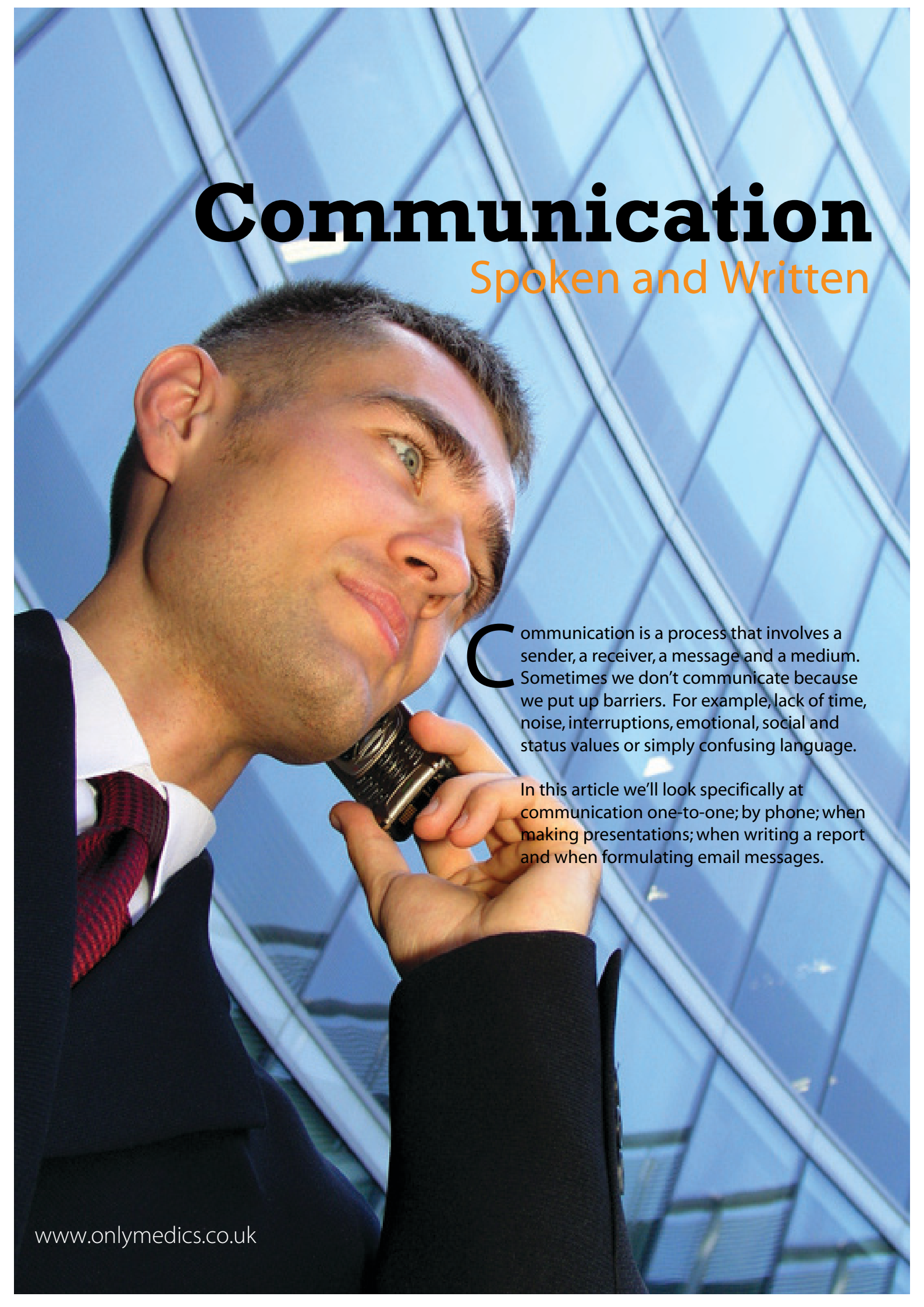


# Communication

## Spoken and Written



Communication is a process that involves a sender, a receiver, a message and a medium. Sometimes we don't communicate because we put up barriers. For example, lack of time, noise, interruptions, emotional, social and status values or simply confusing language.

In this article we'll look specifically at communication one-to-one; by phone; when making presentations; when writing a report and when formulating email messages.

## One-to-One

### Body language

Experts argue over the exact split but communication components are thought to comprise:

- 7% Verbal (the words you use)
- 38% Vocal (the way you use the words – tone, volume, pitch and emphasis)
- 55% Visual (the body language that goes with it)

When the words and music don't match, it creates unease. When the song and dance don't match, the message is in big trouble.

It's not what you say, it's how you say it  
Disinterest is infectious. Be upbeat. Use analogy, metaphor and positive language and don't be afraid to let your emotional commitment show.

