

**Neal-Schuman**

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A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians®

# Communicating Professionally



Catherine Sheldrick Ross and Kirsti Nilsen

3rd Edition

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# Communicating Professionally

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A How-To-Do-It Manual®

Catherine Sheldrick Ross & Kirsti Nilsen



Chicago 2013

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To Patricia Dewdney



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## Preface

**In this third** edition of *Communicating Professionally*, our goal remains the same as it was in the first two editions: to provide a handy source for library professionals that covers all aspects of professional communication in one convenient book. The first edition began as a response by Catherine Ross and Patricia Dewdney to the many librarians, educators, and students who attended our continuing education workshops and graduate library and information science courses and who asked us, “Where can we read about these communication skills?” or “Can we use your handouts to develop our own staff training?” From the outset, we have tried both to compile some of our most useful training materials and to provide a broader framework for thinking about the communication skills needed in our field. And now in the third edition, Kirsti Nilsen brings her expertise as a teacher and a researcher in reference, library and information policy, and bibliography. Since the previous edition of *Communicating Professionally*, new developments in technology have expanded the range of tools available for professional communication. In this revision we have updated all references and added new sections to take into account the opportunities offered by new communication media. However, the basics of human communication have not changed. The goal of this new edition continues to be to translate these basic principles into practical guidelines and exercises that can be used for training. We also include current research-based material on communication in general as well as findings of recent research on communication conducted within the field of library and information science itself.

Effective communication is not a gift innate in the lucky few but consists of skills that can be learned and practiced and taught to others. Library professionals need to understand the principles

underlying effective communication, and they also need to learn and intentionally use specific communication skills in situations that arise on the job. Therefore, we have retained the microskills training approach, developed by Allen E. Ivey, but adapted it here for the library context.

This preface explains how the book is organized first to teach specific communication skills and second to show how individual skills can be combined effectively in specific library applications. We also suggest ways you may wish to use the book, and we describe features that are new in this expanded edition.

## **Underlying Assumptions**

---

You will probably get better results from this manual if you share some of our fundamental beliefs:

- The primary mission of a library or information center is to serve its community by linking users, or potential users, with resources that meet their diverse and ever-changing information needs. (This may seem self-evident, but it's the premise on which all our other assumptions are based.)
- Communication skills are central to our jobs. Anyone in any kind of helping profession needs to be able to listen effectively, to ask productive questions, to speak in public, to write clearly, and to help groups function efficiently. The success of our mission and the survival of our institutions depend on the ability of library staff members to communicate with the public.
- Communication skills are learned rather than innate. Even those people who seem to be naturally good at interpersonal communication have learned these skills early in their lives, often from modeling others. And we know from research studies that those people who do not seem at first to be very good at interpersonal communication show after training the most immediate and lasting improvement in their communication behavior.
- Tools that are specifically designed for library staff training now exist. The methodology and resources for successfully

identifying, teaching, learning, applying, and evaluating human communication skills have been available for many years in other helping professions—social work, teaching, counseling, and health services. Now that we have an established body of research on communication skills within library and information science itself, we are able to draw on this work to teach skills to library practitioners in ways that address specific library contexts and applications.

*Communicating Professionally* takes a people-oriented rather than a system-oriented approach to information service. If you believe that people can change, and that they really do want to learn how to give better service, then this book will provide you with some tools for helping yourself and others. Through systematic observation of behavioral changes and through feedback from our trainees, we know that these skills *can* be learned and *do* work in actual on-the-job situations.

## Frameworks for Thinking and Learning

---

*Communicating Professionally* is, above all, intended to be a practical guide. Believing that there is nothing so practical as a good theory, we have based this book on two major frameworks for thinking and learning about human communication: *microtraining* and *sense-making*. We explain these approaches in more detail in Chapter 5.

Briefly, *microtraining* is based on the idea that complex communication behavior can be broken down into its constituent parts or small (micro) skills and that these skills can be taught, one at a time, in a systematic way that involves the following steps:

1. Defining the skill and identifying its function
2. Observing the skill modeled
3. Reading about the skill and the concepts behind it
4. Practicing the skill in a context that provides feedback (e.g., audiorecording or videorecording)
5. Using the skill in a “real world” context and observing the consequences
6. Teaching the skill to others



Microtraining, a model developed by Allen E. Ivey for teaching interview skills to counselors, is an excellent way to teach basic speaking skills to prospective librarians and information service workers. Following Ivey's basic hierarchy of microskills (see Chapter 5), we have concentrated on those skills most appropriate for information service—particularly the basic listening sequence, questioning techniques, and other skills that library staff can use in their everyday contacts with clients and staff.

We found at the same time that we could extend the microtraining method to written communication and group work. For written communication, the components that make for effectiveness can be identified (unity, coherence, clarity, brevity, variety, force, correctness, etc.), modeled, practiced, and taught just as oral communication skills can be taught. Many microskills that contribute to an effective interview are identifiable in group work, as psychologist Robert F. Bales demonstrated many years ago in his work on group interaction. There is no reason, then, why group skills cannot be taught as part of a microtraining program.

The second major framework for *Communicating Professionally* is *sense-making*, an approach that gives rise to user-centered strategies and techniques for interpersonal communication. Following the work of Brenda Dervin, we have used sense-making to focus on how people “make sense” of their world, leading us to reject the traditional way of thinking about information as existing objectively, a self-contained construct, some kind of commodity to be bought, stored, and transferred. Instead, sense-making holds to a view of information as constructed by the individual within situational and perspectival constraints. This concept of information is dynamic and requires us as information providers to ask, “How does information help individuals deal with particular problems or situations that arise in their lives?” Library staff will be more effective in their communications with the public and with other staff if they focus on the situations that generate information needs, the questions people have about these situations, and the ways in which people hope to use the information as a way of responding to these situations (“uses”).

