

Building and Construction

Conduct workplace communication

Learner Guide



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Construction Workplace Communication ¹



Good communication skills are important in every workplace.

You communicate with your co-workers and clients when you:

- are given instructions
- ask for help and advice
- pass on messages
- discuss and share information and ideas.



Most information on a building site is communicated either in writing or by talking.

Communication is about sending and receiving messages. It's a two way process.



We send messages by:

- the words we choose
- the tone of our voice
- facial expressions and gestures we use
- the way we move and position our bodies.

We receive and interpret messages from others in a similar way.

Being aware of these things can help communication and prevent misunderstandings and conflict in the workplace.

There is more to communication than just speaking and listening.

Remember:

¹ Source: national VET Content, as at <https://nationalvetcontent.edu.au/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/2371a5e4-5d7b-465e-8f25-9f640e8499c3/index.htm?guest=true>, as on 17th June, 2014; Brady Australia, as at http://www.bradyid.com.au/en-au/products/signs_labels/safety_signs, as on 18th June, 2014.

General worksite safety

It is very important to keep a worksite as tidy as possible to avoid accidents.



Always check that safety caps are on starter bars.



Check whether other workers want to work in the same place as you.



Lock away dangerous tools at the end of the day.



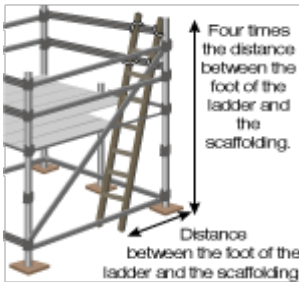
Use scaffolding if you are working above shoulder height.



Unfilled holes and openings in floors should have a warning sign or fence.



Before using scaffolding, check that it is complete, stable and strong enough to carry the load you want to put on it.



Ladders should have a rise to base ratio of 4 to 1. This means that the distance a ladder reaches up a wall should be about four times the distance that the foot of the ladder is from the base of the wall.

Ladders should be placed on stable ground and, if possible, they should be tied at the top to the structure you are climbing. If it is not possible to tie the ladder you should have someone holding the base of the ladder.



All rubbish should be removed from walkways and areas where people are working.

How we communicate

Face



Your face shows your mood.

A friendly expression and eye contact shows your interest in the conversation.



A blank expression, frown, or eyes wandering around the room can show disinterest.

When you talk to people, you want to know that they are listening and understanding what you say. You can tell by looking at their eyes. This is called 'making eye contact'.

Voice

Speak clearly! Don't mumble.

Choose your words carefully, speak clearly and use the right tone of voice. Often it's not what you say, but the way you say it that is important. If your tone doesn't match your meaning it can be confusing.

Responding when listening

Listening is not just hearing what is being said. It also means responding to what is being said.

A good listener will:

- let the speaker know that they have heard what is being said by saying things like 'Yes', 'Ah huh', 'I understand'. Nodding can help too.
- Sum up what has to be said to confirm that the message has been understood.

Body



When speaking and listening stand facing the other person at a comfortable distance. Keep a relaxed posture.



Be aware of your body. Crossed arms or hands on hips might make it look like you're annoyed or don't want to communicate.



If you fidget or look around it can look like you're not paying attention, not interested or don't have much respect for the person who is talking.

Hands

Be aware of how you use your hands and how your gestures can be interpreted.



Using gestures can help to illustrate what you are saying. For example, showing size, direction, number, etc.

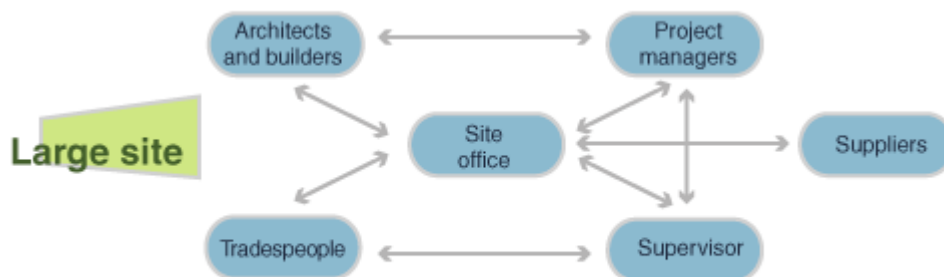


On the other hand gestures such as pointing, finger wagging or clenching fists can be interpreted as aggressive or disrespectful.

