Strengthening Interpersonal Communication Skills in the Virtual Space

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Today's Presentation

WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

- Principles of Effective Communication
- Non-Verbal Communication's Role
- The Virtual Landscape
- Problems + Opportunities
- Approaches + Solutions
- Tools to Take with You
What's My Experience?

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF DIGITAL FILMMAKING | LESLEY UNIVERSITY

AS PROFESSOR

Movement to the online classroom effective as of March 2020 for both theory and production classes.

AS SPEAKER | PARTICIPANT

Speaker at both in person and virtual conferences, as well as attendee of myriad virtual events.
WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THIS?

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION LEADS TO EFFECTIVE LEARNING
WHERE ARE WE?

STATE OF AFFAIRS

THIS MAY BE ONGOING
How We Communicate

• VERBAL
• NON-VERBAL

TONE + BODY + WORDS

**Verbal**: The actual words chosen to represent thoughts.

**Non-Verbal**: The way words and the physicality of their delivery are expressed.
NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal Communication

Let's Examine What That Looks/Sounds Like
NON - VERBAL COMMUNICATION CUES

Maintaining Regular Eye Contact
Expressive of interest, engagement, and understanding - or lack, thereof.

Positive Vocal Tone
Here we're only speaking of affect, not volume - reassurance, combativeness, agreement, disagreement. All have influence on the effect of the resonance of information. Tone is a term that has many implications, however, and depending on context can lead to misunderstanding.

Posture
Slouching is indicative of disinterest, of fatigue. Upright posture expresses engagement.
NON - VERBAL COMMUNICATION CUES

Expressing Kindness or Professionalism through Touch

Importantly - is touch appropriate for setting/relationship? It can be a reassurance but also is the strongest immediate route to discomfort and should be navigated with caution.

Displaying Engaging Facial Expressions

Not simply your eyes, but are you smiling occasionally? Frowning? What are you saying with your face as someone is speaking to you, or as you speak to others? Pursing lips? Crinkling the nose? Mouth agape?
NON - VERBAL COMMUNICATION CUES

Using Gestures to Express Feeling
Running the gamut, these can be excited, halting, welcoming, enthusiastic!

Showing Emotion through Body Movement
Are you facing someone or facing away (even slightly)? Leaning in or pulling back?

Providing Enough Space to Maintain a Conversation Appropriately?
Are you an acceptable distance away from someone based on your relationship?
## WHAT DO NON-VERBAL CUES DO FOR US?

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<tr>
<th>Repetition vs Contradiction</th>
<th>Accenting</th>
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<td>They may repeat and often strengthen the message you're making verbally. OR they can contradict the message you're trying to convey, indicating to your listener that you may not be telling the truth.</td>
<td>They may accent or underline a verbal message. Pounding the desk or gesturing with your hand, for example, can underline the importance of your message.</td>
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<th>Substitution</th>
<th>Complementing</th>
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<td>They can substitute for a verbal message. For example, your facial expression often conveys a far more vivid message than words can. Crinkling your nose is a much weightier &quot;I'm disgusted.&quot;</td>
<td>They may add to or complement your verbal message. If you pat someone on the back in addition to giving praise, it can increase the impact of your message - If appropriate for your relationship!</td>
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HOW DOES NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION TRANSLATE TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD?

What happens when all of these communicative devices (of which we've only scratched the surface!) get squashed into a small, digital frame? Hint... it is drastic.

Just ask this guy.
WHAT NON-VERBAL CUES DO WE STILL HAVE IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE?

Eye Contact
YES + NO
The monitor is not an accurate representation of your exact gaze.

Vocal Tone
YES + NO
Mostly accurate, this can be affected by Tech.

Facial Expressions + Limited Gestures
YES + NO
What's available to you within your digital frame?
YOU ARE WORKING MUCH HARDER TO UNDERSTAND SOMEONE ELSE

Perceptual Dissonance occurs when we have a mismatch of verbal to non-verbal cues. In the virtual space? We lack at least half the equation most of the time!