Similarly, sense-making can help us to write more effectively. Writers are helped, for example, if they think of a piece of writing not as a self-contained object but as part of a transaction with a reader. To write a useful report, the writer should consider the situation that has made the report necessary, the questions that readers might have in their minds, and the ways in which readers might expect to use the report.

Sense-making operates at two levels in *Communicating Professionally*. The first level is the interaction between you, the practitioner who provides information service, and the people who seek your help in the library. The other is the interaction between us, the authors, and you, the reader. We have tried to present our ideas in a way that will help you make sense of our ideas so that you can take what you need from this book to help you through situations that arise in your work. Each reader comes to this book with unique experiences and perspectives, each has different needs, and each of you will be looking for different ways in which to use the help that we offer.

## How This Book Is Organized

---

In order to combine the theory of sense-making with the technique of microtraining, we have organized *Communicating Professionally* by presenting first a set of communication skills, then a chapter that explains the theoretical underpinnings of communication skills training, then a set of applications within which these skills can be applied, and finally a chapter on teaching others.

Specifically, the book includes the following four elements:

- **Single skills.** Chapters 1–4 focus on single nonverbal, listening, speaking, and writing skills. For each we give a definition, examples, exercises, and a brief discussion of the functions or effects of the skill.
- **Integration: Putting it all together.** Chapter 5 outlines our approach to communication theory, especially sense-making theory and microtraining. Here we elaborate on the concept of intentionality, discuss the skills of integration, and provide some practical tips for practicing.
- **Applications.** In Chapters 6–9 we discuss common situations in libraries that require the use of nonverbal, listening, speaking, or writing skills. For example, in these chapters you'll find applications such as conducting the reference interview, managing the employment interview, handling complaints and other problematic situations, leading or participating in a group discussion, introducing a speaker, making a presentation yourself, writing

instructions, writing a winning proposal, and creating web content.

- **Training others.** Finally, Chapter 10 covers using the techniques provided in *Communicating Professionally* for staff training.

We have designed this book in a modular format so that you can begin anywhere and move through the book following your own path. The single skills are a good place to start, but you may prefer to begin with the theoretical aspects presented in Chapter 5 and then work through the earlier chapters. If you start with any of the specific applications in Chapters 6–9, you will find referrals to the appropriate earlier sections that describe the particular skills required.

Because learning is an active process centered in the learner, we want to involve you as much as possible in the process of discovery. This book presents a series of starting points for your own further exploration. The sidebars labeled **Did You Know?** include interesting research findings or pertinent examples. The **Quick Tips** sidebars are practical hints that we've found useful or at least worth trying. We also include **Exercise** sidebars because it is not sufficient to read about a skill. To learn and really master the skill, you have to try it out yourself. We stress this because learners have repeatedly told us that something that seemed simpleminded and trivially easy when they read about it proved unexpectedly rich, complex, and tricky when they tried it themselves. All of the exercises are indexed by content under "Exercises" in the index.

Each chapter ends with an extensive section called **Annotated Bibliography**, divided by topic and consisting of books, articles, websites, and multimedia that we have used or that we recommend. The treatment of each topic in this comprehensive book must necessarily be concise, but you can use the annotated bibliographies as starting points for a more thorough and detailed exploration of any topic that particularly interests you. All authors cited in the text and/or in the annotated bibliographies are listed in the index.

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## What's New?

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This third edition of *Communicating Professionally* features four kinds of changes and additions:

- **More and newer resources.** We have checked all references for the latest editions of key resources that we have retained from the second edition of our own book. Throughout we have replaced older material with material that reflects new research, evolving understandings, and emerging issues. The sidebars for all the chapters include some new exercises, examples, and quick tips.
- **More emphasis on cross-cultural communication.** As the research literature on cross-cultural communication continues to expand, we have been able, in each successive edition, to put more emphasis on the effects of different ethnic, cultural, national, and linguistic backgrounds on the daily communication activities in libraries. In addition to a specific section on this topic in Chapter 6, we have also tried to integrate an awareness of cross-cultural communication throughout the book in our treatment of individual skills, common library situations, research facts, examples, and exercises.
- **New applications.** We have added some sections on topics not addressed in previous editions. Specifically there are new sections on applications that have been scantily addressed within the library literature itself but are nevertheless important to library practitioners. Examples include the following: the employment interview (both conducting the interview and being interviewed) in Chapter 6 on speaking one-to-one; the focus group and self-directed work teams in Chapter 7 on working in groups; the poster presentation in Chapter 8 on making presentations; an expanded section on contributing to the professional literature in Chapter 9 on producing texts; and of course new sections throughout, described next, that address applications of new communication technology.
- **Communicating electronically.** When we started thinking about the revisions needed for this third edition, we planned at first to add a new self-contained chapter focusing exclusively on new electronic media. That plan was abandoned when it became clear that no area of communication—written communication, communicating one-to-one, working in groups, or making presentations—is unaffected by new communication technology. New technology has transformed the ways in which people

communicate in every area of library service, changing how users interact with the library staff and with library resources and changing how library staff communicate with each other and with users.

We have therefore integrated throughout the book material that addresses issues raised by technological change. In addition, we have added new material on the virtual reference interview and writing digitally, and we have introduced new sections on these and other topics: virtual teams, virtual conferencing, and virtual discussion sites in a new section on virtual groups in Chapter 7; presentation software in Chapter 8 on making presentations; and forms of electronic writing, such as instant messaging and online chat, virtual discussion sites, Facebook, and blogs in Chapter 9 on producing texts. Throughout the book, we have also introduced new examples to help library staff improve their electronic communication, both oral and written.

