Introduction

According to traditional thinking communication comprises of speaking, writing, reading and listening. A manager who can do these well is said to be a good communicator. This concept of communication is however, inadequate.

Communication is in its essence an organisational process leading to organisational effectiveness. Effectiveness of communication therefore is to be judged not by the ability of the manager to speak, listen, etc., but rather by his ability to bring about desired changes in behaviour.

Following are some reasons for most communication not being effective:

* The illusion that expression is communication.
* The illusion that authority and status and capacity for adverse action are enough for communication.
* Failure to recognise that creating the right “atmosphere” for communication is a long, slow process.
* Failure to recognise that people filter out ideas which are disquieting and threatening.
* Failure to recognise that messages which support the status quo are more easily received than those relating to change.
* Persistent quest for rigidly defined communication and communication structures.
* Tendency to look for communication formulas and gimmicks rather than addressing the heart of the issue.

You are invited to keep the foregoing in mind while reading the individual articles and checklists.

May you become an Effective Communicator
"The ability to speak is a short cut to distinction"
Effective Speaking

Dr. S. Manikutty

Among the various activities an executive is engaged in, perhaps communication is the one that takes most of his time and is the most critical. A manager typically spends most of his time either in receiving or in delivering some communication, oral or written. He reads letters from others, writes letters, speaks to others, and engages in conversation-tete-a-tete, in meetings, over the phone, etc. Verily, an organization depends on the quality of the communication among its members.

Among the different skills possessed by typical successful executives, it has been found that one skill they all possess is that of communication. They may be articulate or taciturn, introvert or extrovert, but they can all communicate what they want to communicate clearly.

Therefore communication skills is perhaps the one skill you cannot fail to acquire if you are an executive desirous of advancing in your career.

In this paper, we shall deal with one-and the more commonly used-mode of communication: the formal oral communication. Its focus is on such formal communication like public speaking, presentations, and addressing meetings. Group communication is not dealt with.

The following tips on how to improve your communication are given in the context of either public speaking or a presentation. But the basic principles apply to all oral communication.

Elements of Communication:
Before any communication, four elements are to be kept in mind:
1. Purpose
2. Men
3. Media

I. Purpose:
The commonest reason why communication fails in many cases is lack of clarity of purpose. Purposes could be different: it could be to teach, inform, persuade, change attitudes or behaviour or enable the other person to make decisions. Each would need a different format for communication. If one is merely to teach or inform, the speaker has to ask what exactly he wants to teach and why it is important to the audience. The talk is likely to be matter-of-fact, proceeding from the familiar to the unfamiliar in a logical sequence. If the purpose is persuasion, he has to understand the mood of the audience - favourable, neutral or hostile to the idea. Change of attitudes would need subtle handling involving consideration at each stage as to what effect the ideas would have on the psychology of the audience. If the purpose is decision making, the
speaker would need to consider whether he wants the audience to accept a decision already taken, take a decision on particular lines, explore areas which need decision making, or - not to take the decision at all!

2. Men:
This really stands for the audience. Depending on the audience, the talk has to be delivered. The following questions need to be asked:

* What is the capability of the audience? In other words, what is their level of understanding at present, and how much can they absorb? An audience of children, for example, is very different from one of adults.
* What is the mix of the audience - homogenous or heterogeneous?
* What is the nature of the audience, laymen or specialized? The language has to be tailored appropriately.
* What is the mood of audience? Are they likely to be congenial or hostile? Person known to you or perfect strangers?

3. Media:
In a communication, the visual, audio and gesture languages combine to produce the effect on the audience. Hence depending on whether it is a presentation, communication with just one other person, a small audience, or a large audience, and whether the talk is face to face or impersonal - like a T.V. program - will have to be taken note of.

An important determinant of the communication style is the availability of visual aids - like slide projector, overhead projector, flip charts, etc.

4. Message:
The presenter has to tailor his message to suit the audience and the time available. He has to see:

* The breadth of the message - the coverage of topics.
* The depth of coverage of topics.
Obviously, the choice is between covering a broad spectrum of subjects without going in depth with regard to any of them, or a few subjects in great depth. The choice depends on the audience. For a layman audience, the former may be the right style to adopt.

* The order of the topics to be presented. Usually the principle is to proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar. If the objective is persuasion, usually it is more effective to proceed from the points of agreement to gradually introduce other point of view. But a straight contradiction may also be effective.

* Clarity of the message: make sure the message is clear.
* Emotion and interest: in certain cases, it is necessary to introduce emotion into a talk, especially if the objective is to persuade the audience.

Elements of Good Speaking:
No matter how good the subject, and how well prepared the speaker is, the effectiveness of the presentation is lost if the speaking itself is not good.
There are six elements of Good Speaking: Right speed, clarity of speech, voice, eye contact, expression of feelings and holding the attention of audience.

1. Speed:
The speed at which one speaks is very important. Usually, most speakers, particularly inexperienced ones, tend to speak very fast. There is no golden number which can specify the "correct" speed in terms of words, but by and large, 125-175 words per minute is very good, and even 200 may be acceptable if there is high clarity.

2. Clarity of Speech:
The speech may not be clear due to (a) wrong pronunciation; (b) wrong intonation, (c) or trailing off the ends of the words making them illegible.

Each language has certain accepted ways of pronunciation. There may be differences in pronunciation between different regions speaking the same language, but the important consideration is that the audience must understand the speaker.

For improving one's pronunciation, the best way is to regularly listen to broadcasts, especially the news. In English, BBC and VOA form excellent reference points, since these newscasters are specially trained. In Hindi, AIR's newscasts are excellent. When in doubt about the pronunciation of a word, never hesitate to look up a dictionary.

Trailing off the latter portions of words, and even whole sentences, is very common. This is hardly ever realized by the speaker. For an inexperienced person, the best way is to consciously stress the latter portion of each word.

An excellent device to improve one's clarity and to check one's speed is the tape recorder. Regularly record your reading of a passage and listen to your voice critically.

3. Voice:
An interesting voice is characterized by alteration in the speed, pitch, volume and tone of the voice. A dull and monotonous voice puts the audience to sleep.

A useful device to make the voice interesting is to give pauses after some important idea - to make it sink in. Emphasize your main points by raising the volume and pitch of your voice. Difficult ideas must be delivered slowly; light passages - like jokes - can be delivered fast.

4. Eye contact:
Look at audience in the eye as much as possible while speaking. This shows that you are talking to them. In fact, an experienced speaker can be easily distinguished from a beginner by the degree of his eye contact. Inexperienced speakers either look at a point straight ahead, but above the audience, or at some point below, perhaps the ground. There could be other ineffective eye contacts. As for example, eye darting, where the speaker looks briefly at different persons; triangulation, where he looks in turn at the left, the centre and
the right; and fixed stare where the speaker keeps looking at just one person.

Make the eye contacts natural and covering the entire audience, especially those nearest to you on your left and right, and those in corner. Allow each contact, once established, to stay about 10-15 seconds.

5. Expressing Feelings:
This, of course, depends on the topics. You can get across a feeling of warmth by softening and lowering the tone of your voice slightly. Your face also can show feelings and emotions. Smile occasionally to show that you are feeling friendly and relaxed (unless you are talking about a very serious matter).

6. Holding Attention:
Slouching and fidgeting divert the attention of the audience from your theme. Use appropriate gestures, but habits like swaying, jingling of keys or peculiar mannerisms distract the audience’s attention. When using an overhead projector, never let the projection remain on the screen after the purpose is served; switch off the projector. Never let the projector beam its light with no transparency. With a flip chart, flip the chart back after the particular sheet has served its purpose.

Preparation of the Presentation:
It is never good manners to start a presentation without adequate preparation. Lack of presentation always shows through. The audience are then asked to put together your incoherent thoughts, and make sense of it - which they may not do.

