Understanding Communication Differences at Work

Communication can involve speech, writing, visuals, signing, assistive technology and other methods. Differences are not deficits; accessible working practices allow people to participate in ways that work for them.

Ways of communicating

People may prefer spoken, written, visual or alternative and augmentative communication (AAC).

Processing and pace

Some people benefit from time to consider information, predictable formats or written follow-up.

Sensory and access needs

Noise, lighting, hearing access, speech differences and technology can influence communication.

Clarity and understanding

Direct wording, clear expectations and opportunities to ask questions can improve accessibility.

How do I communicate most comfortably at work?

Which communication situations feel inaccessible or difficult?

My Communication Preferences

There is no single correct way to communicate. Use these examples to identify what helps you receive, share and process information.

Receiving information

Written instructions, demonstrations, captions, diagrams or spoken explanations.

Expressing myself

Conversation, email, messaging, communication aids, signing or another preferred method.

Processing information

Extra time, shorter sections, advance notice and fewer simultaneous instructions.

Checking understanding

Clarifying questions, written summaries, examples or an agreed follow-up.

My preferred ways to receive and share information:

What helps me process information and check understanding?

Recognising Communication Barriers

Communication barriers can come from workplace systems and expectations, not only individual differences. Think about the situations below and the changes that could help.

Meetings

Unclear agendas, rapid discussion, inaccessible rooms or no way to contribute in writing.

Instructions

Several spoken directions at once, ambiguous wording or no written reference.

Conversations

Background noise, interruptions, pressure to respond immediately or assumptions about tone.

Digital communication

Inaccessible formats, missing captions, excessive notifications or unclear requests.

Which situations create the biggest barriers for me?

What could make those situations more accessible?

Communication Support and Adjustments

Small changes to how information is shared can reduce barriers. Appropriate support depends on the person, task and working environment.

Accessible information

Written instructions, plain language, captions, transcripts, accessible formats and visual guides.

Meetings and conversations

Agendas in advance, time to process, structured turn-taking and written opportunities to contribute.

Predictable communication

Agreed contact channels, clear deadlines, follow-up summaries and notice of changes.

Individual support

Assistive communication technology, interpreters, quiet spaces or other adjustments as appropriate.

Which adjustments would make the greatest difference?

What workplace communication practice could be improved?

Communicating My Needs and Preferences

You can explain a practical communication preference without sharing every detail of your health or personal circumstances. Choose what feels appropriate to disclose.

1. Describe my preference

How do I receive, process or share information most effectively?

2. Identify the barrier

What happens in the current working arrangement that makes communication difficult?

3. Suggest a practical change

What alternative method or adjustment could reduce the barrier?

4. Agree next steps

Who can help put the change in place, and when will it be reviewed?

The communication need or preference I want to discuss:

What I would like to request or agree:

My Workplace Communication Profile

This page can be completed and shared on its own. Include only information you are comfortable sharing.

Preferred name (optional): _____ **Date:** _____

My preferred communication methods

How I prefer to receive and share information.

What helps me understand information

Clear instructions, processing time, written summaries or other supports.

Communication barriers to be aware of

Situations or practices that make participation harder.

Adjustments that support me

Practical changes that improve accessibility.

How to check understanding respectfully

Ways to clarify information or follow up.

Other things I would like people to know (optional)

Only include what feels useful and appropriate.

Sharing and Reviewing My Profile

Your communication profile belongs to you. You can choose whether to share it, with whom, and what details to include. Preferences may change over time.

Who might I choose to share my profile with?

How would I prefer to share or discuss it?

What information would I prefer to keep private?

When or how would I like to review my preferences?

A supportive reminder

Effective communication is not about everyone communicating in the same way. Accessible workplaces respect different methods, allow time for understanding and make reasonable changes where needed.