

# The Four Parts of Communication

By Nicole Fulgham

Many people think that communication is simply listening to another person speak and responding. Or perhaps reading what another person wrote. However, there is much more to communication than listening and reading. Britannica defines communication as “the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols” (Gordon 2024). Symbols can be written and spoken words and other visuals, such as graphs, pictures, videos, to name a few. Good communication involves multiple parts.

The four parts of communication include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Sometimes you are the audience inputting the message or you are the communicator outputting the message. It is important to understand each part of communication in order to be a more effective communicator.

## ***Input: Listening and Reading***

The act of listening involves more than hearing the words/sounds coming from another person. Fully engaging in comprehending the message requires an understanding of tone of voice, body language, and vocabulary. Tone of voice can go a long way in terms of comprehending a message. Is the speaker’s tone open and engaging? Dry and dull? Sarcastic? Angry? Knowing the emotional tone of the message can help you understand where the speaker is coming from and perhaps how they need you to respond.

Body language can also determine the underlying meaning of a message. A communicator’s body language can help just as much as the tone of voice in understanding both the message and the necessary response. How is the communicator’s posture? What are their hands doing? Is the person moving or standing still? Noticing the body language is a key part in communication and will help the audience when it comes time for their response to the message that was communicated to them.

Vocabulary can also show the communicator’s purpose. Choosing words carefully based on the intended audience is important for the communicator. A message full of technical jargon could benefit an audience of subject matter experts. However, a message full of technical jargon sent to someone who does not have that expertise can create confusion and even other emotional responses that can cause tension between the

communicators. Listening involves both the spoken worlds and the unspoken words found through tone and body language.

As a reader, it is important to take time to comprehend the message. Going too fast can cause a reader to miss information. It may take more than one read through before the message is fully comprehended.

Depending on the purpose of the text, annotations or mark ups may be necessary to fully understand. Without body language and a clear understanding of tone, it can take a reader more to understand the emotional context of the message. Reading, just as listening, requires being open and taking time to comprehend the message.

### ***Output: Speaking and Writing***

Speaking is more than just verbally saying words to a person.. When you are speaking ,what tone of voice are you using? How is your body language? What kind of vocabulary are you using? As you speak, are you trying to engage with your intended audience? An important aspect of speaking is knowing your audience. You would not speak to a group of investors the same way you would speak to a group of friends. You have to consider what information your audience needs. This will help when it comes to vocabulary. There is also the element of formality. Is the setting formal or informal? You would probably talk to a superior more formally than you would with a peer at the water cooler. Consider your audience and determine what kind of language and formality needs to be used with them.

Writing is similar to speaking. However, there's the absence of body language and more ambiguity in determining tone. As a writer, you have to consider what the tone is as you write. Sarcasm doesn't translate through the written word well. Likewise, other emotions can be misconstrued unless specific word choice is used to set the tone of the message. You also want to consider if your writing is understandable to the reader. Is the message clear and concise? Is the message understandable? Have you considered the audience and the level of understanding needed? Richard Nordquist, in his article "What is Communication," states "If a message contains just the written word (such as a text or email), the sender needs to be confident in its clarity, that it cannot be misinterpreted" (Nordquist 2019). It is important to note that writing requires an understanding of how formal you should be. Formal writing needs to be clear, concise, and upfront. Avoid flowery language in formal writing and keep your intended audience in mind as you write.

Speaking and writing are the two parts of outputting information to an audience. It is important to consider what your audience needs to know when you are communicating. Understanding how important vocabulary, body language, and tone will help improve your communication skills and help you reach your audience more effectively.

Understanding the four parts of communication will help you see how both inputting (listening and reading) and outputting (speaking and writing) work together for greater understanding and fewer miscommunications. Paying attention to purpose, audience, and understanding will help all who are communicating with each other.

## References

Gordon, George N. 2024. "Communication | Definition, Types, Examples, & Facts." Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/communication>.

Nordquist, Richard. 2019. "What Is Communication and How to Use It Effectively." ThoughtCo.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-communication-1689877>.