

EASY TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

By the Language Resource Center

1. PROFILING YOUR INTERNATIONAL WORKING STYLE

Analise these ten intercultural attitudes and behaviors and choose *Yes*, *No* or *It depends*, according to what best describes your general international working style. Remember, there are no 'right' answers – it is not necessary to mark *Yes* to all the descriptions below. The important thing when working internationally is to know your own style, to observe the styles of others and then *do something* to manage any differences between the styles positively.

Profiling your international working style

1 Meeting new people	
I like to be the one who makes the first contact and builds relationships with new people, especially those who have different experiences and values from my own. I take a strong interest in people from different and unfamiliar cultural backgrounds.	Yes / No / It depends
2 Being flexible	
I adapt easily to a range of different social and cultural situations. I have learned, or I want to learn, a wide range of behaviours. I am ready to experiment with different ways of behaving to find those that are most acceptable for others.	Yes / No / It depends
3 Focusing on objectives	
I set clear goals and tasks, and work with determination to achieve them, regardless of problems or pressures to compromise. I believe I can control much of my own destiny, and can make things happen in the world.	Yes / No / It depends
4 Dealing with change	
I look for variety, change and stimulation in life, and avoid safe and predictable environments. I push myself into uncomfortable and ambiguous situations, even if I am unsure that I have the skills required to be successful.	Yes / No / It depends

5 Understanding how others see me	
I am aware of how I come across to others. I am sensitive to how I communicate, and how my behaviour is interpreted by international partners.	Yes / No / It depends
6 Listening effectively	
I check and clarify, rather than assume that I understand what people are saying. I do this by paraphrasing and exploring the words that they use and the meaning they attach to them.	Yes / No / It depends
7 Speaking clearly	
I am able to get my ideas across in an international context by communicating clearly. I explain my ideas with simple words, and I also make clear the positive motivation behind my ideas.	Yes / No / It depends
8 Understanding cultures	
I am interested in unfamiliar cultures, and I take time to learn about them. I use different strategies for gathering information, for example asking colleagues and clients about their culture, so that I can understand the cultural contexts I work in.	Yes / No / It depends
9 Influencing decisions	
I am good at understanding where political power lies in an organisation. I work hard to understand the different cultural contexts in which decisions are made.	Yes / No / It depends
10 Managing diversity	
I make sure that different cultural perspectives are properly understood and used in international teams and in the problem-solving process.	Yes / No / It depends

Read the summary below to find out the meaning of your scores and ideas for personal development.

1. MEETING NEW PEOPLE

Yes: Your working style is strongly people-oriented. You may have the ability to build rapport quickly with a range of people. However, people who are strongly task-oriented may think you spend too much time on small talk and not enough on getting the job done.

No: Your working style is strongly task-oriented. You may have the ability to focus quickly, and to focus groups quickly, on tasks when under time pressure. However, some people may find your approach a little impolite if you don't spend the time and make the effort to get to know them.

2. BEING FLEXIBLE

Yes: Your working style is based on a strong people orientation and a preference for harmony in working relationships. You may have the ability to make others feel comfortable with you by adapting to their style. However, some people may find it difficult to trust you if they see you changing your behaviours too much.

No: Your working style is based on being honest and authentic – being who you really are, rather than the person someone else wants you to be. You may have the ability to create trust in this way, as people will believe that what you say is what you really think. However, people may also feel uncomfortable with your behaviour at times and see you as inflexible in some circumstances.

3. FOCUSING ON OBJECTIVES

Yes: Your working style is strongly results-oriented. You may have the ability to reach your goals even in very difficult situations. However, some people may see you as too focused on your own goals and not able to negotiate compromises with those who have a different opinion.

No: Your working style is less focused on individual goals and more on reaching results which are right for the whole organisation. You may have the ability to see the bigger picture and negotiate with those who have a different opinion. However, some people may think you lack focus on your own goals and that you are too easily influenced by others.

4. DEALING WITH CHANGE

Yes: You feel comfortable in situations where things are open and unplanned. You may have a strong wish to learn many new skills, rather than specialise and be expert on one area. Some people may think you lack focus at times, especially those who are experts and / or those who like to plan in detail.

No: You are someone who likes to organise and plan in order to be effective at work. You may prefer to be an expert in one subject rather than someone who learns a little about many topics. Some people, particularly in management, may see this way of working as problematic for international situations where tolerance of ambiguity is essential.

5. UNDERSTANDING HOW OTHERS SEE ME

Yes: You have a good understanding of your own working style and of how others will interpret it – either positively or negatively. You may have the ability to be flexible and adapt your style to make other people feel comfortable. However, you may spend too much time worrying about the opinion of other people rather than getting the job done.

