

Learn the language of leadership

COMMUNICATE BETTER Though a lot of students are good at informal communication, they falter at projecting themselves effectively. V Pradeep Kumar provides tips on mastering basic communication skills essential for success



BODY LANGUAGE Much of what we communicate is non-verbal, through facial reactions and gestures.

A few weeks back, I delivered a lecture in a management institute. Divya, a first year student of the institute was coordinating my visit. Every time she called, her communication was clear, concise and impactful. Despite being a student, she spoke well and with maturity, leaving me impressed.

Unfortunately, not all students can communicate well. Recently, the Director of another educational institution commented wryly, "Many of our students can't even speak well. How can we place them in corporates?"

Students widely differ in their ability to communicate, depending on their background, institution, circle of friends and so on. Our education system is academics-centric with no focus on personality development. Thus, even though we may find students good in informal communication, they falter in projecting themselves effectively.

As a student, you interact with teachers, fellow students, elders, prospective employers, friends and society in general. While, the purpose of communication may differ with each of these communities, the basic principles remain the same. Dale Carnegie, the author of the outstanding book 'How to Win Friends and Influence People', says: "There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it."

Basics of communication An understanding of these basic principles equips you to communicate better.

Active listening: Many students suffer from a lack of concentration in classrooms, which makes coaching classes inevitable. Eliminate this problem by actively listening, and maintaining eye contact with the teacher. Active listening also enables interaction with teachers, completing your learning process. It's a good idea to rephrase the words of the speaker to demonstrate that you are indeed listening. Such listening skills are

equally essential while interacting with elders, friends and prospective employers. Dean Rusk, an American politician and professor, highlights the importance of listening, by saying, "the best way to persuade others, is by your ears, by listening to them".

Verbal skills: When you don't understand a point made by your teacher, interrupt the lecture and ask for a clarification. In the Indian context, students do not feel comfortable to express an opinion or ask questions, for fear of ridicule. Overcome such inhibitions in your personality, as questioning is an extremely useful technique in learning. Ask open-ended questions to understand better and to make the learning process participative.

Communication is not words or even speaking. Interacting in the classroom or participating in a debate, requires you to structure your question or views with the appropriate words. Develop a high trust quotient by being honest so that others hear you. The right tone and tenor of your voice is essential in making your communication effective. These principles are valid in any communication.

Currently, noise pollution is high and people detest loud conversations. Be discerning in selecting ring tones and move away to attend incoming calls. Speak softly and courteously. This helps make a positive impression.

You must also learn the art of picking up a conversation in social interactions. An effective method is to ask a few open-ended questions about an individual's profession, hobbies, interests. And then listen actively to what he or she says.

Body language: Speaking is merely the utterance of words; communication is conveying the attributed meaning. You may be surprised to know that much of what we communicate is non-verbal through facial reactions and gestures. Psychologists say that the face is the index of the mind and other body movements support the index of the mind. The way you hear, talk, walk—all communicate something, whether intended or not. There are many languages,

but a smile speaks them all. Therefore, it's important to develop a natural genuine smile. A smile on your face, an appropriate handshake or greeting, with the right enthusiasm creates a positive first impression on people, instantly winning you friends.

Writing skills: Students request me for career guidance, through emails. However, many of them come without background information, making the process of counseling, impossible. Further, incomplete sentences, misspellings and wrong words, make comprehension difficult, even with repeated readings.

Innumerable tests and exams are part of your academics, which tests your understanding of the subjects. Just as you adapt your answers depending on the type of question, be brief or elaborate as the situation demands even in informal or formal communication.