After finalizing on the four basic elements - purpose, men, media and message - preparation has to be done for the presentation of the subject matter. There are three components of a talk:

1. Introduction.
2. Main Theme.
3. Summary and Conclusion.

1. Introduction:
Introduction is extremely important, for it sets the mood of the audience. It is necessary to get the audience interested. This can be done by:

* A “bang” introduction - saying something powerful or controversial.
* Showing how the subject is important to them personally.
* Arousing their curiosity about some issue.
* Outlining the interesting aspects of the subject.
* - to let them know what they can look forward to.
* Showing your own enthusiasm for the subject.

2. The Main Theme:
The subject matter finally selected must be relevant, and with no superfluities. The presentation must be tight. Distinguish between:

* Points that must be conveyed,
* Points that are useful but not essential - they could help the illustration of the main points but can be discarded without serious loss, and
* Points that can be discarded.

Next, arrange the points in a logical sequence. Plan the visual aids at this stage. Make sure there is nothing in the visual aid (VA) you are not fully familiar with.

3. Summary and Conclusion:
The summary helps the audience to get the threads of your talk together. This is probably the portion which the audience will finally judge the talk by; hence make it interesting and powerful.

Make sure your summary is just that: do not introduce any new points at this stage. Ensure that your conclusion logically flows from your previous arguments.

The three stages mentioned above can be summarized as:
* Tell them what you are going to tell them.
* Then tell them.
* Then tell them what you have told them.

Preparation of Visual Aids:
1. Plan your VAs. Ask the following questions:
* What goes in it?
* When have they to be presented?
* If the blackboard is to be used, what to retain and what to erase?
* If the flip chart is to be used, are they to be shown in sequence, or to be flipped back & forth?
2. Plan the matter on VAs carefully.
* Use key words; never write long sentences on the VAs and ask the audience to read them.
* Do not crowd too much matter.
* Make sure the lettering is sufficiently large to enable the writing to read even by the audience in the last row.
* Use bright colours (green, red, black, pink, etc.) to enhance visibility.
* Use colours to distinguish between different groups of data.
* As a general rule, avoid copying typed matter. Usually they are too small to be read.
* Do not use irrelevant data on your transparencies.

The last word:
The audience has been generous with their time listening to you. It is therefore your responsibility to give them an effective return for their time.
In the beginning, you may have faults, but these can be cured only by YOU.
Most people are too polite to tell you about the faults in your lecture but you can spot them if you think about the talk you have given.
Finally, remember, that the acid test is NOT what you have said or how much you have said, but what YOUR AUDIENCE has gained. Hence ask yourself:
What have I given to the audience as a result of my lecture?

Other Communication
Any planned, formal oral communication must satisfy the criteria given in order to be effective. Whether you are speaking to one or one thousand, the principles are the same.
"If an ambassador says, yes, it means perhaps,
    If he says, perhaps, it means no;
If he ever said no, he would cease to be an ambassador"

K. M. Pannikar
Speaking in Public: Checklist

A manager's job usually involves some public speaking. Every so often, you may need to get on your feet in front of an audience and give a more or less formal talk or presentation. You may be talking to your own team, but more likely you will be talking to other managers, to people from elsewhere in the organization, or may be to people from outside. Your effectiveness as a public speaker may turn out to be a major factor in how your career progresses.

Some managers seem to revel in public speaking; others dread it. Many are nervous about it in advance, but nevertheless come across splendidly when the moment arrives. Harold Macmillan, for instance, who was regarded as one of the outstanding orators of his time, later admitted to being physically sick for days before he had to make any major speech in Parliament.

Would you be nervous at the prospect of speaking in public? If not, you ought to be. Without a certain amount of nervousness, your adrenaline would not flow and you would appear dull, lifeless, bored and boring. Too much nervousness, on the other hand could spoil your performance, so it needs to be controlled. The following checklists should help you develop a well-justified self-confidence, for they deal with the four chief components to speaking effectively in public:

1. Controlling Nervousness.
2. Considering your Audience.
3. Preparing your Talk.
4. Delivering your Talk.

Whatever you feel about it, public speaking is another essential management skill. As long as you don't fall back on that time-worn excuse: 'Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking' as long as you are prepared to get accustomed-- with as much practice as you can manage, the skill is one you can get better and better at.

1. Controlling Nervousness

Would you admit to yourself that you might be nervous about any of the following?
Which one would worry you most?
* Not knowing what people expect of me.
* Fearing that I have nothing to say worth hearing.
* Uncertainty about why I am speaking.
* Not comparing well with other speakers I have heard.
* Giving a muddled or boring talk.
* Anxiety about having to use 'visual aids'.
* Fearing that I will 'dry up'.
* Not having a 'public platform' type of voice.
* Having to deal with audience reactions.
* Being rejected by the audience.
* Others (What?)
The key to controlling any such nervousness lies in:
   a. Considering your Audience, and
   b. Preparing your Talk,
Which is what the next two checklists are about.

2. Considering your Audience

Here are the kinds of questions to ask yourself right at the start:
* Who will be in my audience?
* How many of them will there be?
* Do I know any of them already?
* What might they be expecting to hear from me?
* How might they use what they hear?
* Will they assume I am qualified to speak on the subject?
* Can I assume they are reasonably well-disposed towards me?
* Am I aiming to inform them or persuade them?
* Will it be clear why the subject should matter to them?
* How much will some of them know about it already?
* How little will some of them know about it?
* Will any of them have misconceptions about it?
* Will any have strong feelings about it?
* Will any have beliefs different from mine?
* Can I usefully discuss what might go into the talk with some members of the audience before I prepare it?

N.B. Don't let yourself get drawn into speaking to this audience at all unless you believe that you can say something worth their hearing on the subject in question.

3. Preparing the Talk

Make sure you give yourself as much time as possible for preparing your talk. And remember to make a note of ideas that occur to you while you are bathing or walking your dog.

Thinking about the situation:
* When is the talk to be given?
* Does this allow me enough preparation time?
* How long is the talk meant to last? (Don't be persuaded to talk for more than 40 minutes without interruption: 20-30 minutes may be more productive.)
* Will there be other speakers before and/or after me?
* If the audience is likely to be too big, can I split it up and give the talk more than once?
* Where will the talk take place?
* How will the audience be seated in relation to where I shall be speaking from?
* Will they have any problems seeing me or hearing me clearly?
* What visual aids can be used?
* What about the acoustics, seating pattern etc?
* Who will make the practical arrangements?
* Are all the above satisfactory for what I want to do (or can I fit in with them anyway)?

Purpose and content:
* What is the main purpose of my talk -- to inform, to persuade, to inspire, to train or what?
* What (if anything) do I want my audience to do as a result of my talk?
* What will be my overall message? (Try to sum it up in a single sentence, e.g. 'We must innovate or perish'.)
* What are the main points I'll need to make in getting this message across? (Three main points are usually about the maximum an audience can be expected to take in.)
* Have I got all the information I need?
* Or do I need to consult books or other materials, or other people?
* What will be the title of my talk?