### Rapport

Establishing rapport and getting someone to identify you as someone they can trust, is key to successful communication

- start with small talk
- use the other person's name
- find something for you both to smile about
- empathise with them
- mirror their own body language (if you're getting along well, you'll be surprised that this has already happened!)
- maintain gentle eye contact
- match their language by using the same or similar words and phrases.
- enter their reality - try to see things from their point of view so you can lead them to your desired outcome .

### Visit

When you get mail at home, a handwritten letter stands out from the junk you receive. The equivalent in a work context is visiting someone – not a brief meeting but a proper visit where you understand how and where the other person works. You then have more background and reduce the need for superficial communication.

A shared mental picture and emotional understanding is worth a thousand emails.

## Listen - and learn

### Summarise

Summarising what another person has said is a critical skill in successful communication. It makes the other person feel you've taken all they've said on board and helps you gain agreement and commitment.

### Handling questions

Some questions are really concerns. Acknowledge them, clarify, answer and check you've answered satisfactorily to prove you value the relationship. If you don't know the answer, say so. Offer to find out and make absolutely sure you do so and promptly.

### Listen

When you're talking, you're not listening. How many people do you know who drone on about being a good listener when all the time you're wishing that just for once they would stop talking and listen to what you have to say? Listen - and learn.

## Phone

### It's good to talk

We all use the phone as the main means of communication in business whether by land-line or mobile. In general, people like it when you take time to call. A five minute phone call can often do the work of several emails because you can hear someone's tone of voice and gauge reaction.

Brits are famous for not saying what they mean and dressing up messages in layers of irony, humour or understatement. Speaking with people directly ensures you hear what they mean as well as what they say.

### Plan to talk

Just because the phone is an informal medium you can still plan an agenda of the points you need to cover and decide what information you need from the other person.

This is essential if the person at the other end of the line has a reputation for being 'chatty' and monopolising air-time. It's important if you too, are a bit of a 'gas-bag', as you might get carried away and forget key points.

Call where you won't be interrupted by people or signal drop-out on a mobile.

Think about background noise as the other person might not be able to hear you speaking if there is a tannoy blasting out flight arrivals. It's also a bit deflating to start off with "I don't have much time as I'm about to go into a meeting". Dedicate time to the call for both your and the other person's sake.

# Talking with people is the best form of communication

### Let them know you're still there

Speaking on the phone is different to face-to-face communication. You can't check if the other person is paying attention. It's irritating to hear the other person type while speaking.

If replying to an email, they are not listening to you. You might be making a crucial point while they are signaling to a colleague they want a '10 strong' from the vending machine.

Talk in short bursts and use open questions that check for understanding. Similarly, if you're listening, play your part by letting the other person know you are there and not cut off from lack of signal or interest!

### Record it

When you've had an important call, commit to paper what's been said and agreed. This helps you remember what was said and reminds the other person if they deny it afterwards!

### Be polite

If your mobile rings during a land-line call, forward it into voicemail. Taking the call is equivalent to looking over someone's shoulder while they are talking with you and ignoring what they are saying.

An ex-colleague of mine had a habit of putting you on hold while taking a second call, leaving you holding for ages. If someone does this to you, suggest they call you back. Your time is important too, so why hold until the other person is ready to speak? But if chatting to a friend when a business call comes through, remember, business comes first.

Summarise what you've agreed at the end of the call. It will only take seconds and allow any misunderstanding to be ironed out there and then. You can email or prepare a quick file note to confirm the call.

For those working on clinical trials, GCP requires you to have an audit trail. So, conversations with Investigators regarding protocol changes or adverse events will need to be recorded. You may have an internal SOP that provides a form for you to fill in recording the salient points of a conversation.

### If in doubt

Talking with people is the best form of communication and the phone is often the quickest medium to use. It's easy to make a quick call to check something out and even when you have nothing much to say, it's amazing how often people are glad you've called because they have something to say to you.

Slides should encourage an audience to see what you're saying

## Presentations



The prospect of a presentation can have a soporific effect on an audience. The delivery can sometimes send them completely to sleep!

### Structure

1. Tell the audience what you're presenting.
2. Present it.
3. At the end, tell them what you've presented.

### Who is doing the talking?

You are – not the slides. No amount of information on your slides will communicate your message for you. It's vital you know what your message is and can verbalise it without relying on reading out what others can read for themselves on the screen.

Less is always more. Use your own personal skills to engage your audience.

### Dos

- breathe!
- speak clearly and be natural
- pitch the presentation towards the back of the room
- pause at key points for emphasis
- look at your audience
- keep an eye on the audience's body language
- know when to stop and or edit any section of the presentation that's sending them to sleep
- be prepared for questions

### Donts

- shout or mumble.
- rush or talk deliberately slowly
- you're not on stage at the Comedy Store - avoid too many jokes
- indulge in too much hand waving
- talk to the display screen
- read the slides verbatim
- start sentences with "ermm"
- jiggle loose change in your pocket!
- move about too much. Some physical animation is desirable but pacing up and down can unnerve an audience

### Help them to see

Slides should encourage an audience to see what you're saying. They offer a visual component to your message that can be in the form of pictures, graphics, graphs etc. Why do some people only use words on their slides?