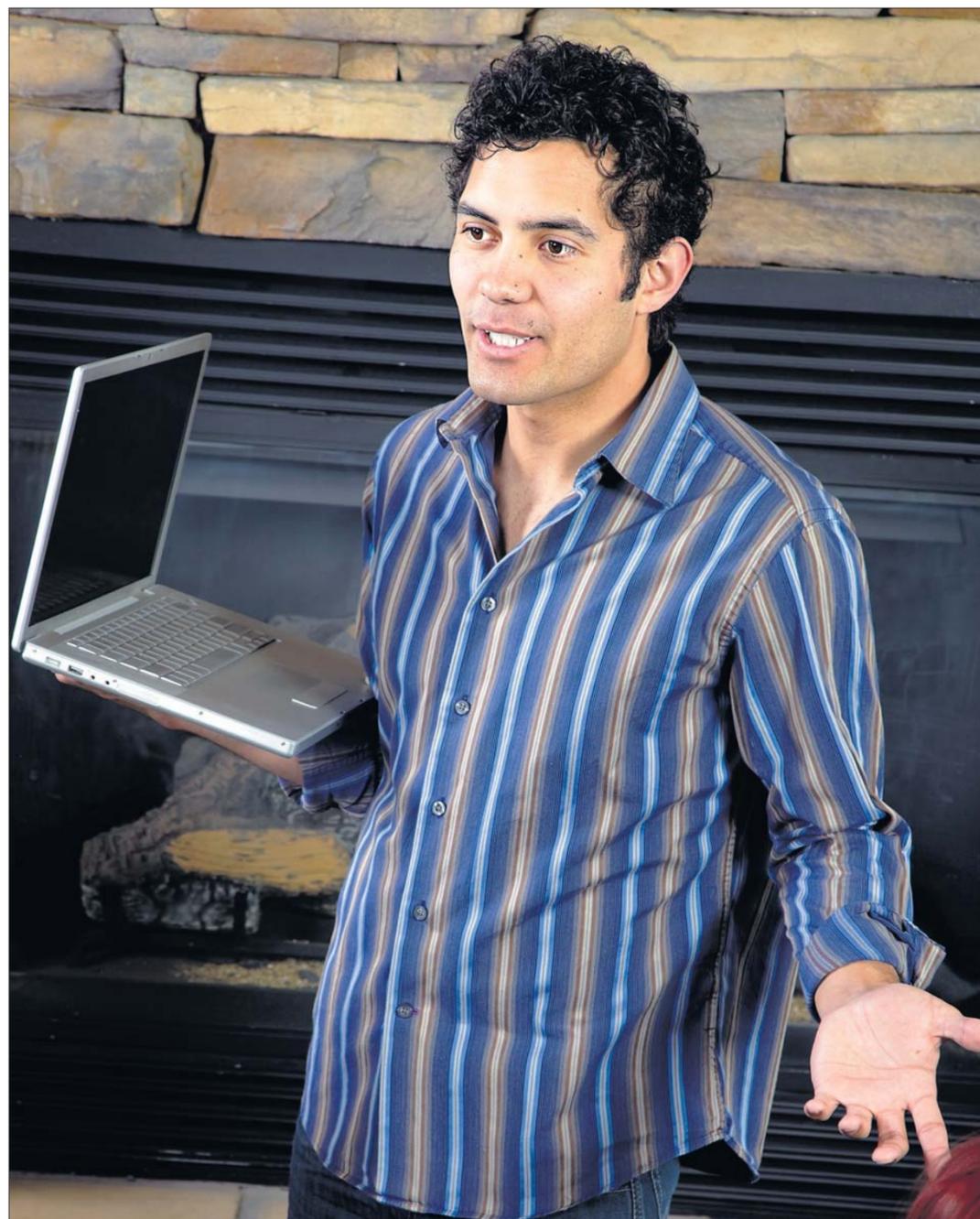
The first step in good writing is to understand the audi-

ence, which determines the style—formal or informal. Once the style is decided, structure the letter or email on the principles of attention, interest, desire and action (AIDA). Avoid grammatical errors, long sentences and paragraphs. Finally, don't send any communication without proof reading it.

Whether you are writing an email, a letter or a report, keep it clear and concise. When you write, take care to be courteous.

Communication is the key to success

CEOs and HR experts concur that the most important skill in an employee is the ability to communicate. With your communication skills you must be able to project the knowledge and technical skills you have acquired in your academic career. This will help you get a job of your liking. Further, you should be able to apply those skills and share your knowledge with peers



and subordinates in a work environment. This is critical for career growth. To learn the art of communication, begin with avoiding the usual gaffes of misspelling and using the wrong words. Develop your communication style and skill, which comes with understanding and practice, or alternatively, consider a

training programme to hone your skills. If you have a mentor or a role model, seek his or her help. Words have amazing power; they can deliver or destroy. Les Brown,

the famous author, speaker and motivator says, "Your ability to communicate is an important tool in pursuit of your goals, whether it is with your family, co-workers or clients and cus-

tomers". Therefore, develop your overall personality with communication skills and reach the pinnacle of success in life. (The author is a management and career consultant)




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