Structuring the talk:
* What facts, examples and arguments will best get my main ideas across?
* Am I being careful to avoid trying to squeeze in everything I know on the subject?
* Shall I follow the old military instructor's advice: 'First I tell them what I'm going to tell them; then I tell them; then I tell them what I've told them.'?
* How else might I ensure the talk has a clear beginning, middle and end?
* How can I get off to an interesting start? Consider:
  - Showing how the subject relates to the interests or experience of the audience;
  - relating it to some local people, places or events;
  - telling an illuminating anecdote or story;
  - comparing definitions of the key word in my title;
  - quoting other authorities on the subject;
  - asking some pertinent questions;
  - giving advance notice of my overall message and/or my (three?) main points;
  - telling the audience what I hope they may get from the talk.
* What will be the most logical flow of ideas for my main points in the middle of the talk?
* What supporting examples, evidence or argument do I have to put across?
* Do I need to use linking phrases - to keep the audience aware of how each idea relates to what has gone before and what is coming after?
* Do I need to summarize from time to time?
* Does my knowledge of the audience help me choose the most appropriate form of words in which to express these ideas?
* How can I bring the talk to a satisfying conclusion? Shall I:
  - repeat my main points;
  - state my one-sentence 'overall message',
  - pose the audience a provocative question;
  - call for some kind of action.
Methods:
* Do I intend to give the audience a 'handout', e.g. summary in advance, or sample materials I wish to refer to at some point?
* Do I intend to use any visual aids, e.g. a flip chart or an overhead projector?
* Shall I ask (or allow) the audience to offer examples, questions or comments at any point during the talk?
* Do I want to do so at the end?
* Shall I prime a few friends in the audience to ask any particular questions?
* In delivering the talk do I plan to?
  - read from a full typed script;
  - memorize a full script;
  - refer only to 'skeleton notes' (headings, sub-headings and key phrase);
  - talk around the handout I have given the audience.
* If I feel I must read the talk, how can I make it as conversational as possible? - e.g. by using
  - short sentences;
  - simple sentence structure;
  - everyday words (not long-winded phrases);
  - only jargon that will be familiar to my audience;
  - conversational turns of phrase;
  - first person pronouns (I, we, you, etc.);
  - lightness of touch.
* If my material is written out in full, how can I make it as legible as possible? - e.g. by having it:
  - typed;
  - in a large type-face;
  - double-spaced;
  - with prominent headings;
  - on one side only;
  - on A4 sheets of paper.
* Or do I feel confident enough, having written the talk in full, to summarize it as a series of headings and key phrases on numbered cards or sheets of paper?
* Can I rehearse the talk by trying it out on friends, spouse, colleagues or self, and make whatever improvements seem necessary after I have heard how it sounds?
* Having rehearsed, would I now feel confident about speaking from skeleton notes as above.

4. Delivering the Talk

Having prepared thoroughly, you will not fail. But the extent to which you succeed depends also on what you do on the day:

Before you even begin, check that:
- all your notes, handouts, visual aids etc. are ready for use;
- any necessary equipment such as a microphone is ready for use; and
- heating, seating, lighting and ventilation are as you require.
Then, when you and your audience are ready:

Aim for a good first impression:
* Wait until everyone is quiet.
* Start with energy and enthusiasm.
* Look your audience in the eyes.
* Make your introductory remarks without having to refer to your notes.
* Stand still and upright.
* Smile a little and look relaxed, confident and in command.
* Make sure your voice gets to the back of the room.

Speak conversationally:
* Imagine you are talking to people you know well.
* Speak distinctly and not too fast.
* Use natural pauses and emphases.
* Look at each individual in turn while you talk.
* Don’t preach or talk down to your audience.
* Be light of touch and good-humoured.
* But don’t bring in jokes unless they are truly relevant (and funny).
* Be yourself.

Keep your grip on the audience:
* Maintain eye contact with your audience.
* Don’t buried your head in your notes. (Lift them up instead.)
* If you get a question that is difficult to answer:
  - say, without embarrassment, that you can’t answer that one; or
  - say you’ll discuss it with the questioner afterwards; or
  - invite the audience to offer answers; or
  - answer a slightly different question; or
  - ask a counter-question of the questioner (e.g. ask him/her to spell out what lies behind the question).
* Avoid distractions -- over-gesturing or pacing about.
* Don’t ‘er’ and ‘um’ -- better to have a moment’s silence.
* Watch the time.

Finish conclusively:
* Let your audience know the end is in sight.
* Have the exact wording of your final sentence clearly in mind.
* Finish off as vigorously as you began.

Never, ever, apologize to your audience for lack of speaking ability.
TELEPHONING
The telephone is an invaluable management tool if used properly, but it can easily make us its slaves. Do you sprint along the corridor to dive into your office because you've heard your phone ringing? Do you interrupt your discussion with someone who has made an appointment to come to see you, in order to respond for minutes on end to someone else who just decided to ring you up? Do you yourself get on the phone the minute a need occurs to you, rather than considering whether a phone call is the best way of dealing with the matter and whether now is the best time for it anyway? If so, you are not alone.

But we can be more ruthless and systematic about the way we use the telephone -- rather than letting it use us. As a result we can save time, and work more efficiently. The following checklists contain some hints and tips that may help.

Making Calls

Don't pick up the phone immediately the thought of telephoning someone occurs to you. First ask:

* Is this matter best dealt with by telephoning (rather than face-to-face or in writing)?
* If I shall have to put it in writing or meet the other person about it anyway, is phoning a waste of time?
* Am I likely to get drawn into time-wasting discussions of other matters besides what I want to talk about?
* Even if the call is worth making, do I really need to make it at this moment (rather than in my daily 'telephone period')?

Timetable a regular half-hour or so each day in which you will try to make all your telephone calls.
Get all necessary paperwork to hand before making your calls.
Have additional reading material that you can be checking or skim-reading in gaps between or within calls.
If possible, get a secretary or assistant to make your calls and put them through only when they have made contact.

Be quite clear why you are making the call. Are you:

* giving information;
* asking for information;
* requesting action;
* or what?

What kind of response do you want from the other person?
If there are several points you want to raise, make a list of them before you call. Decide the maximum time you will hold the line waiting for the person you want to talk with. Unless you think they’ll be unobtainable later, say you’ll ring back and get on with the next call. If the person you want is out, ask whether there is anyone else who might be able to deal with your call.

In case you are greeted by someone who cannot help, have a precise message ready for them to pass on:
* your name and designation;
* your telephone number;
* the subject of your call; and
* the kind of response you are expecting.

Make a point of telephoning to check the date, time, place (and necessity) of distant meetings before you start your journey.

Receiving Calls
Let regular callers know when is the best time of day to telephone you. Also let them know the times to avoid. Consider asking unexpected callers to ring back in your 'telephone period' (or whenever it best suits you).

If possible, brief your secretary or assistant to intercept and screen your incoming calls. For example, are there:
* People you are just not available to?
* People you want referred elsewhere?
* People who should be asked to call back at a specified time?
* People you will call back at a specified time?
* People you are willing to talk to whenever they call?

If someone else is putting calls through to you, make sure they don't do so until the actual person who wants to speak to you (not their assistant) is on the line -- unless of course it's your boss.

If you can't get human help, consider using an answering machine with a tape asking callers to leave a message.

If you simply cannot afford to be interrupted and have no one to intercept incoming calls, take the phone off the hook or unplug it, or hide out in a room where calls won't reach you.

Managing Telephone Conversations

Don't let business calls drift into prolonged social or general chit-chat.
Have a few standard ways of politely bringing a conversation to a close -- e.g., 'My boss has just called for me' or 'I'm due for a meeting' etc.
Consider having a timer ticking away by your phone while you talk.
Make sure that you or the other person sums up the conversation so that both of you can agree to what has been said -- especially if one or both have agreed to take some action.
Consider making notes.
Confirm in writing any important matter that has been agreed -- especially if you fear the other person might forget, or wish to deny it.
Consider keeping a log of each of your telephone calls for a week:
* Who called whom?
* When?
* Purpose?
* How long?
* How much undue chit-chat?
* Outcome worthwhile?
* Written or face-to-face follow-up needed?
* How much of an interruption to higher-priority work?
* Any other problems?
Does the review suggest any change in your telephone habits?