The flow of information

Building sites employ large numbers of people who need to be kept up to date with information affecting their work requirements. This information will be communicated in a number of ways depending on the size and complexity of the building project.

Large Site



Information is communicated in different ways depending on the size and complexity of the building project.

An **architect** designs the building and draws up plans to suit the requirements of the client.

A **builder** (usually a company) manages the construction from the drawings and specifications prepared by the architect. The builder and the architect communicate regularly with the client to ensure their needs are met.

If the client wants to change the plans or specifications this is communicated to the builder or the architect. The required changes are then communicated to the workers.

Tradespeople and workers on a building site can be either sub-contractors or direct employees of the builder. They are employed by the builder to carry out specialist work such as carpentry, bricklaying and plastering.

Sub-contractors may employ their own workers including apprentices. The sub-contractors tell their workers what has to be done and set them work. There is also communication between the different trades as they co-ordinate their activities on site.

The site office is the communication centre of a large building site.

Some sites may have documents such as **quality assurance (QA)** and **policy and procedure manuals** to communicate the required methods and procedures that workers on site must follow.

There may also be **notice boards** for first aid and union notices, WorkCover alerts and hazardous materials information.

A large project employs a large number of workers and there may be a couple of levels of management involved in overseeing their work.

The site may have a **Construction Manager, Project Manager or Site Manager**. Their role is to manage the construction according to the agreed plans, specifications, budget and timelines. They communicate regularly with the builder, the architect and the engineer to ensure the client's needs are met.

On large sites there are staff who coordinate and manage the building work and communicate down the line from management to worker as needed.

There may be one or more **supervisors** responsible for the day to day operation of a work group in all aspects of work.

There may be **leading hands** who are team leaders within a particular trade area. They will report to the supervisor and communicate with tradespeople regarding work requirements.

Suppliers can be individuals or companies that provide building materials to the construction site. On a large site a lot of materials are ordered and managed centrally. In some cases sub-contractors will buy their materials themselves.

There is regular communication with suppliers.

Written communication on a large site

Because of the number of people who work on a large site, there also needs to be various kinds of written communication.

Incident report forms



Incident report forms need to be completed if anyone is injured on the site.

Hazard notification forms

Hazard notification forms are used when someone identifies a hazard. The forms provide a written record of the problem. They do not replace verbal communication, but are useful

because they can be referred back to when the problem is being dealt with. Written records are also useful for keeping track of problems over a period of time.

Hazard tags



Equipment or materials that could create hazards need to be labeled to warn of the danger involved.

Emergency contact lists

The site office should have a list of emergency contacts in case of fire, accident or other emergency.

Visitors' books

Visitors to the site need to sign in when they arrive at the site, and sign out when they leave. This is necessary so that:

- the Site manager can monitor exactly who is on site at any time - this is especially important in case of an emergency
- the visitor can be checked for any PPE (eg hard hat) that is needed on the site and can be warned of hazards on the site.

Hazardous materials register

A list of all hazardous materials on site should be kept at the site office. This may be needed:

- to help people use safe work practices in potentially dangerous areas
- to help maintain safety in emergency situations.

Log of equipment safety standards compliance

Various equipment needs regular maintenance checks to ensure it complies with safety standards. Records need to be kept of when these checks are done.

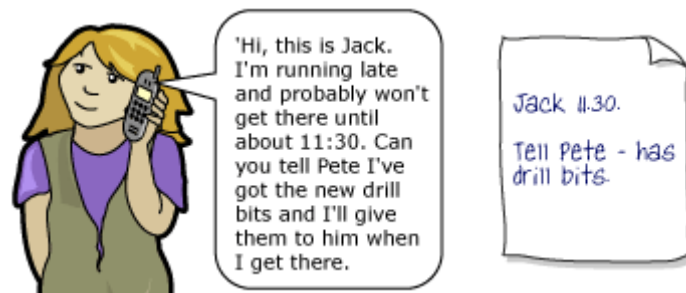
Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)

Manufacturers of hazardous substances are required to provide a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) with any materials they supply. The MSDS is printed material with health hazard information, first aid, precautions for use and safe handling information. The MSDS

for any hazardous materials used on a worksite should be easily accessible to all workers on the site.