## Who Can Use This Book?

---

Anybody. Anyone (professional or not) who has been taught helping skills can be a helper. Anyone who is in need of skills can be helped to acquire them. We see this book as useful not only to librarians and other library staff but also to library volunteers, staff trainers, clerical assistants, board members, and information and referral counselors. In short, the book is for anyone who wants to improve communication skills in the library context or help others do so. An experienced trainer can pass on the skills not only to staff but also to library users, for example, by teaching the skills needed for volunteer leadership of book discussion groups.

Having said that anyone can use this book, we must add a few cautionary notes. Individuals who use this book for independent study may initially feel awkward or frustrated in practicing the individual skills or in trying to integrate the skills into their everyday behavior. This is normal! When you have a communication accident, try the tips for recovering in Chapter 5. In a group training situation, the best results will come with an experienced, supportive leader (which you can all become, eventually—but begin training on a small scale first).

Use the ideas and materials in this book, but develop your own style. If something doesn't work, try it again. Examine what happens carefully, and reflect on it. If you try again and it still doesn't work, try something different. Take from this book what works for you in your own situation. Perhaps you'll just copy a page for a presentation slide or a handout. Maybe you'll use this book to develop a course outline or as a source of a reading for a course curriculum. Or you might find one or two tips that help you improve the way you handle a problem situation.

## **Learn, Do, Teach . . . and Give Feedback**

---

Please try out the communication skills, and then give us feedback. Allen E. Ivey advises his trainees to “learn, do, and teach.” Learning a skill requires being able to demonstrate the skill yourself, not just reading about it. The first step is to practice the skill immediately, right in the training group, where you will be supported when you risk trying out something new. The second step is to practice or use the skill in real-life, on-the-job situations. In this second stage, you will be integrating the skill into everyday behavior and experimenting with specific behavioral contexts or situations. The final step of skill mastery is to teach another person. When you are able to teach someone else, you have truly mastered the skill. Make a commitment to the process by contracting with yourself to “learn, do, and teach” as you work through this book, whether you use it as an individual self-study manual or as a guide to group training. Then we would like to hear from you. You can reach us by e-mailing [ross@uwo.ca](mailto:ross@uwo.ca). Let us know what works for you, how you adapt the material, and what new ideas or exercises you develop. We hope that you will not only make a “learn, do, and teach” contract but will also provide us with feedback so that we too can go through that cycle again.



## Acknowledgments

**To the attendees** in our workshops, students in our graduate courses, and readers of earlier editions who have tried out the exercises and have given us feedback, suggestions, and fresh examples of what works and what doesn't. We have drawn upon your experience and advice.







**PART 1**  
Skills



# Nonverbal Behavior

# 1

## 1.1. Introduction to Nonverbal Behavior

---

You convey nonverbal messages to other people all the time—it's impossible not to. The real question is: What kind of message are you sending by such behavior as your use of eye contact, tone of voice, facial expression, posture, gestures, positioning of arms and legs, style of dress, and the distance you stand from other people? The ideal, of course, is to be aware of all these elements of nonverbal behavior and make sure that the message you send is one of professionalism and your desire to help library users.

Researchers have distinguished various dimensions of nonverbal behavior:

- **Kinesics**—the way we use our bodies, head, arms, and legs, as well as facial expression, posture, and movement
- **Proxemics**—the way we use interpersonal space; the distance we stand from another person
- **Paralanguage or vocalics**—how we say something: the pitch, rate, loudness, and inflection of our speech
- **Chronemics**—the way we time our verbal exchanges; waiting time and punctuality; duration and urgency
- **Physical appearance**—the way we look: body type; clothing; hair and skin color; grooming; accessories and cosmetics
- **Gesture**—the way we use our body to express meaning: hand and arm movements; head and eye movements (nodding or shaking head, rolling eyes, winking)

### IN THIS CHAPTER:

- ✓ 1.1. Introduction to Nonverbal Behavior
- ✓ 1.2. Eye Contact
- ✓ 1.3. Smiling and Nodding
- ✓ 1.4. Pausing
- ✓ 1.5. Posture
- ✓ 1.6. Physical Appearance
- ✓ 1.7. Personal Space
- ✓ 1.8. Vocal Qualities
- ✓ 1.9. Annotated Bibliography

**Did You Know?**



You may have heard the often-repeated myth that 93 percent (or sometimes 70 percent or up to 60 percent) of *all* communication is nonverbal. The original experiments on which these findings are based applied only to emotions and attitudes, not to all communication, and have been challenged. Clearly nonverbal cues matter a lot less when it comes to factual statements and scientific arguments. Nevertheless, this 93 percent myth, however exaggerated, points to a kernel of truth. Nonverbal communication, though not everything, is still very important, especially when emotions and attitudes are involved. Moreover, whenever the verbal and nonverbal messages contradict each other, nonverbal cues are believed (Grassian and Kaplowitz, 2005: 46; Puccinelli, 2010).

**Did You Know?**



The way people think about time and space varies from one culture to another. For example, in mainstream North American culture, being three minutes late for an appointment between equals might not require an apology, but 45 minutes is considered an insult. In some countries, however, being 45 minutes “late” is considered “on time” and does not require an apology. For a fascinating and accessible discussion of these and other cultural differences, see the classic work *The Silent Language* by Edward T. Hall (1959, 1973).

These nonverbal cues convey nuances of meaning and emotion that reinforce, or sometimes contradict, the spoken words. When interpreting the meaning of any communication, people rely on both verbal and nonverbal cues. However, under many circumstances, and especially when there is a discrepancy between the verbal and nonverbal messages, people tend to give more weight to the nonverbal cues. Compare the following examples:

“That’s interesting.” (Said as the speaker smiles and looks encouragingly at the other person.)