**New Technology**

Could any of the following devices or services (some of them already mentioned above) help you manage your telephoning more effectively?
* Telephone amplifier or headset -- allowing you to have your hands free while you talk.
* Key phone -- enabling you to get your number several times faster by pressing keys than you can by turning a dial.
* Memory phone -- one that saves your time by storing your regularly-used numbers and getting them for you faster than you could dial or key them in.
* Cordless phone -- giving you freedom to roam.
* Radio pager -- for getting messages to people when they are not near a phone (or for receiving them if you are not).
* Answering machine -- allowing you to control who gets to you as well as taking messages when you are not around.
* Answering service -- a more personal but more expensive alternative.
* Timer -- to remind you of time passing and the other business still waiting to be done.
* Conference calls -- enabling you to speak to several people at once on the telephone rather than getting together for a meeting.
* Facsimile transmission -- enabling you to get a machine in a distant office to produce a facsimile of a document you have in your office.

Don't let people waste your precious time with their telephone calls - and be equally careful not to make calls that waste theirs.
"What a man cannot clearly state, he does not know"
Writing to Communicate

Written communication is different from oral because of two reasons. Firstly, while in the oral communication, the listener is compulsorily led by you, and hence does not go back to an earlier part of the talk, this is not possible in written communication. The reader reads it in his own time, his own pace and in his own way. Secondly, written communication is on record, and what is said is there for everyone to see. Hence, much greater clarity of thought is needed while writing.

Writing becomes thus an exacting business, and like all exacting matters, is generally disliked. All of us know that it is a pleasure to read a well written piece, but do not realize how much pain goes into writing it. Yet, ability to write is a great asset in any manager - and well worth cultivating.

This paper gives a few hints on how to improve your formal writing.

Elements of Writing:
Like oral communication, the writer has to decide on
* The Purpose
* The Audience
* The Medium
* The Message

The style of writing depends on the purpose. To a lay audience in a newspaper, one should adopt a journalistic style. Here the readability is extremely important, and difficult words and complex ideas are avoided. To a scholarly audience reached through a journal, a formal style where jargon - which mean words special to that trade and which are understood to have certain specific, precise meanings - are used. In a report, a formal but appropriate language is used.

The purpose is to be seen against the audience, the medium - whether a newspaper, magazine, journal or report and the message. The points mentioned in connection with oral communication, like relevance of the matter, absence of superfluities and coherence apply here also.

We now deal with certain points that arise especially in writing. These are:
1. Readability
2. Correctness
3. Appropriateness.

1. Readability:
A piece of communication must be more than anything else, readable. What is readability? It is not necessarily short sentences, or use of simple words; but the total effect produced on the reader when he is able to follow the writer without undue effort.
Most managers are only average writers, and the following hints may be useful.

1. Avoid long sentences, especially when the idea is complex. It also helps to stick to a direct subject - verb - object construction in sentences.
2. Avoid use of words that are not in common use, or pretentious words. Many times, though not always, there are simpler words that serve the purpose.
3. Use appropriate jargon, taking into account the audience.
4. Ensure that each paragraph has one single idea. It helps to open each paragraph with a sentence that summarizes this idea.
5. Avoid paragraphs that are too long.
6. Ensure adequate transition between paragraphs. Preferably, the last sentence in each paragraph must give some hint on what is coming in the next.
7. Form subconclusions at different points to enable the reader to collect his thoughts. Form the overall conclusion from these subconclusions.
8. Always make sure that all the material covered is relevant to the main theme; lack of focus is a common problem in many writings.

In general, the best way to say it is the simplest way.

2. Correctness:
The language used must be correct - grammatically and idiomatically. The language must be, as noted above, appropriate to the audience and purpose.

In the subject matter, the facts used must be unchallengeable. Thus, before writing, it is better to check and verify the facts. Also, check on the sources from where the facts have been taken; their veracity and the purpose for which that source had collected the data.

Different journals, magazines and reports call for different formats. These must be adhered to.

3. Appropriateness:
The communication will have to be different in its tone whether it is addressed to a superior, subordinate, colleague, a stranger or a customer. Politeness is always welcome, and brusque, insulting or overbearing letters invariably produce a negative response.

Avoid the temptation of being biased. By and large, all of us have strong opinions on many issues, but a tone which gives an impression that the writer has not considered other points of views, or is dismissing them perfunctorily, is always unhelpful.

Writing and Thought:
It has been said that there is nothing called shoddy writing; there is only shoddy thinking. Much of the unreadability of written material arises due to lack of adequate thought on what the writer wants to say before putting it down.

Data analysis is crucial if the writing is empirically based. The logic of why certain data were collected, how they were collected, and why they were analysed the way they were are to be explained.
The conclusions must flow from the data presented. They should neither be unwarranted nor should there be failure to draw the obvious conclusions from the available data.

Before writing any report, it is essential to prepare a skeletal outline. The outline must show the subheadings to be used, the idea in each section and in each paragraph, and the overall conclusion. Do not think as you write. Thinking must precede writing.

Conclusion:
Good writing is a product of adequate, organized and disciplined thought. The reasons for most poor writing is not so much lack of command over language - although this may be a contributory factor - but poor and shoddy thinking and carelessness in writing. The answer to that is: harsh criticism of one's own writing and more and more practice.
"If it is worth saying, it is worth putting on paper. And when you rewrite you learn some more."
As a manager, you may need to spend quite a lot of time drafting letters, memos, reports and other written documents. You may be writing for your boss, for members of your team, for other people in your organisation or for people outside the organisation.

You will need to convey information, instructions, questions, decisions and suggestions in writing to people who, we hope, will read your words, understand what you mean by them and take the kind of action you would wish as a result. In order to bring this about, your writing will need to be readable, accurate and to the point.

Different people have different problems in producing such writing. Here are some of them (and you can decide which are other problems for you):

* Deciding what is most worth saying.
* Getting started.
* Avoiding wordiness.
* Keeping to the point.
* Grammar.
* Punctuation.
* Vocabulary.
* Spelling.
* Style and readability.

The following checklists touch on all such problems, besides several others.

**What must you Write?**

Which of the following do you have to write?:

* Letters and/or replies to other people's letters.
* Memos and/or replies to other people's memos.
* Reports or discussion documents.
* Comments on other people's reports etc.
* Minutes or notes of meetings.
* Articles for house journals, newsletters etc.
* Articles for trade or professional journals.
* Advertising or promotional material.
* Others (What?)
Quick and Dirty ' Approaches to Writing

Certain writing tasks simply do not deserve the full power of your creative energies. Consider whether any of the following approaches might suffice for some of your work:

- Delegate the writing of routine items or replies to a properly-briefed secretary or assistant.
- Use standard letters (or standard paragraphs to be chosen from and/or amended) for routine correspondence.
- If your reply can be brief, write it on the incoming memo or letter, send a photocopy to the sender, and put the original in your files.
- Don't write if a phone call will save time (and be realistic about how many of your organization's 'person-minutes' would be consumed by a written item.)
- Don't write if a phone call would be better -- if you need to exchange ideas or negotiate.
- Don't write or phone if you need to see the other person face to face while you talk.
- Persuade your boss or fellow-managers that you can be relied upon to report exceptions -- rather than having to give a regular blow-by-blow account of how things are running according to plan.