No: You focus on getting the job done rather than on managing people's feelings. You may have the ability to remain calm during moments of conflict. You do not allow the emotions of others to influence your decision-making. However, you may not see that some people find parts of your working style difficult. As a result, you may slow down the process of relationship-building necessary for reaching a business result.

6. LISTENING EFFECTIVELY

Yes: You are someone who thinks that it is very important to clarify frequently what people say to you. You may ask a lot of questions to make sure that you understand their opinions. Some people may think that asking a lot of questions in this way shows a lack of expertise in the subject, and so may think you are not competent.

No: You are someone who believes that they can understand quickly what others are saying. You may prefer spending less time on communication and more time on doing things. However, you may misunderstand other people more often than you think. In addition, people may think you are a bad listener if you do not spend time commenting on and clarifying what they say to you.

7. SPEAKING CLEARLY

Yes: You are a person who is sensitive to the challenges of communicating internationally in a foreign language. You have the ability to manage the way you speak to make sure that people can understand you – by speaking slowly, by simplifying your language, by explaining your reasons explicitly. However, some may think that your simplified communication style is too soft or not dynamic enough.

No: You may be a natural communicator who is able to get messages across easily. You may not need to simplify or moderate your way of speaking. However, some people may find your communication style problematic. It could be that international partners frequently misinterpret the meaning of what you say: for example, a request is seen as an order.

8. UNDERSTANDING CULTURES

Yes: You believe that it is important to know about the cultures of your international partners. You may have the ability to build respect by showing this knowledge during business conversations. However, you may focus too much on knowledge rather than on adapting your own behaviour.

No: You feel it is more important to know the individual than to learn about the culture. You may have the ability to form strong interpersonal relationships without knowing much about the wider cultural context. However, without this knowledge you may manage people in the wrong way or take poor decisions.

9. INFLUENCING DECISIONS

Yes: Your working style is based on networking with a wide range of people. You understand that many decisions in international organisations are very political. You know that if you want to influence a decision, you have to get close to key decision-makers. However, some people may see this kind of management behaviour as too political and begin to mistrust what you say to them.

No: Your working style is focused on results. You are not interested in playing political games with senior managers who have influence on key decisions. However, some people may think you are a little naive for international working. You may not have the skills to build enough influence with key decision-makers to enable you to get what you want.

10. MANAGING DIVERSITY

Yes: You see diversity as an advantage. You analyse the different working styles in the people around you, and you allocate tasks according to specific competence. In meetings, you make sure that different opinions are heard and evaluated. However, some people may think the time you take to collect different opinions shows a lack of leadership.

No: You see it as your role to lead and to give direction. You may think that differences are best managed by creating common guidelines which everyone can follow. However, you may not spend enough time listening to different opinions which could produce innovative solutions.

2. PROFILING PERSONAL COMMUNICATION STYLE

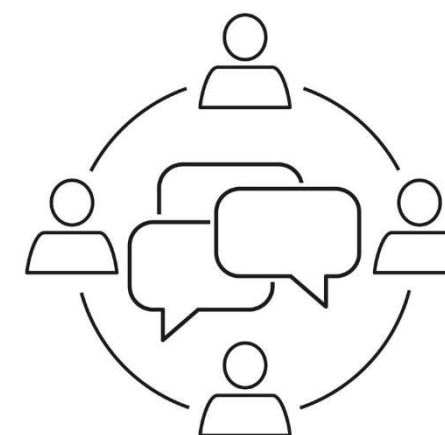
We each have a personal communication style. We communicate the *what* and the *why* in different ways, for both psychological and cultural reasons. These different styles affect the clarity and impact of our communication for those listening to us. Here are five steps to begin to analyse your profile, which will make you think more carefully about how you communicate internationally and help you identify how you can improve your clarity and impact.

Personal communication style – profile

1 Circle the word in each pairing below which most correctly describes your style.

	Fast speaker	Slow speaker
Physical	loud	quiet
	energetic	calm
	touching	distant
	smiling	serious
Informational	long and complex	short and simple
	analytical	results-oriented
	structured	flexible
	direct	indirect
	time-focused	time-relaxed
Psychological	introverted	extroverted
	impersonal	personal
	open	closed
	emotional	neutral
	pushing	helping

- 2 Now ask a colleague if he or she agrees with your self-evaluation. And revise it accordingly.
- 3 Next, analyse how your international partners will see your style – both the positives and the negatives.
- 4 Plan a communication style strategy for your next communication event – meeting, presentation or negotiation – in line with the results of point 3.
- 5 After the event, get feedback from your audience on your communication style. Were you clear? Did you have a positive / negative impact? Decide which areas you need to continue to improve.