“That’s interesting.” (Said in a flat tone as the speaker shrugs and looks away from the other person.)

In the second example, the verbal message, or *what* was said, is contradicted by the paralinguage, the *way* it was said. When we interpret nonverbal behavior, we pay attention to a cluster of cues all at the same time—tone of voice, posture, facial expressions, and so on—to figure out emotions or attitudes. Verbal cues take precedence for factual, abstract, and persuasive communication. Nonverbal cues are given more weight for messages about attitudes or feelings.

It is important to understand that much nonverbal behavior is culture specific (see also 6.6.3 on cross-cultural communication). We learn what is appropriate within our own culture, and we take our own culture as the norm. Variations are interpreted as too much or too little of something, too close or too far away, too loud or too restrained, too pushy or too standoffish. At an early age, we begin to learn how far away to stand from another person, how much physical touching is acceptable, what kind of eye contact is appropriate, and how long to look.

These lessons are never taught formally, but they are learned. For example, a scolding parent or teacher might say to a child, “Stand up straight and look at me when I’m talking to you.” From the middle-class Anglo-American perspective, this looking is understood as an appropriate and respectful listening pose. Children who won’t look us in the eye are considered shifty, guilty, or otherwise lacking in openness and integrity. In contrast, direct eye contact may be considered inappropriate among many African Americans, Native Americans, or Hispanic Americans, who believe that lowering the eyes is a sign of respect.

Misunderstandings often occur because of the differing communication styles used by people in “high-context” versus “low-context”

cultures. According to Edward T. Hall (1976), high-context cultures differ from low-context cultures in how much they rely on cues other than words to convey and interpret meanings. Hall has argued that in any given communication situation there is far more going on than we can possibly pay attention to. Therefore, we filter out those signals that our culture considers less important. Low-context cultures pay attention to direct messages and the explicit meanings of the words themselves and downplay the context—the *way* in which the words are said. High-context cultures, which are group oriented with a strong sense of tradition, place importance on ambiance, rapport, and trust building and rely more on nonverbal cues such as eye movements, tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions (Berlanga-Cortéz, 2000).

To complicate matters, appropriate communication style varies with other factors, such as status, gender, age, generational differences, and the formality of the situation. So it is not a simple matter of learning the “right” cultural behavior but rather attuning ourselves to these factors as they pertain in any given situation and with any given individual. We may not always be communicating what we think we are communicating to a person whose culture is different from our own. McGuigan (2002) points out that we overlook cultural differences at our peril. We might be violating deeply held cultural values and be perceived as arrogant or rude. The following sections on individual skills describe some of the common meanings of nonverbal behavior in mainstream North America, with notes on alternative interpretations.

## 1.2. Eye Contact

Making eye contact is one of a cluster of skills known as *attending skills*. By using attending skills, many of which are nonverbal, we show our interest in others by paying attention. Attending skills are the anchors in Allen E. Ivey’s microskills hierarchy, the most basic skills that we must learn before we move on to other skills such as active listening, questioning, summarizing, or confronting (Ivey, Ivey, and Zalaquett, 2010). Eye contact is an attending skill that we all recognize. The appropriate use of eye contact is one of the most powerful cues we have for opening and maintaining communication. It has been described as a visual handshake that connects you nonverbally with the other person.

### Exercise



#### Soundless TV

Develop your awareness of body language. Watch a television drama, soap opera, or reality TV show online with the sound turned off. Try to interpret what the characters are doing and feeling, using no cues but the actions. What emotions are being displayed? What is the relationship between the characters? How do you know? Later check your interpretations by replaying the sequence a second time, this time with the sound turned on. Which nonverbal cues did you use most during the soundless TV?

### Did You Know?



Gender differences are really cultural differences. Regardless of ethnic background, boys and girls grow up in essentially different cultures. For example, boys tend to play outside, in large groups that are hierarchically structured, whereas girls play in small groups or pairs, often with their best friends. For an interesting discussion of how this pattern results in communication accidents between women and men, read the books by Deborah Tannen (1990, 1994).

**Did You Know?**



Researchers have found that verbal content and some facial expressions can be highly controlled by the individual but that certain body movements and tone of voice are less susceptible to conscious control. These latter cues are therefore harder to fake. In novels, characters are sometimes described as having a smile that “doesn’t reach the eyes.” In an authentic smile (called the “Duchenne smile”), involuntary muscles around the eye contract, producing a crinkly-eyed effect that doesn’t happen in the fake smile. Nonverbal behaviors not under conscious control are more likely to reveal real thoughts and feelings than are the words themselves (Puccinelli, 2010: 276-277).

**Exercise**



**Attending Skills**

Find a partner with whom you can role-play a conversation. Ask your partner to talk about a topic in which he or she is personally interested. Your role is to listen and to encourage your partner to say more by using the attending skills of eye contact, smiling, and nodding along with verbal encouragements such as “That’s interesting,” “What happened next?” and “uh-huh.” Which of these skills do you feel comfortable doing? Which ones need more practice? Change roles. How does your partner’s use of attending skills affect the way you talk about your topic?

Middle-class Anglo-Americans communicate that they are listening by looking at the other person, and they may feel that without eye contact no communication is taking place. For middle-class Anglo-Americans, looking at the person talking to you usually indicates warmth, interest, and a desire to communicate. We can powerfully influence how much another person talks by our use of eye contact. Frequent breaks in eye contact are usually interpreted as inattention, lack of interest, embarrassment, or even dislike. Therefore, looking down at the floor, up at the ceiling, or over at a file will cause the other person to stop talking. Maintaining appropriate eye contact indicates interest and encourages the other person to continue talking.