Writing Plainly and Effectively

The best one-sentence guide to effective writing is: Write as you talk. Put down on paper what you might say to the reader if he or she were there in front of you. Which of the following guidelines can you follow in the kind of writing you have to do?:

- Write conversationally:
  - Use personal pronouns ('I', 'you', 'we').
  - Use contractions ('ll', 'we've', 'mustn't) where you'd use them in speech.
  - Use rhetorical questions -- questions you pose at the beginning of a paragraph and then go on to answer yourself.
  - Be friendly, informal and light of touch without being matey, slangy or chatty.
  - Choose your words carefully:
  - Don't use several words where one will do -- e.g. not 'in the great majority of cases' but 'usually'.
  - Use familiar, everyday words -- e.g. not 'relinquish', 'terminate' and 'exacerbate' but 'give up', 'end' and 'worsen'.
  - Avoid long-winded phrases and official-sounding gobbledygook -- e.g. not 'They exhibit economy in the deployment of veracity' but 'They lie'.
  - Use precise words rather than general, abstract ones -- e.g. not 'Extreme danger is associated with the incorrect operation of this equipment' but 'Keep the safety shield down or this machine may kill you'.
  - Use active not passive verbs -- e.g. not 'A trial was carried out' but 'We (or whoever it was) carried out a trial'.
  - Use specialist terms -- but only if you can be sure your readers are already familiar with them, or if you define them in what you are writing.
If spelling causes you problems:
* Use a dictionary constantly.
* Make a list of words that give you trouble.
* Break each word into its separate syllables and underline the syllable that gives you trouble.
* Write out each word correctly several times.
* Practise seeing such spellings in your mind’s eye.
* Learn what few spelling rules are really helpful: ‘i before e except after c (but only when the sound is ee), and ‘single consonant after a long vowel (as in roving) but double consonant if the vowel is short (as in robbing).’
* Keep using your dictionary.

Simplify your sentences:
* Keep your sentences short (rarely more than 20 words).
  - Short sentences will:
    - help you avoid grammatical errors;
    - help you spot them more easily if you do make them; and
    - save you from many punctuation problems.
* Avoid writing sentences which, like this one, have phrases and clauses sprouting within them -- each with their own qualifications (some more, and some less, to the point than others) to make, are not only too long but also too complex for easy reading, and are better split into several shorter ones.

Keep your paragraphs short:
* Start each paragraph with your ‘topic sentence’ which carries the main idea; or
* Lead up to the main idea as your final sentence.
* Use the rest of the paragraph to elaborate on the main idea or else lead up to it.
* If you write a paragraph and see it contains more than one main idea, make each the topic into a separate paragraph.

Punctuate for meaning:
* Write short sentences and you will have much less trouble with punctuation.
* Use punctuation to substitute for the pauses and emphases you would use if you were speaking to your reader.
* If you have trouble imagining this, try reading your sentences aloud.
* If you want your reader to pause only briefly, insert a comma.
* A full stop gives a longer pause.
* If you want to make a comment (not too lengthy) on what you have just written, enclose it in brackets.
* Alternatively -- perhaps to make your writing more open in texture -- set off the comment with a pair of dashes.
* If you want two short sentences to be linked together use a semi-colon; this gives a pause longer than a comma but shorter than a full-stop.
* If you want to give particular emphasis to a word underline it or have it printed bold or in CAPITALS.
* If you must emphasize a complete statement use the exclamation mark! (But one only, and not too often!!!)
* Notice the use of 'blobs/numbers/letters as a punctuation mark -- to tell the reader you are presenting a list of related items.
  Measure your readability:
  a) Count how many sentences you have written;
  b) Count the number of words with three or more syllables;
  c) Divide (b) by (a) to find the average number of long words per sentence.
  If this average (your Readability Quotient, or RQ) exceeds 3, your writing will be more difficult than that of most novelists. Try this test on some material you know your readers find readable.

Layout and Presentation

It's often not enough to have good ideas and express them well. If your document is to look attractive to readers, and enable them to grasp its structure and find their way around in it, it will also need to be well laid out. Here are some questions to ask yourself:
  Is it clear at a glance what the document is about (e.g. a title, or heading in a letter)?
  Might readers find it helpful if I insert occasional headings or sub-headings?
  Shall I distinguish between headings and sub-headings by using capitals and lower-case letters?
  Are my paragraphs short enough?
  Shall I number my paragraphs?
  Will I sometimes get my points over more clearly in a list (like this one) rather than in a prose paragraph?
  Will graphs, tables or diagrams sometimes be needed instead of, or as well as, prose?
  Would it help to draw boxes around any items?
  Do I need to emphasize any of the text by using underlining or CAPITALS?
  Are my lines short enough for easy reading? (Lines with more than about 65 'characters'-letters or spaces - may be difficult to read.)
  Is there enough space between lines? (The longer the line, the more space is needed between lines.)
  Is there enough space around the margins of the text? (Don't let the pages look too dense with print.)
  If the document is a lengthy one:
  * Does the reader need a table of contents?
  * One or more summaries?
  * An index?
  * Can any of the contents be put in an appendix for optional reading?
  Should the document be presented in any special kind of folder or cover?

Tackling the writing Task

Many of the following hints and tips may be more applicable when writing lengthy pieces -- longer memos, reports, proposals etc. But you may find some are applicable to writing shorter documents like...
letters and brief memos. Alongside any of the following you think might be particularly helpful jot
down the kind of document you might use it for:

Decide first why you are writing:
* To give someone information they have asked for.
* To give them information you think they need (why?).
* To request information yourself.
* To persuade someone to a point of view.
* To enable or encourage them to take action.
* To get them off your back.

Ask yourself what knowledge (or misinformation) and opinions (or prejudices) your reader may
may possess which you need to take into account in your writing.
If you haven't already got a deadline by which the writing must be finished set yourself one.
Where feasible, let your potential readers know when to expect the material from you.
If the writing requires some preliminary research and thinking time, set yourself a deadline for
starting the actual writing.
However brief the document, make sure it has a clear beginning, middle and end:
* Introduction (Why you are writing?);
* Middle (What you have to say?);
* Conclusion (So what is the reader expected to think or do as a result of what you have
  said?)

Jot down the main topics or points you want to mention in each section (and their sequence)
before you begin writing sentences.
Don't feel you must write the document in the order in which it is to be read. If you find the
beginning difficult, start somewhere else.
Get something written as soon as possible to 'prime the pump' -- even knowing you may scrap it
later.
As you write, keep in mind the reader(s) you are addressing and ask yourself, sentence by
sentence, how are they likely to respond to your words.
Aim to 'brainstorm' your way through your first rough draft in one sitting if at all possible.
If time allows, put your first draft aside for a day or two so you can look at it again with a fresh
eye.

Criticize your draft severely:
* Are my facts correct?
* Are they complete enough?
* Are they all relevant?
* Do my conclusions or recommendations follow logically from the facts?
* Have I dealt with all likely objections?
* Are my words and sentences short enough? (Do I have an RQ of 3 or less? -- see above).
* Have I avoided mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar?
* Does it read smoothly and easily?
* Is it laid out (headings, spacing, etc.) so that readers can easily find their way into and
  around the material?
* Can anything be cut out?
If you have time and the document is important enough, get comments from a colleague, friend or spouse before you write a final draft.
Don't miss your deadline trying to make the document perfect

Whenever you write, read it ALOUD. Anything you find tedious or awkward to speak will be equally so for your readers to read.
LISTENING

"Only the humble can listen"
Executive Listening

Dr. P. Moudgill

27 Managers with 18 years service in a large Public Sector Organisation were asked the following questions:
1. Which is the single most important managerial attribute?
2. Which single activity takes up most of your time?

Only a small minority identified communication as the attribute (further questioning revealed that they meant "talking") and the one activity which took most of their time was talking. Listening was not identified as either important or practiced.

Studies have shown that 55 to 80% of the working time of line supervisors and managers is spent in communicating. 11 top executives estimated their communication time at 70 to 100% of their working time. Managers and executives spend 45 to 62% of their communication time at listening; with reading, writing and speaking making up the rest (Keepfe, pp 9-10).

The Public Sector managers referred to above were either not aware that they spent more communication time on listening than talking or, as will see later as something more serious, they do not take time to listen.