HOT TIPS

- Become more aware of your typical communication behaviours
- Understand which audiences will judge your style positively and which more negatively
- Use feedback as a tool for developing your range of communication styles

3. THE E-N-G-A-G-E-M-E-N-T APPROACH

Attitude is the secret to becoming an effective listener across cultures. Effective listeners truly believe that it is important to give time to listening to other people, specially to those who express very different opinions and beliefs from their own. Listening is about engagement: engaging yourself with others, engaging with diversity and, as a result, engaging others with you. Let's look at the E-N-G-A-G-E-M-E-N-T model:

E *Engagement starts by emptying your mind of your own thoughts as the other person begins to talk to you. Make a conscious effort to tell yourself to concentrate fully on what's being said.*

N *Never disturb the person talking to you. Listen to yourself listening and, if you hear unconstructive thoughts ("I have other things to do", "Let me tell you what happened to me", "This is boring"), switch them off and re-engage with the speaker and what they are saying.*

G *Give positive feedback, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways which the speaker can understand.*

A *Allow others time to say what they want to say – be patient.*

G *Give feedback to yourself on your own listening performance as you listen. Ask yourself - am I listening well enough, am I concentrating on the other person, am I asking the right questions, am I getting bored?*

E *Eliminate any negative emotions you may feel towards speakers whom you feel are ignoring, disrespecting or attacking you.*

M *Make others talk to you by asking questions. Good listeners create opportunities for themselves to listen to their own questions being answered.*

E *Energize yourself the moment you feel tired or you start to lose interest.*

N *Note-taking is an excellent way to maintain concentration when listening to a long presentation or a number of inputs from speakers during a meeting.*

T *Try the key word approach to listening. This means mentally noting key words a speaker uses when talking to you. You then use the key words as a basis for developing the conversation to clarify what the speaker meant.*

**HOT
TIPS**

- Show respect for people by giving them your full attention when listening
- Be patient as a listener, especially when listening to people you think have nothing important to say
- Listen for key words used by a speaker and use these same words in your follow-up questions and comments

4. SPEAKING CLEARLY: THE T-I-P-S MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

In order to speak clearly and with the impact we want, we have to consider four things:

T – TARGET

Is my communication target right for this listener / situation? When you open your mouth to say something, you usually have a purpose for speaking, for example to solve a problem, to give advice or to socialise. However, if the listener has a different sense of purpose about the communication, a different reason for talking to you, miscommunication happens.

I – INFORMATION

Is the information I am communicating right for this listener / situation? It's generally true that individuals prefer to talk about what they know and what's important to them, which is often less known and less important to others. When working across cultures, there is the added problem that people think about information very differently. For some, high complexity, sophisticated analysis and attention to detail mean professionalism. To others, this can mean information overload, and unnecessary discussion of facts and figures causing delays in decision-making. Choosing which information to talk about and to which level of detail, therefore, can be a difficult task.

P – PROCESS

Is the communication process right for the listener / situation? In international business everyone would say that they understand the terms *email*, *telephone conference*, *meeting*, *presentation*, and so on. The problem is that across cultures and between personalities the interpretation of these terms can differ enormously. A meeting can be for top-down briefings in one culture but for direct and open discussions in another culture. A presentation may be an explanation of facts for some, but for others it may be an opportunity for entertainment and self-marketing.

Communication becomes unclear and problematic across cultures when professionals force their own assumptions about these communication processes on others – they argue in a meeting when others would agree in public, only to negotiate privately later; or they send an email to resolve a conflict when others would telephone.

You will communicate more clearly across cultures if you clarify the process of communication events.

S – STYLE

Is my communication style right for the listener / situation? Our communication style is influenced by our personality and the various cultural groups we belong to – national, company, family. This style will be clear to some and have a positive impact. For others, however, it will be confusing, perhaps even unprofessional, and have a negative impact.

You will communicate more clearly across cultures if you understand and manage your own communication style.

Effective communicators can profile their communication style in three dimensions:

- **physical** (channel): do I speak at the right speed and with the right volume?
- **pragmatic** (data): am I too complex or too simple, am I too analytical or too results-oriented?
- **psychological** (relationship): am I too friendly or too reserved, am I too extroverted or too introverted?

5. FIVE TECHNIQUES TO BUILD COMMON UNDERSTANDING AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATE THE
BACKGROUND CONTEXT
AND POSITIVE
MOTIVATION BEHIND
YOUR MESSAGE

SAY WHAT YOU ARE *NOT*
SAYING BEFORE YOU SAY
WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY

KISSSS – KEEP IT SHORT,
SIMPLE, STRUCTURED,
SLOW AND THE SAME

GIVE LISTENERS AN
OPPORTUNITY TO
CLARIFY

MAKE TIME FOR MORE
COMMUNICATION

HOT TIPS

- Make sure the listener understands the positive motivation behind your message
- Create common understanding by asking the listener to comment on what you say
- Allow more time for communication when working internationally