

Self-Understanding in Communication

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about how your sense of self comes through in oral and written communication, and the impacts that it can have on your message. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Self-Awareness and Perspective

We have talked often about the **self and social awareness skill** in earlier lessons. There are many components of this skill, and each of them plays an important role in how you communicate. Public communication starts with intrapersonal communication, or communication with yourself. You need to know what you want to say before you can say it to an audience.

Understanding your **perspective** can lend insight to your **awareness**, or the ability to be conscious of events and stimuli. Awareness determines what you pay attention to, how you carry out your intentions, and what you remember of your activities and experiences each day.

Awareness is a complicated and fascinating area of study. The way we take in information, give it order, and assign it meaning has long interested researchers from disciplines including sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

Your perspective is a major factor in this dynamic process. Whether you are aware of it or not, you bring to the act of reading this sentence a frame of mind formed from experiences and education across your lifetime.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Imagine that you see a presentation about snorkeling in Hawaii as part of a travel campaign. If you have never been snorkeling but love to swim, how will your perspective lead you to pay attention to the presentation? If, however, you had a traumatic experience as a child in a pool and are now afraid of being under water, how will your perspective influence your reaction?

Learning to recognize how your perspective influences your thoughts is a key step in understanding yourself and preparing to communicate with others.



TERMS TO KNOW

Awareness

The ability to be conscious of events and stimuli.

Perspective

A frame of mind formed from experiences and education across an individual's lifetime.

2. Social Influence on the Self

When we communicate, we are full of expectations, doubts, fears, and hopes. Where we place emphasis, what we focus on, and how we view our potential has a direct impact on our communication interactions.

You gather a sense of self as you grow, age, and experience others and the world. At various times in your life, you have probably been praised for some of your abilities and talents, and criticized for doing some things poorly. These compliments and criticisms probably had a deep impact on you.

Much of what we know about ourselves we've learned through interaction with others. Not everyone has had positive influences in their lives, and not every critic knows what they are talking about, but criticism and praise still influence how and what we expect from ourselves.

So, if you were ever told by someone that you were not a good communicator, know that you can improve. You can shape your performance through experience, and a business communication course, a mentor at work, or even reading effective business communication authors can result in positive change.

3. Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

Another point of discussion useful for our study about ourselves as communicators is to examine our attitudes, beliefs, and values. These are all interrelated, and researchers have varying theories as to which comes first and which springs from another. We learn our values, beliefs, and attitudes through interaction with others.

An **attitude** is your immediate disposition toward a concept or an object. Attitudes can change easily and frequently.

➞ **EXAMPLE** You may prefer vanilla ice cream while someone else prefers peppermint, but if someone tries to persuade you of how delicious peppermint is, you may be willing to try it and find that you like it better than vanilla.

A **belief** is an idea based on our previous experiences and convictions and may not necessarily be based on logic or fact.

➞ **EXAMPLE** You no doubt have beliefs on political, economic, and religious issues. These beliefs may not have been formed through rigorous study, but you nevertheless hold them as important aspects of self.

Beliefs often serve as a frame of reference through which we interpret our world. Although they can be changed, it often takes time or strong evidence to persuade someone to change a belief.

A **value** is a core concept and idea of what we consider good or bad, right or wrong, or what is worth the sacrifice. Our values are central to our self-image, what makes us who we are. Like beliefs, our values may not be based on empirical research or rational thinking, but they are even more resistant to change than beliefs.

To undergo a change in values, a person may need to undergo a transformative life experience.

IN CONTEXT

Suppose you highly value the freedom to make personal decisions, including the freedom to choose whether or not to wear a helmet while driving a motorcycle. This value of individual choice is central to your way of thinking and you are unlikely to change this value.

However, if your brother was driving a motorcycle without a helmet and suffered an accident that fractured his skull and left him with permanent brain damage, you might reconsider this value. While you might still value freedom of choice in many areas of life, you might become an advocate for helmet laws— and perhaps also for other forms of highway safety, such as stiffer penalties for texting while driving.



TERMS TO KNOW

Attitude

An immediate disposition toward a concept or an object.

Belief

An idea based on previous experiences and convictions, but not necessarily based on logic or fact.

Value

A core concept or idea of what is considered good or bad, right or wrong, or worth a sacrifice.

4. Self-Concept, Self-Image, and Self-Esteem

Your **self-concept** is composed of two main elements:

- Self-image
- Self-esteem

Your **self-image** is how you see yourself, how you would describe yourself to others. It includes your physical characteristics— your eye color, hair length, height, and so forth. It also includes your knowledge, experience, interests, relationships, and expectations of yourself— what you can be.



REFLECT

What is your image of yourself as a communicator? How do you feel about your ability to communicate?

While the two responses may be similar, they indicate different things.

Your **self-esteem** is how you feel about yourself; it is your feelings of self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-respect. Healthy self-esteem can be particularly important when you experience a setback or a failure.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Instead of blaming yourself or thinking, "I'm just no good," high self-esteem will enable you to persevere and give yourself positive messages like "If I prepare well and try harder, I can do better next time."

Putting your self-image and self-esteem together yields your self-concept: your central identity and set of beliefs about who you are and what you are capable of accomplishing.

When it comes to communicating, your self-concept can play an important part. You may find that communicating is a struggle, or the thought of communicating may make you feel talented and successful.

Either way, if you view yourself as someone capable of learning new skills and improving as you go, you will have an easier time learning to be an effective communicator.



BIG IDEA

Whether positive or negative, your self-concept influences your performance and the expression of that essential ability: communication.



TERMS TO KNOW

Self-Concept

An individual's central identity and set of beliefs about who they are and what they are capable of accomplishing.

Self-Image

An individual's view of themselves, including physical characteristics as well as knowledge, experience, interests, relationships, and personal expectations.

Self-Esteem

An individual's feelings of self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-respect.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that being a good communicator starts with having a well-developed understanding of self. To communicate effectively, you need **self-awareness** and insight into your **perspective**, an appreciation for **social influence on the self**, and recognition of your **attitudes, beliefs, and values**. All of these factor into your **self-concept**, which is composed of your **self-image and self-esteem**. To be a good communicator, you must conceptualize yourself as one.

Best of luck in your learning!

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