The newly recruited first-rung manager is essentially an action man. As he goes up the ladder, however, the emphasis changes from doing to getting things done, from action to decision making/communicating. Managerial decisions can, however, be only as good as the information on which they are based. If feed-in is faulty so are the decisions. If management does not practice listening feed-in is likely to be faulty.

There can be another serious consequence of non-listening. It is common experience that many intendedly pro-labour policies and decisions fail to find acceptance. Even though management means well labour continue to view them with suspicion. This is because there is a communication gap; downward communication has failed. But downward communication can be effective only to the extent that there has been prior good upward communication. Two reasons for failure of downward communication are:

1. Management fails to answer or settle the questions, hesitations, doubts, and second thoughts that it must answer before introducing change; it does not do so because it cannot--it has no deep, accurate awareness of such doubts and questions.

2. Management is not recognizing the reality that formal authority may be more nominal than real authority unless and until it is accepted by those subject to it. Such acceptance pre-supposes understanding of management's goals and intentions in exercising authority, Again, management cannot
transmit such understanding without knowing through listening whether and where understanding gaps exist (Keepe, p. 13)."

It is the thesis of this article that

* Good listening leads to good decision making and that
* There is greater receptivity to such decisions.

Consequently

* Good listening is an important behavioural attribute.

Definition of Good Listening

Hearing is a passive physical activity which only requires that the ear drums be in order. Listening, however, is an active process employing the ears, eyes and the mind. Active listening result is in increased pulse rate and blood pressure and perspiration of the palms. Listening is said to be good when the listener can re-state the speaker's ideas, feelings and frame of reference to the speaker's satisfaction.

Reasons for Poor Listening

Good listening is more the exception than the rule. Given below are some reasons why:

1. The first reason for poor listening is primarily physiological. The average speed of speaking is 150 words per minute in contrast to our ability to hear up to 500 words per minute. Thus while listening the mind is free to make side excursions and yet remain abreast of the speech. What typically happens, however, is that a particular side excursion becomes too long and by the time the mind switches back some content has been lost. Consequently there is less comprehension and the mind then makes even more excursions, thus missing more and more. Studies have shown that there is on an average only 50% recall at the end of a speech, half of this is lost in the next two days; the average listening efficiency of the adult thus being only 25% (Mackay, p.2).

2. Inspite of the mismatch between the speeds of talking and listening however, it is possible to discipline the mind to listen. The reasons why we do not listen well is because we have never been taught the necessary discipline. Unlike other communication skills viz. speaking and writing there is almost no emphasis on teaching listening.

3. From our very child-hood we have learnt that we must speak (during infancy, cry) to have our needs met. We are encouraged to talk. As one grows there is pressure to make your presence felt. Listening does not conform to the macho image. A quiet person tends to be written off. Listening is therefore, not reinforced. Speaking is.

4. When a young adult enters an organisation he is exposed to non-listening. He is told what to do and to get going. Thus non-listening is further reinforced.
5. As a manager rises in the hierarchy and is reasonably successful he gets the feeling that "all is well". This satisfaction with the status quo is perhaps the most insidious phenomenon prevailing in the Public Sector. People compare themselves with their colleagues or their organisation with others and are content. They fail to appreciate that both personal as well as organisational potential is far from being realised. Since there is little pressure (internal or external) for yet higher achievement there is little reason to listen.

6. Often we do not listen because we think that we cannot afford the time for listening. This can be counterproductive. A reporter asked some people for their reason for being on strike. 'Man', the striker said, 'if you only knew. No one in there ever listens to us. So we give them a strike' (Keefe, p.3).

7. Often we do not want to hear. "My mind is made up. Do not confuse me with facts". There is the fear that if I see the speaker's point of view I may be forced to change mine. If follows that we hear only that which we want to hear. That which is contrary to presuppositions is filtered out.

8. We expect the speaker to subscribe fully to or at least be sympathetic with our point of view. If not, there is a corresponding under-valuing of what he says. In case he is seen as hostile, e.g., a union representative, there is further devaluation or even rejection. We forget that if our point of view is legitimate from our point of view, his point of view is equally legitimate from his point of view. It makes sense, therefore, to at least see his point of view.

9. There are those who want to listen yet are poor listeners. It is because they fail to understand the purpose of listening. The assumptions which make listening bad are contrasted below with those that make for good listening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad Listening</th>
<th>Good Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the transaction is deemed to be purely logical or rational, i.e., listening only for information or ideas.</td>
<td>The transaction is seen as more than just logical and the listener looks also for the sentiments, attitudes and values of the speaker.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of the transaction is to get what the listener is looking for. "How do I profit?" "What use can I make of this information?"

The speaker is given an opportunity to express himself freely, including freedom to cover personal or non-business issues. The ideas is to let him profit.

10. One other assumption underlying bad listening is that words are deemed to have a meaning of their own. But different people use words differently. Words are, therefore, to be interpreted according to the speaker's frame of reference and not that of the listener. Whenever in doubt, seek clarification.
11. Another failure is that we listen for words only and fail to pick up non-verbal signals. According to American research on communication words may convey as little as 7% of the message; the balance being communicated through inflections, sounds other than words, body movements, touch and even the way or the distance at which a person sits (Menon).

12. If the speaker uses words that rouse strong emotions, either positive or negative, hearing is impaired. If positive we tend to suspend critical evaluation and accept all, hook line and sinker. If negative we stop listening and plan rebuttal. If the speaker is emoting, instead of responding to his feelings we respond on the basis of how his feelings effect our feelings.

Disadvantages of Poor Listening

Poor listening can be costly. Two of the disadvantages of poor listening have been referred to earlier. These and some others are given below:

1. Decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate information regarding people or the situation are likely to be inefficient.

2. Even if decisions are good staff are likely to be unreceptive to these or other downward communication. The key to get others to listen to you is to first listen to them.

3. We generally listen only to those who we think can contribute to organisational performance. Non-listening may, therefore, convey to the employees that they have nothing to contribute. Assumptions like these have a habit of turning out to be true—a case of self-fulfilling prophecy.

4. Management which practices non-listening may be forced to listen through strikes or other pressure tactics.

How to Listen Well

Given below are some tips on listening:

1. Think ahead of the talker, trying to anticipate what he is leading to and what conclusions will be drawn.

2. Weigh the evidence presented against the points being made.

3. Review and summarise periodically during the course of the talk. This may be done either mentally or orally.

4. Listen for what is not being said, specially if the speaker appears to be skirting a particular issue.

5. Make a deliberate effort to look for evidence or ideas that might prove you wrong or be contrary to your point of view.

6. With-hold evaluation of what is being said until after the speaker has finished.
7. After the speaker has finished, summarise what has been said including the ideas, feelings and the frame of reference of the speaker. Check with the speaker whether your summary is accurate.

Help the Speaker to Speak

Listening or wanting to listen may, however, not be enough. You may have to help the speaker speak. There are several reasons for doing so and for probing for what he is saying or not saying.

1. He may not be able express himself clearly. This is more likely to be true of supervisory and lower level staff.
2. They are generally not used to speaking freely to their bosses.
3. There can be inhibition due to fear of rejection of their ideas or feelings.
4. Often the speaker may be aware of something wrong but does not see it as any of his business and will, therefore, not volunteer information.
5. It is a normal tendency to not want to rock the boat. Often problems are not high-lighted because they would reflect adversely on the speaker’s colleagues.
6. Very often you will be told only what you want to hear. Information which is likely to upset you will not normally be forthcoming.
7. Information is sometimes suppressed to hide that which may be of disadvantage to the speaker or exaggerated to show him in a good light.

While listening, therefore, encourage the other person to elaborate. Ask for clarification where necessary and summarise from time to time to ascertain whether you are hearing him accurately (this will also build confidence in the speaker -- that he is being listened to). It is not necessary that you accept as true or reject as untrue all that has been said. Acceptance and rejection will require independent confirmation. What is necessary, however, is that you get the full message, viz., facts, feelings and frame of reference.