But what is appropriate eye contact? Too much can be as bad as too little. A prolonged and unwavering stare can seem hostile, rude, intrusive, or even threatening. Appropriate eye contact involves neither staring nor avoiding. Unless the context is a courtship, the time spent looking directly into the other person’s eyes is actually very brief. Your eyes will move from the speaker’s eyes to chin, hairline, mouth, and back to the eyes. Listeners and speakers tend to adopt an alternate pattern of looking and looking away. Moreover, the looking times of speaker and listener are not symmetrical. In mainstream North American culture, listeners spend twice as much time looking as do speakers.

### **1.3. Smiling and Nodding**

Smiling and occasional nodding function as minimal encouragers (see 3.3) in conversation, reassuring the other person that you are friendly, interested, and listening. Smiling is a sign of warmth in most cultures, but in some places—in Japan, for example—smiling may indicate discomfort or even hostility. Nodding the head up and down is usually a positive signal and is understood to mean agreement. But in many cultures, a head nod means that the other person is listening politely or following what you are saying, not necessarily agreeing with it. To complicate matters, in some cultures the side-to-side nod means agreement and the vertical nod means disagreement. If you usually listen impassively, try nodding occasionally. Don’t overdo it. An occasional single nod of the head encourages people to say more; successive nods get them to stop.

## 1.4. Pausing

The effective use of pauses, or silence, is really a kind of nonverbal behavior, although it is often combined with speaking and listening skills. A well-placed pause can substitute for a conversational turn. Pausing is intentional silence, either as a delay before you speak or used instead of speaking. For example, when it is your turn to speak, you wait before speaking, or say nothing, until the other person speaks again.

The effect of pausing varies according to culture. In some cultures, lengthy and frequent pauses are a sign of inattention. In others, such as some Native American cultures, they are a sign of attention and respect, an indication that the listener is taking the speaker's last statement seriously and considering a worthy answer. It is important to know what effect your pauses may have in different situations. The intentional use of pauses can be helpful in many communication contexts, but is especially valuable during an interview, such as the reference interview (6.4.1), the employment interview (6.5), or an interview between a supervisor and a supervisee. In mainstream North American culture, effective pausing sharpens an interviewer's listening skills and conveys attentiveness to the interviewee. A pause may function as an encourager or a probe. It says to the interviewee, "I'm listening" and "Go on." Because the interviewer relinquishes her turn at the conversation, the interviewee is likely to expand on what he has previously said. Consider these examples:

**Librarian:** Please tell me about your research.

**User:** Well, this is in the area of applied microbiology.

**Librarian:** . . . (pause, combined with encouraging body language)

**User:** I'm studying the action of lactic acid bacteria in cheese.

**Supervisor:** How is the self-study report coming along?

**Staff member:** Fine.

**Supervisor:** . . . (pause, combined with encouraging body language)

**Staff member:** Well, actually it's taken a while for some people to get their sections done, and some parts need extra editing. But I think we'll have the final draft by next week.

### Exercise



#### Practice Pausing

For a timed session of half an hour, make a conscious effort to use pauses while speaking to someone at home or at work. Ask a question and then—just wait. One or two seconds of blank time might seem endless to you, but it will give the other person a chance to think before responding. Note what happens after the pauses. Did pausing improve communication? Were there any negative outcomes? Try this exercise at various times with different people.

### A Quick Tip



#### Consider the Context

Don't misread nonverbal behavior. Each individual nonverbal signal should be considered in context and interpreted as part of a cluster of behaviors. You might think that a firm handshake indicates confidence while a weak handshake shows a lack of gumption. But maybe not. A limp handshake may indicate something else entirely, such as arthritis. Kendra Cherry (2011) advises that you interpret a particular signal in the context of all the other nonverbal behaviors: "A person's overall demeanor is far more telling than a single gesture viewed in isolation."



### Did You Know?



Pauses serve various purposes: they are used for cognitive processing, as a control mechanism, to indicate acceptance or refusal, or simply for turn taking (Goodwin, 1981).

Pauses are also important as a listening skill when they follow a statement or a question. A common difficulty for librarians who are learning to ask effective questions (see 3.4) is remembering to pause after the question while the other person formulates an answer. It's too easy to ask a question and then rush to answer it yourself, for example, "What would help you? Do you want X?"

Effective pausing is more difficult to learn than one might think and requires practice. Pauses longer than ten seconds may confuse the user, who becomes unsure whether the other person is still listening. Very short pauses tend to be unnoticeable. Some librarians habitually pause while considering what the user has said or deciding what to do next. But pausing too often or too long can be awkward, especially over the telephone. Used correctly, however, pausing is a skill that helps reduce the common mistakes of talking too much, cutting the other person off, and interrupting. The skills that supplement pausing are restatement, encouragers, and nonverbal skills that show attentiveness.

### **Steps to Using Pauses Effectively**

1. Observe your own behavior. Under which circumstances do you normally pause? Under which circumstances do you *not* pause, but perhaps should?
2. Consciously attempt to vary the lengths of your pauses. Pause for a longer or shorter time than usual, and observe the effect. Experiment by substituting short pauses for questions or statements.
3. Use appropriate body language. When you pause, make eye contact, and use other body language that says, "I'm listening—go on."
4. Train yourself to wait. When asking a question, practice stopping at the end of the question until the other person answers.