Taking messages

It's a good idea to write down complicated instructions or messages that you have to pass on to someone else.



You don't need to write down every word they say.



Meetings

When people need to discuss things as a group they will often call a meeting and bring everyone together in the same place at the same time. This allows everyone to hear what is said and exchange their thoughts and ideas. On a building site, meetings may be called to discuss:

- changes to plans or specifications
- how work is progressing
- issues with workmanship or performance
- safety issues.

On a large construction site, meetings will be held regularly. Each meeting will have:

- an agenda (a list of items to be discussed)
- someone taking minutes (a written record of what is discussed).

On a small site, meetings may simply consist of a few people gathered together somewhere on the building site.

For meetings to run smoothly, everyone needs to co-operate.

Some examples of meeting rules are shown below.

Meeting Rules

1. Be on time. It's rude to keep others waiting. You may also miss some important information if you are late.
2. It's the job of the person who called the meeting to make the meeting run smoothly, so listen to what they say.
3. Listen carefully to what others have to say. When listening look interested and don't fidget.
4. Don't speak while someone else is speaking. You may miss something.
5. Show respect for other peoples' ideas and opinions. Respond appropriately when they speak.

Signs and what they mean

Without Safety Signs, many employees would lack the necessary direction in times of crisis and employers may find themselves in significant legal difficulties if accidents were to arise as a result.



Signs can use words, symbols or a combination of these. They are used to communicate hazards, protective equipment requirements and other information that you need to know to be safe on the work site.

Some of the signs you might come across on a building site are:

Hazard signs

- Danger signs
- Warning signs

Regulatory signs

- Prohibition signs
- Mandatory signs

Emergency information signs

Fire signs

General signs

Signs and what they mean: Danger signs



Examples of danger warnings include:

- construction site - do not enter
- asbestos removal in progress
- demolition in progress - keep out
- high voltage
- men working overhead
- scaffolding incomplete
- deep excavation.



Danger signs provide warning when a hazard or a hazardous condition is likely to be life-threatening. The word "Danger" is featured inside a red oval inside a black rectangle. Danger signs comply to AS 1319 regulations.



Prohibition signs

A red circle with a red diagonal line is used to show activities that are not permitted.



Admittance Prohibition Signs



General Prohibition Signs

Prohibition Signs specify behaviour or actions that are not permitted. The annulus and slash is depicted in red over the action symbol in black. Sign wording is in black lettering on a white background. Prohibition signs comply to AS 1319 regulations.



No Smoking / Flammable Prohibition Signs



State Specific No Smoking Prohibition Signs

Mandatory signs

These signs show protective equipment that must be worn.



Mandatory Signs Specify that an instruction must be carried out. Symbols (or "pictograms") are depicted in white on a blue circular background. Sign wording, if necessary, is in black lettering on a white background. Mandatory signs comply to AS 1319 regulations.



Emergency information signs

Emergency Signs indicate the nearest location of, or directions to emergency related facilities (Exits, First Aid, Safety equipment etc.). Features a white symbol and/or text on a green background. Emergency Information Signs comply to AS 1319 regulations.



These signs show where emergency facilities or equipment are available.



This sign indicates where first aid is available.



Emergency eye wash may be needed if corrosive substances are splashed into the eyes.



Emergency shower may be needed if corrosive substances come in contact with the skin.



Fire signs

Fire Signs advise the location of fire alarms and fire fighting equipment. They contain a white symbol and/or text on a red background.



Standard Fire Signs



Fire Markers & Discs - Australia



Fire Extinguisher ID - New Zealand



Fire Directional Signs

These signs show you where to find fire alarms, fire fighting equipment and emergency exits.



General signs

Some of the signs you will see on building sites are self explanatory, as shown below.



Some are there to direct traffic, such as the following.



Goods coming into the site come to this area.



Goods leaving the site are collected from this area.



Do not enter.



Shows the direction traffic must travel.

Notice Signs



These notice signs are not referred in AS1319, however are available due to popular demand. They communicate information of a general nature and often refer to Housekeeping, Company Practices and Logistics.