### Handouts

If you have a lot of information for your audience to read, send it in advance of the presentation or provide it as a handout. It's a cardinal sin and indeed a form of miscommunication to embed a wordy document into a slide. An audience will never read a long piece of text on screen.

### Does the audience need an eye test?

Going one worse, is to import a spreadsheet into a presentation. Most of your audience will not be able to see anything on the slide and any who do are unlikely to be able to make neither head nor tail of it. Once again, provide a print out of the details if important. Otherwise, summarise salient points.

### Use bullets

Not everyone likes them but bullet points on a slide can prompt you as a speaker to communicate your key messages to your audience. Five bullets are about the maximum on any one slide or the font size has to decrease and you're back to the audience switching off because they can't read the words. If you need more than five, use a further slide or simply try to be more concise.

### Animated slides

In small doses if at all please!



## Writing a Report

### Clarity

You don't need to be a literary genius or, if you are, keep reminding others in your written communication. Why use several words when one will do?

Here are some examples -

- 'in view of the fact that' (because)
- 'an approximation as to how much' (estimate)
- 'serious crisis' (crisis)
- 'entirely complete' (complete)
- 'consequently' or 'accordingly' (so)

Watch out for confusibles like

- 'affect/effect' or advice/advise

### Brevity

When writing, less is more - especially when writing a report. An executive summary is all most people want to read. A good one-pager can say enough to make an informed decision or take action. Try to get the main message into the headline and cover four key areas -

- Background

Set the context, why you're writing the report and briefly what you want to achieve.

- Proposal

This is your answer to the problem set out in the Background. Deliver the message in the clearest way in the fewest words. Don't use the passive approach. Take responsibility and say 'I recommend.' A good way of structuring your thoughts is -

opinion + fact + reason + example.

e.g. 'I believe we should eat more fruit. Fruit is vital to a balanced diet. It's full of vitamins and minerals. A single orange gives all the vitamin C a healthy adult requires in one day.'

- Support

Why is your proposal the right one? List the supporting points, costs, benefits and risks. Write in headlines, like a newspaper or use bullet points. Keep supporting facts and figures separate in an annex. If people want them, they can find them but don't confuse the main message.

Play devil's advocate (you can bet your last dollar someone else will!) and include contrary points and deal with them.

- Action

This is where you ask the reader to do something based on your proposal.

Conclude by repeating your main message and suggest actions, such as who does what and when.

# Read and re-read what you've written before you send it

## Email

### Popularity

Fewer letters are written in business today because the main focus is email. It's like working in our own personal post room as communications arrive directly to the desktop. Yet despite being the most popular form of communication, email continues to cause headaches for many and is the single greatest source of embarrassing faux pas.

### Ignore them and they'll go away

Not so. Some people believe if you let email sink to the bottom of the pile unanswered, then they will eventually become irrelevant.

Truth is, if you don't reply, the person who sent the email to you will sooner or later contact you again, either by email or phone, for a response. Don't be labeled as unresponsive - it can come back and bite you when you need information from them. By not replying you're only increasing your workload.

### Receipts

Annoying, aren't they? Why do people ask for a receipt that their email has been read? It tells them nothing other than that you've opened their note. The only receipt that matters is whether you've managed to change the way someone thinks, feels or acts.

Don't ask for receipts and don't send them. If it matters so much that someone gets something, give them a call to check.

### Get out more

Sitting at your PC is a lonely business. Email is a way of pretending you're in a social environment. You can flirt or gossip on line while pretending to work. Some people generate email to get more in return.

If you want to interact with others in the real world, turn your PC off, get your jacket on and get out there.

### Coverage

Many people send emails to cover their backs, copying others in to make sure every possible person who had any conceivable reason to be interested is informed. You are empowered to use some authority without getting others' permission and if you make a big mistake, a covering email isn't going to help.

### Rules

There are certain rules with emails that save a lot of bother. Try to reply as soon as you read an email, otherwise you'll need to read it again at the time you do decide to reply. The exception is if you're angry or tired. You may regret it later. Always read and re-read what you've written before you send it. If in doubt, delete. We all keep too much correspondence that clogs up our corporate servers. Do remember though, that for GCP audit trails, some emails may need to be printed out and filed.

### Forward/reply

Never confuse forward and reply buttons – you can keep sending long email messages onwards for ever if you do. Only use copy to all where every person really does need to know.

Finally, never forward anything that you wouldn't pin up on your wall for everyone to see.

You never know where it may end up.