## **1.5. Posture**

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Your posture, or the way you hold your body, signals your mood and attitude to others, including library users. Slumping signals fatigue, boredom, or discouragement. Rigidity suggests nervousness

or disagreement. Closed postures, such as crossed arms or orienting yourself away from the other person, often convey detachment or disagreement, no matter what your words say. When you give out mixed messages, other people trust the nonverbal cues.

## 1.6. Physical Appearance

How you look and what you wear can be considered as nonverbal communication, especially those aspects that are within your control. For example, we have limited control over weight and height. In North America, however, we have a great deal of choice about what we wear and how we decorate ourselves. Despite the phasing out of explicit dress codes, appearance *does* matter in service organizations.

The standards for an “acceptable” appearance vary according to the immediate task, our status in the organization, and whether or not we work with the public. For example, when you are giving a public presentation, you are generally expected to be dressed more formally than you might be for your everyday activities. For an event such as a media interview (8.7), you want to appear professional and to avoid distracting elements such as noisy jewelry. In special libraries you will be explicitly or implicitly encouraged to fit in with the corporate image.

In the absence of clear-cut dress regulations, consider how various aspects of appearance may be read by others. You will then be able to take steps to avoid unintended interpretations, some of which are culturally determined by the expectations and assumptions of the interpreter. You may think that a particular outfit is cool, but you may be sending unintended messages about your professional status or role within the organization. Clothing chosen to express individuality, for example, may not be seen as professionally appropriate by people whose culture does not place a high value on individuality.

One reason to adopt a professional appearance is that it helps library users identify you as an employee whom they can ask for help. From an unobtrusive study conducted in various types of libraries, Durrance (1989: 33) concluded:

Appearance of the staff member (including age and dress) plays an important role in helping observers make decisions, especially when the environment fails to send a clear message; 56% used

### A Quick Tip



#### Trunk Lean

To convey relaxed attentiveness during a conversation, stand or sit so that you are leaning slightly toward the other person. This is called “trunk lean.”

**Exercise**



**Does a Name Tag Help?**

If you don't normally wear an identification tag, make one and wear it for an hour while you stand near your public access catalog. Do you find that more people tend to ask you questions? If people still do not ask you for help, try asking them if they found what they wanted. The results may be surprising.

**Exercise**



**Get Out of My Face**

In an article (Celik, 2005: 38) on the difference between Turkish and American senses of personal space, the author, who is from Turkey, describes an encounter in the Chicago O'Hare International Airport on his first visit to the United States:

I anxiously approach the lady at the information desk of the airline company for help. Although I am nervous and upset, I try to tell her about the situation as I ask if she can put me in the first available flight to my destination. Although I thought I spoke to her in a calm, polite way, she says: "Get your face out of mine first of all." I have no idea what is going on and why she reacted the way she did. She acts intimidated and upset even though I thought I was being polite.

Using the framework of the zones of personal space, explain what happened in this encounter. Why did the lady at the information desk behave as she did? What could she have done differently?

environmental clues to decide if they had been working with a librarian. Well-dressed, older individuals were assumed to be librarians while casually dressed younger people were thought to be students.

One of Durrance's students approached a young man seated behind the reference desk, who said that he was not the librarian, but rather a friend of the librarian. When "the librarian emerged from the stacks, the observer concluded from her age, her casual clothing, and her bright pink hair that she was not a librarian either" (Durrance, 1989: 33).

This example raises the much-debated issue of whether library staff who serve the public should wear identification tags. Some research indicates that library users feel they have been better served if they know the name of the staff member helping them, in much the same way as they like to know the name of the doctor who treats them in an emergency ward. For those employees who are concerned about privacy and security, however, the purpose is served by tags that indicate their function or position. Some libraries give employees the option of using an "alias" on tags. The key consideration in the name-tag debate, and indeed in the entire issue of appearance, is really accessibility. Can people identify you as someone who is able to help them, and do they feel comfortable in approaching you?

## 1.7. Personal Space

The distance we stand from another person and our body orientation, such as leaning forward or turning aside, can send powerful nonverbal messages. The dimension of nonverbal behavior called "proxemics" is the way we use space in interpersonal communication. As is the case with other nonverbal behaviors, our sense of the appropriate use of personal space is culturally determined. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1974: 2), who coined the term *proxemics*, has described it as "the study of man's transactions as he perceives and uses intimate, personal, social and public space in various settings while following out-of-awareness dictates of cultural paradigms."

Hall (1963) explains how personal space works, using four zones expanding outward in concentric circles with the individual at the center. Imagine an invisible bubble that surrounds your entire body

6 to 18 inches away from your skin. Only people with whom you have a very close relationship would be welcome at this *intimate distance*. Next, at a distance away from you of 1.5 to 4 feet, is *personal distance*, a space into which you would feel comfortable admitting family members and personal friends. Next, from 4 to 12 feet away, is *social distance*. This is the physical distance you would leave between yourself and an acquaintance when having a conversation. It is used in formal social interactions, including business and professional encounters. And finally there is *public distance* of 12 to 25 feet away, which is used for public speeches and the like. This conceptual framework is useful in explaining why you may feel uncomfortable when talking to someone from another culture. His or her culturally learned sense of appropriate distance may differ from yours (Berlanga-Cortéz, 2000). For example, someone from the United Kingdom or Norway may perceive a personal distance of 2 feet as too close (pushy), whereas someone from Latin America or the Mediterranean is apt to find it too distant (unfriendly).

Be aware of your own sense of personal space and the distance that you like to keep in the following situations: (1) during a conversation between yourself and a close friend and (2) during a conversation between yourself and someone you have just met in a professional context. Do you ever find yourself backing up? Or, contrarily, do you find yourself trying to close the gap? Knowing that feelings of discomfort may be caused by differing concepts of personal space makes it easier not to feel invaded or, alternatively, to feel that you are getting the cold shoulder.