Advantages of Listening

Some disadvantages of non-listening have already been identified earlier. Listening will convert these potential disadvantages to advantages -- namely better and more efficient decisions communicated to staff who are receptive. Some of the other advantages of listening are

1. The "therapy" experienced by the employee because of free communication. The speaker verbalises his thoughts, hears out his problem, gets an insight into his needs and improves self-understanding. There is a release of emotions and hostilities. His need for self-esteem is satisfied leading to increased motivation.
2. The manager sees the employee as a person and gets a better understanding of him and the situation. He sees himself as others see him and recognises his own deficiencies and misperceptions.
3. There is mutual trust and respect and decreased defensiveness.
4. Issues that agitate the employees may often be "little things." Dealing with these little things will, however, make the employees receptive to the "big things" management may seek to implement. There is thus a high "return" to the time and effort spent in listening.
5. The employees feel good about themselves, about the manager -- and since they relate to the organisation through the manager -- feel good about the organisation.

SUMMARY

Executives spend a significant proportion of their time listening. Good listening results in good feed-in and, therefore, to good decisions. It also results in staff being receptive to downward communication -- the key to get others to listen being to first listen to them. The emotional climate is healthier with the staff more likely to contribute to organisational performance. Listening is thus an important prerequisite to organisational effectiveness.

References:

4. Menon, P.G., "Verbal Communication - its Scientific Basis in NLP" (details of publication not known).
Ten Commandments for Good Listening

1. Stop talking.
   You cannot listen if you are talking.
2. Put the talker at ease.
   Help him feel that he is free to talk.
3. Show him that you want to listen.
   Look and act interested.
   Listen to understand rather than to oppose.
4. Remove distractions.
   Don't doodle, tap or shuffle papers.
5. Empathize with him.
   Try to put yourself in his place so that you can see his point of view.
6. Be patient.
   Allow plenty of time. Do not interrupt him.
7. Hold your temper.
   An angry man gets the wrong meaning from words.
8. Go easy on argument and criticism.
   This puts him on the defensive.
   Do not argue: even if you win, you lose.
9. Ask questions.
   This encourages him and shows you are listening.
10. Stop talking.
    This is first and last, because all other commandments depend on it. You just can't do a good listening job while you are talking.

Nature gave man two ears but only one tongue, which is a gentle hint that he should listen more than he talks.
Listening: Checklist

Managers spend a significant proportion of their time listening to people talk. But how much of that is just 'hearing' rather than true listening? If we are really listening, we are being active—we are doing something with what we are hearing. We are thinking about it. Our minds are working on it (not just our ears).

One of the troubles is that we can think far faster than the other person can talk. So it is easy to get distracted by thoughts of our own—especially thoughts about what we intend to say next.

Furthermore much of what we have to listen to may strike us as unappealing. Managers have to deal with lies, excuses, complaints, accusations and expressions of despair. There will be people who seem determined to waste your time, bore you to death, sell you something you don't want, persuade you out of your better judgement or push you around. No wonder there's sometimes a temptation to 'tune out'.

The effective manager is one who knows how to listen—and listen actively—whatever the circumstances. This means concentrating on what is being said, and on the way it is being said. The active listener is looking for meaning in what he or she is hearing. Could you, at the very least, express in your own words what the other person has conveyed to you—to their satisfaction?

The experience of being actively listened to may be quite novel to many speakers. Certainly it will make many people feel more appreciated and taken note of. It may even transform the way some people see themselves and feel about themselves. This outcome of active listening may be very much to be desired in counselling your staff, for instance. But active listening is important for the manager in all kinds of situations, from job interviewing or negotiating with a supplier to holding their own in a meeting. The checklist below will help you to become a good listener.
To Whom Must you Listen?

First of all consider the number and variety of people you may need to listen to. Tick whichever of the following have expected you to listen to them during the last working week:

* Your boss
* Your boss' boss
* Fellow managers in your organization
* Consultants or advisers (internal or external)
* Your subordinates
* Their subordinates (if any)
* Other manager's subordinates
* Union representatives
* Job applicants
* Customers or clients
* Suppliers
* Competitors
* Professional acquaintances in other organizations
* Press, radio or TV representatives
* Other (Who?)

Sometimes you listen chiefly because you need to hear what the other person has to say, sometimes because the other person needs to be listened to. Tick the following listening purposes according to whether they are chiefly for your benefit, chiefly for theirs, or whether they benefit both:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Them</th>
<th>Both</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To obtain information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To learn people's opinions</td>
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<tr>
<td>To explore their feelings and attitudes</td>
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<tr>
<td>To clarify a misunderstanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>To assess or appraise the person</td>
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<td>To help them talk through a problem</td>
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<td>To encourage their creativity</td>
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<td>To make them feel appreciated</td>
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<tr>
<td>To ensure they also listen to you</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others (what ?)</td>
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Clearly there are many people to listen to and many reasons why you may be doing so -- both yours and theirs. So:

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How Well do you Listen?

Most of us have our weaknesses as listeners, though few of us are aware of them. Which of the following weaknesses do you recognize in yourself?

**Selective Listening**

* Are there some individuals you avoid having to listen to? □ □
* Are there certain categories of people you find difficult to listen to? □ □
* Would someone's appearance prejudice you so that you could not listen objectively? □ □
* Might a person's accent or way of speaking make him/her scarcely worth listening to? □ □
* Do you 'tune out' on certain topics? □ □
* Do you refuse to listen to things that may make you feel uncomfortable? □ □
* Do you pay attention only to the good things (or only to the bad things) you hear? □ □
* Do you listen chiefly for facts and overlook expressions of feeling, opinion or prejudice? □ □
* Do you listen purely for your own purposes without thinking what the other person needs? □ □

**Attention**

* Do you let your mind wander or pursue thoughts of your own? □ □
* Do you spend most of the time thinking what you are going to say next? □ □
* Are you easily distracted by other things going on around you? □ □
* Do you have ways of fooling the speaker that you are paying attention when you are not? □ □
* Does your body language (wandering gaze, stifled yawn, tapping foot or drumming fingers) ever reveal that you are getting bored, impatient or irritable? □ □
Interruptions

* Are you always ready to jump in with your own ideas as soon as the other person pauses?
* If the other person says something you disagree with do you interrupt to put your point of view?
* If you can guess the end of a person's sentence, do you complete it for him/her?
* If so, do you then continue talking yourself?
* Do you try to stop the speaker if you feel he or she is getting angry or upset?

Which of the above is your one worst listening weakness? Consciously try to overcome that weakness during your next week of listening to people.

Giving feedback

To be an active listener you need to give appropriate feedback to the person who is talking. That is you need to let them know that you are paying attention and trying to understand things from their point of view. Which of the following might be appropriate in any of the kinds of listening you need to do:

* Reflecting back what the other person seems to be saying by restating it in my own words.
* Telling the other person what feeling or attitude I seem to hear them expressing.
* Inviting them to comment on my understanding.
* Asking them to say more about things I don't understand.
* Happily tolerating pauses, which may encourage the talker to carry on and dig deeper.
* Asking open-ended questions (e.g., why, what, how?) that leave the talker free to say what they want.
* Ensuring my contributions are no lengthier than they need be.
* Expressing:
  _ approval;
  _ disapproval;
  _ both approval and disapproval;
  _ neither approval nor disapproval.
* Offering diagnoses or solutions of my own.
* Refusing to offer my own diagnoses or solutions.
* Using non-verbal noises (Mmm and Uh-huh).
* Using body language -- e.g., eye contact, nods, facial expressions, different body postures.
* Responding to their non-verbal noises or body language (especially if they seem anxious or angry) by encouraging or calming them.
* Summarizing all the key points I believe the other person has made.
* Remembering what they have said (even if I have to make notes afterwards).
* Showing by what I say or do later that I have remembered what the person told me.
* Anything else (what?).

