

◇ Chapter 6
Effective Communication Skills

Enrichment Activities

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

In the midst of so many writing assignments in school, it's easy to forget that writing is a form of communication. It's a way to communicate specific ideas to a specific audience. The audience in school is often your teacher, but real-life audiences include parents, friends, employers, people in the community, or people far away via e-mail.

Some teenagers and parents write to each other to apologize for an awkward or unpleasant conversation. One mother wrote the following note to her daughter after an angry interchange: "I'm so sorry I lost my temper last night. I was tired and took it out on you. Can we start again? I promise to be a better listener next time." A thoughtful note like this can help ease the tensions that so easily erupt between teens and their parents.

Directions: Read the following situations in which a form of written communication was shared. Then answer the related questions.

1. Sometimes a letter is a good follow-up to an important conversation. Chin had an interview for a part-time job. Afterward, he wrote his interviewer a letter. What might he have said in a follow-up letter?

2. Tara's dad works nights, so sometimes she doesn't see him for several days. Tara writes to her dad in a notebook each day, sharing her thoughts or experiences. Her dad checks the notebook each night and immediately writes back. What purposes do you think these notes serve?

3. Think of a time in your life when writing a note or letter might have been a good idea. Explain what the note might have accomplished.

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ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

Are you a person who thinks your feelings don't really show? If you don't cry, no one will know you're sad. If you don't tremble, no one will know you're scared. The truth is, your body doesn't lie. Your body language speaks loudly and clearly, with or without the volume turned up.



Your body language includes your posture, facial expressions, and gestures. What you don't say says a lot. What do you think your little brother is saying when he folds his arms defiantly across his chest when it's time for bed? What are you saying when you stare at the ceiling while taking a test? Your actions can send conflicting messages to others. Here are some examples:

- You say nothing is wrong, but your eyes are darting everywhere but in the direction of the person you're talking to.
- You say you're not afraid, but your voice is shaking and you don't make eye contact.
- You tell your friends "sure, I agree," but you're frowning and staring at the floor.
- You tell your best friend you're not angry, but your voice is cold and your body is stiff.

You have a choice in every situation. When you use clear communication, everything matches. Nobody has to guess whether he or she should believe your words or your body language. The better you get at communicating your feelings, the better the chance that people will respond to you in a way that makes sense — to you and to them.

Focus In

1. Look around you for a day. What body language do you see on the bus? At the mall? At lunch? What are the hidden messages?
2. What body language do you use? What mixed messages might your body language give? What words could you substitute to clear things up?
3. Can nonverbal clues be deliberately misleading? Explain.

Project: Create a character for a short story or a one-act play. In one paragraph — without using any dialogue and without "telling" the reader what is going on — describe your character only through his or her nonverbal language. Make your descriptions of the character's body language detailed enough that the reader can understand what the character is thinking and feeling.