## 1.8. Vocal Qualities

Vocal qualities, sometimes called “paralanguage,” are what get lost between the recording of a voice and the transcript of the words. These vocal cues include volume (loud or soft), pitch (high or low), rate of speech (fast or slow), rhythm, emphasis, use of speech fillers, and fluency. After you have become accustomed to hearing your own recorded voice, evaluate your speaking style using the following checklist of questions. Try to be objective as you listen to your voice. Ask yourself whether there are any features of your speaking style that prevent you from sounding as effective as you would like.

### Did You Know?



Sociologist Dane Archer (*Personal Space: Exploring Human Proxemics*; video, 28 min) describes what happens in a proxemics experiment in which the personal space of experimental subjects is invaded by three people who approach too closely. The most common response for the “invaded” person is to leave, usually without saying anything. Only 2 percent say something to their invader.

### Did You Know?



Spanish-speaking people use silence to indicate agreement, whereas Native Americans use silence to indicate disagreement (Evans et al., 2010: 39).

**Did You Know?**



Todaro and Smith (2006: 5) say, "Part of any complete customer service program is the design and adoption of a policy of positive communication that focuses on recommended word or phrase choices, intonation, inflection, and volume to match recommended body language and proxemics. Staff must find a speaking voice that is positive and respectful of customers, including younger people, and avoid demeaning or negative language."

**Exercise**



**On Emphasis**

Say each of these sentences in as many different ways as you can. In each case, how does the change in emphasis affect the meaning of the sentence?

- Maria gave that disk to John.
- Who do you think you are?
- I didn't say that I think he is good at teaching.

**Vocal Qualities: A Checklist**

- Does every word and every sentence sound like every other? Or do you vary the pitch and emphasis depending on the sense?
- Do you sound tired and bored? Or energetic and interested?
- Is your tone tight? Nasal? Breathy?
- Do you mumble? Or can your consonants be distinctly heard?
- Do you speak so softly that people often can't hear you?
- Do you have a machine-gun delivery so rapid that people sometimes miss what you say?
- Do you speak so slowly that people have trouble waiting for you to finish your sentences?
- Do all your sentences, even declarative ones, have an upward intonation as if you are asking a question? Do you sound hesitant and unsure? Or do you sound confident in what you are saying?

The way you speak sends a message. Is it the message you intend? If not, you may want to work on correcting problems that you have identified. Following are exercises related to six aspects of voice: emphasis, variety, voice quality, articulation, projection, and inflection.

**Emphasis**

Dull speakers tend to give equal emphasis to every word, overlooking the importance of emphasis to reinforce meaning. See the difference it makes to the meaning when you vary the emphasis. Read aloud the following sentence, putting the emphasis on a different word each time:

- Would* you like me to help you?
- Would *you* like me to help you?
- Would you *like* me to help you?
- Would you like *me* to help you?
- Would you like me to *help* you?
- Would you like me to help *you*?

**Variety**

There are four main ways to achieve variety. Change the pitch and inflection; change the pace; change the volume; and use pauses. Read aloud the passage below, making it sound as flat and inexpressive as you can. To increase the monotony, you can use a singsong rhythm in

which the predictable pattern of rising and falling tone bears no relation to the sense of the passage. Then read it with great variety, using pauses and exaggerating the variations in pitch, pacing, and loudness to emphasize the meaning of the passage. To get a better sense of the differences in the way a listener hears these two versions, record the two readings and then replay them. You may be surprised that what you thought was a greatly exaggerated reading was not really exaggerated, just more interesting.

A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied around his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin. “Oh! Don’t cut my throat, sir,” I pleaded in terror. “Pray don’t do it, sir.”

“Tell us your name!” said the man. “Quick.”

—From Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*

## Voice Quality

The quality of your voice depends on the way you form vowel sounds and use the resonators of your upper throat, mouth, and nose. Because the vowel carries the weight of the tone, the way to improve tonal quality is to work on vowels. The muscles in the jaw and throat play an important role here. If the jaw and throat are tense and closed, the vowel cannot be open and the tone will sound tight or harsh.

Read aloud the following passages, prolonging and exaggerating the vowel sounds. Repeat, paying attention to lip action.

The Rainbow comes and goes  
And lovely is the Rose

—From Wordsworth’s “Ode: Imitations of Immortality”

Far and few, far and few,  
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;  
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,  
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

—From Edward Lear’s “The Jumblies”

### Exercise



#### Evaluate Your Own Voice

Record yourself in an informal conversation. Then record yourself reading aloud. Your first thought as you replay your recorded voice might be, “But that doesn’t sound like me.” However, the voice that you hear recorded is the voice that other people hear.

### A Quick Tip



#### Wait a Day

After recording your voice, don’t listen to it immediately. You will be better able to evaluate it dispassionately if you allow some time to separate yourself from what you’ve recorded.

### Exercise



#### A Test for Nasal Twang

Hold your nose as you say “ee-ah-oo.” Your nose shouldn’t vibrate. If it does, then you have some nasality. The only sounds in English that should be nasal are *m*, *n*, and *ng*.



**Did You Know?**



“Smiling lifts the soft palate and improves the way sound is generated in the mouth” (List-Handley, 2008: 70).

**A Quick Tip**



**Don't Yell**

When talking to people who are hard of hearing, don't yell the vowels more loudly; instead, articulate the consonants more clearly.

**Articulation**

While the vowels carry the tone of the voice, the consonants are what distinguish one word from another. Read the following words: *hit, bit, mitt, hill, his, big*. The vowel is the same. Only the consonants differ. Distinct pronunciation of the consonants requires the energetic use of the articulators—the lips, tongue, and palate. Mumblerers are lazy pronouncers of consonants.