Clearly different situations (counselling, job interviewing, staff counselling, customer complaints, meetings etc.) will call for different kinds of active listening. Please decide which of the above approaches may be useful for the different kinds of listening you regularly need to do.

If you regularly listen actively to other people you may find they repay the compliment by listening that way to you.
"Reading without thinking is like eating without digesting."

Reading: Checklist

Most managers feel they have too much to read. Typed and printed materials flow on to one's desk in a near-continuous stream. Half of it is probably not worth reading; but how, without actually reading it, is one to know which half? And even the worthless half may contain some information that is extremely helpful, if not absolutely essential, to one's effectiveness as a manager. So how does one sort the chaff from the grain and keep on top of one's reading?

Some managers try to give their closest attention to every piece of paper that comes near them. This can leave them with little time for managing. Then someone suggests they take a Speed Reading course. This puts them in a position to echo Woody Allen's testimonial: "Yes I've just taken a speed reading course. Very useful. I read War and Peace last night -- all 1400 pages. Took me 20 minutes. It's about Russia, isn't it?"

The quickest way to deal with your reading material is not to use speed reading techniques but to cut down on the amount you need to read. Efficient reading means being selective about what you read, and then reading it at whatever speed is most appropriate to the nature of the material and your purpose in reading it. There are three chief elements in reading efficiently:

1. Identify the purpose for which you are reading.
2. Have a system for handling reading materials.
3. Learn and apply appropriate reading techniques.

The following checklists should help.

What and Why Do You Read?

Which of the following sorts of materials do you regularly expect to have to read?

* Files
* Letters
* Memos or reports
* Copies of letters, memos or reports sent to other people
* Agendas and papers for future meetings
* Minutes or notes of past meetings
* Advertising/promotional circulars
* Newspapers
* Trade or professional journals
* Selected articles or papers
* Books (management or technical)
* Others (what?)
Now consider why you need to read them. Here we can pick out five chief purposes:

1. Decision: Where you have to take a decision based on what you have read.
2. Action: Where you need to do something in the foreseeable future as a result of your understanding of the materials.
3. Internal Information: Where the material may provide useful background information about what is going on within your organization.
4. External Information: Background information about what is happening in your field outside your organization.
5. Professional Learning: Where the material can be expected to contribute to your continuing learning and development as a manager or technical expert.

Alongside each item you picked out in the first list, write the most likely purpose (1-5) you would have in reading it.

Managing Your Reading Materials

It helps to have a system for handling the materials you may be expected to read. Which of the following tips might you usefully be able to adopt?:

* Ask one of my team to categorize materials for me under purposes 1-5 above.
* Ask one or more of my team to read certain materials for me and provide summaries.
* Get my name taken off the circulation list of publications that I never find relevant.
* Ask people to stop sending me reports or copies of memos that never concern me.
* Urge that members of my team (and others if possible) should restrict memos and routine reports to one side of a sheet of A4 paper.
* Avoid creating unnecessary paperwork myself.
* Agree with fellow managers to share out the reading of professional and technical materials and tell each other the highlights once a month.
* Guarantee myself a total of at least one hour a week reading Professional Learning materials.
* Don't handle any material more than twice — once to decide what to do with it and once to do it.
* Learn to be ruthless in saying No to materials that don't deserve my attention.
* If I decide not to do anything with some material, get rid of it straight away: into the waste paper bin or on to a colleague.
* Create a logical filing system so that I know where to look for materials on different subjects or of different types or degrees of urgency.
* Remember to inform my team of anything I've read that may interest or help them.
* Others (What?)

Towards a Reading Strategy

When faced with a pile of reading materials, some people start gamely at page 1 of the first item they come to, and plough on, word by word, until they finish the last page of the item at the
bottom of the pile. This is an inefficient way for a manager to work. The first essential for efficient reading is to be selective. This is a three-stage process:

1. Leaf through the pile, glancing over every item, and throw out or pass on any material that does not concern you.
2. With each item that does appear relevant, skim through it to get a general idea of what it is about -- and discard it if it is unworthy of closer attention.
3. Read carefully any item (or sections within an item) that survive this far.

Skimming

The purpose of skimming (stage 2 above) is to get a feel for what (if anything) you might be expected to get out of the material and/or do about it. In doing so, one might ask oneself questions like those that follow. Which of them might be appropriate to the kinds of reading material you are faced with?

* Has this been sent exclusively to me?
* Who sent it?
* Do I have to do something about it?
* What is it about?
* With a journal, does the contents list help me decide which articles to consider further?
* With a book, does the contents page and/or the index help me to identify sections that might be worth closer study or to track down information I am looking for?
* With all materials:
  - What do the sub-headings (if any) tell me?
  - What can I pick up from a glance at any illustrations, lists, calculations etc?
  - Can I get any clues from introductions, prefaces etc?
  - Are there any useful summaries?
  - If not are the main points mentioned in the first or final paragraphs?
  - Glancing through the paragraphs do any key words leap out at me?
  - Do I have any feelings about the author's main ideas, intentions or approach?
  - For what purpose might I read this material (or parts of it) more carefully?
  - What questions might I be looking to answer from any more careful reading?

Reading Carefully

If some material appears to be worth reading carefully -- e.g. for action or for learning -- ask yourself questions like these:

* What is my purpose in reading this so carefully?
* What questions have been suggested by my earlier skimming?
* What are the main ideas? (The main idea of each paragraph is usually in the first or last sentence.)
* What evidence, examples, explanations and other detail are used to support or qualify each main idea?
* Are any main ideas or important details contained in diagrams, tables, photographs etc?
* Which of the main ideas or important details are worth making a written note of?
* What is my assessment as I read the text? e.g.:
  - Are its facts correct and up-to-date?
  - Does it distinguish between facts and opinion?
  - Are its examples, evidence, explanations etc. plausible?
  - Are its conclusions (main ideas) properly supported by evidence and examples?
  - Would other conclusions follow equally well from the evidence offered?
  - How closely do the conclusions tie in with my experience?
  - Is the author overlooking any aspects that seem important to me?
  - How might I use the ideas presented here?
  - Is any of it worth reading again (now or later on)?

* What might I (or must I) do as a result of reading the text?
* Shall I write a summary of the material? (if so, why?)
* Shall I discuss the material with anyone? (Who? Why? When?)
* What have I learned (or might be of value) to me?
* If the answer is Nothing, how can I avoid wasting time on careful reading of such material again?

The Mechanics of Reading

Finally, here are some hints and tips that may help you improve the speed and concentration of your reading:
* Have I found the best physical conditions in which to read (good lighting and no distractions?)
* Do I need (new) spectacles for reading? (How long since you last had your eyes tested?)
* Do I take a break from reading every 20-30 minutes? (If not your concentration may suffer.)
* Do I read the words one by one? (If so try to take in whole phrases, or 'thought-units' instead.)
* Do I move my lips, or say the words to myself, while reading? (If so, try chewing a pencil.)
* Do I find myself continually back-tracking to re-read earlier words in a sentence or paragraph? (Unless the material is very difficult to understand, try to keep your eyes moving downwards, if necessary by moving your finger down the page.)
* Am I frequently held up by not knowing the meaning of ordinary non-technical words? (If so look them up in a dictionary and write them down to enlarge your vocabulary.)
* Do I consciously try to read as fast as I can, bearing in mind the nature of the material and my purpose in reading it? (When skimming easy material you may manage to deal with 400-500 words per minute or more. When carefully reading very difficult material you may need to slow down to 100 words per minute or less.)

You don't have to read everything. You may not even have to read ALL of anything.