Read aloud the following passage. Record yourself as you emphasize the consonants, especially the ones at the ends of the words. Pay attention to lip movement and tongue action. You will be surprised that what felt to you like an extravagant exaggeration of consonants comes through on the recording as good clear articulation.

Andrew Airpump asked his aunt her ailment;  
Did Andrew Airpump ask his aunt her ailment?  
If Andrew Airpump asked his aunt her ailment,  
Where was the ailment of Andrew Airpump's aunt.

—From “Peter Piper’s Practical Principles  
of Plain and Perfect Pronunciation”

As you practice this next selection, emphasize the consonants. You should be able to feel the muscles of your tongue and lips working energetically. Because this is a patter song from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance*, you might want to emphasize the rhythm, too.

I am the very model of a modern Major-General,  
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral,  
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical,  
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical;  
I'm very well acquainted too with matters mathematical,  
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical,  
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news  
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse.

—From Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance*

**Projection**

Children have no trouble with projection. Newborn babies can cry for hours and do. It's all a question of proper breathing. If your breath is shallow and irregular, your voice will be thin and weak. What is

needed is an efficient and regular use of breath—not breathiness for the first few words and running out of breath by the end. The way to increase loudness is to increase the pressure of breath below the larynx, not to tense up the muscles of the upper chest and throat. Tensing the throat raises the pitch and produces a harsh, strident tone. Keep the throat relaxed. Good projection depends on an adequate breath supply, resonance, and some prolongation of the vowel sounds. Of course, because you want to be understood as well as heard, you also have to articulate the consonants distinctly. Practice outside or in a large room by reading a prose passage (pick any paragraph from this book), using three different levels of projection:

- As if in conversation with several other people
- As if in a staff meeting with 20 other people
- As if in a large auditorium (imagine bouncing your voice off the back wall)

### **Inflection**

English speakers indicate questions by ending sentences with a rising inflection: “You do?” However, some speakers use this same pattern of rising inflection when they intend to make a declarative statement so that their statements sound like questions. Among linguists, this speech pattern has been called “high rising terminals” (HRT) or sometimes “recurrent intonational rises.” But more popularly it is known as “uptalk” or “upspeak.” Uptalking has become a common speech pattern, particularly among young women, though it is by no means limited to them. George W. Bush used it too—listen to a speech sample at <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languageelog/archives/002708.html>.

Why has uptalk become so pervasive? Some communication experts claim that, for teens and children, peer identity plays a role, because people want to sound like their peers. Others claim that uptalk is used by generally confident speakers to invite a response or to invite agreement from another person (Lieberman, 2006). Whatever its causes and whatever its origin, whether valley girl speak or something else, it is generally agreed that uptalking sounds uncertain and lacking in confidence to non-uptalkers. They are likely to conclude, correctly or not, that you are asking for approval rather than making a confident statement. Uptalk can easily become an habitual speech pattern.

### **Exercise**



#### **Voice Makeover**

Find out whether or not you use uptalk. Many people are unaware of the inflection of their own voice. Record yourself during a conversation with a friend. Talk naturally the way you normally would. Replay the conversation and listen for a rising inflection. Ask your friend to listen too and help you identify uptalk, if any.

### **Exercise**



#### **Up and Down**

Try reading the following sentences. First read them with a rising inflection. Then read them as if you really believed them.

My name is Barbara.

This is a good project.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to this afternoon's speaker: Mary Entwhistle.

The library will be closing in 15 minutes.

This is a very interesting book.



**Did You Know?**



Research suggests that discourse markers can be any of these:

- Little fillers that give the speaker a moment to decide which words should come next
- A means to connect the speaker and the hearer
- A connection between one part of an utterance and the next
- An insertion that means “I’m quoting”

### **Speech Fillers**

Using speech fillers is not, strictly speaking, a quality of voice, but we are including it anyway as a coda to this section because this behavior sends a message to others. Interspersing your speech with phrases such as “like,” “you know,” “I mean,” and “Do you know what I mean?” can be distracting and sound unprofessional. Technically a type of “discourse marker,” these speech fillers are often an unconscious habit that people fall into without being aware of it. However, not all discourse markers are annoying or distracting. Some, such as “well,” “now,” “actually,” and “okay” perform an important function in conversation beyond being fillers. These expressions make the language livelier and more personal and can be used to indicate acknowledgment, agreement, or involvement.

Assess your own use of discourse markers to see whether you overuse certain expressions that function only as fillers. How can you do this? Listen to yourself. Observe *when* you use these fillers. Ask yourself: What purpose do they serve? Which ones seem to have no purpose? Which ones do you overuse that you would now like to eliminate from your speech?

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### Videos

Dane Archer, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, has produced a series of videotapes and trainer's guides on nonverbal communication. We recommend these for training library staff:

- *The Human Face: Emotions, Identities and Masks* (1995; 31 min)
- *The Human Voice: Exploring Vocal Paralanguage* (1993; 30 min)
- *Personal Space: Exploring Human Proxemics* (1999; 28 min)
- *A World of Differences: Understanding Cross-Cultural Communication* (1997; 30 min)
- *A World of Gestures: Culture and Nonverbal Communication* (1991; 28 min)

These and other videos are available from Berkeley Media LLC, Saul Zaentz Film Center, 2600 Tenth Street, Suite 626, Berkeley, California 94710; phone: (510) 486-9900; e-mail: [info@berkeleymedia.com](mailto:info@berkeleymedia.com); fax: (510) 486-9944. For more information or to order videos, see <http://www.berkeleymedia.com/>.

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