YOU ARE LESS CLEAR IN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS TO OTHER PEOPLE

Frustration and feelings of lack of clarity can be discouraging, even if minor. Over time, these add up.
WHAT IS THE RESULT?

VIRTUAL (ZOOM) FATIGUE

AKA

PERCEPTUAL DISSONANCE OVERLOAD
What's Virtual Fatigue?

This is a real phenomenon & it is ok (and normal) to be tired!

The consistent and pervasive battling of the brain's basic perceptual capacities creates a separation between your physical and mental perceptions, and this is exhausting over time.
ATTENTION WANES

HOW LONG DO YOU REALLY HAVE AT YOUR BEST?

My experience with both general audiences and my students, is that 60 minutes is the maximum amount of time a brain can maintain virtual focus without needing rest, food, or decompression. You will need a break to maintain sessions longer than that.
WHY SO TIRING? LET'S BREAK IT DOWN

MORE FOCUS REQUIRED
You have to work harder to process what limited non-verbal communication cues that you have left. That consumes energy.

SEPARATE LIFE ELEMENTS ARE SPATIALLY COMBINED
Elements of your life no longer have spatially distinct realms and contexts. Your work is your home is your after party bar etc.

FOREVER BEING WATCHED
Unlike in real life, you feel you must be performative, and also are able to see yourself on screen. Imagine someone holding a mirror up next to themself every time you chatted. It’s abnormal.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF SILENCE...
Quiet takes on an entirely different connotation in the virtual space. In real life, we are communicating constantly - even while silent. Online, it could be disinterest, confusion, or a tech issue!
Tools for Success

HOW DO WE MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE ENERGY AND ATTENTION THROUGHOUT A VIRTUAL DAY?

It's not easy. We'll break down approaches for each side of the coin, and a big word today is "boundaries."
SOLUTIONS to MITIGATE EXHAUSTION

TOOLS FOR THE SPEAKER

What should I take into consideration to be sure listeners get from me what they need?

TOOLS FOR THE LISTENER

Am I recognizing my rights in this landscape to get the most out of my experience and learn effectively? How do I advocate for what I need to do so?

TOOLS FOR THE GENERAL USER

How can I be understanding of myself and my limits as a real person making sense of all of this?
SPEAKERS

GOALS TO STRIVE FOR

PRIMARY
TECH • INTEGRATION

SECONDARY
SPEECH • ENGAGEMENT

GRAVY
EASY BREEZY SNEEZY
## Know Your Tech
It's imperative, especially in larger groups, to be in control technologically of your situation as best as you can. You lose viewers faster virtually.

## Increased Engagement
Open each session and genuinely say hello to everyone. Mimic a normal greeting.

## Integrated Experience
Use elements that are visually, and sonically engaging. Video clips, audio recordings, great!

## Slow Speech Down & Be Positive (Tone)
Be clear, be concise, and ever so slightly slow things down. Remember - cues are limited here.

## Don't Take it Personal - This is Performance
Allow listeners’ cameras to be off. Allow guests to be quiet. They are listening but could be tired.

## Keep a Sense of Humor
You will mess up, and it’s ok! Just communicate with everybody about what’s going on, and everything will be fine.
LISTENERS

GOALS TO STRIVE FOR

PRIMARY
ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED

SECONDARY
IT'S OK TO UNPLUG

GRAVY
BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF
Cameras Can Be Off

In the name of equity, of safe spaces, and learning, yes. These can and should be allowed off if you need.

Don't Be Afraid to Pause and Breathe

Tech issues on anyone’s end? Take a breath. Don't allow unnecessary stressors to invade if you're already tired.

Use Speaker View

Gallery View is unnatural for so many reasons. You will be fighting your brain - focus on your speaker.

It's OK to Ask for What you Need

Closed captions make things easier? Super easy to make! Feel good making those requests, I guarantee that others need them, too.

Consider Your Monitor Placement

Sometimes, placing it to the side can better mimic the fact that no one is actually making direct eye contact. Might feel better!

Be Gentle

Learning is hard enough. Never forget that you now battle your body in this space also - work with it, not against it. Rest & be kind. Advocate for you!
IN GENERAL

GOALS TO STRIVE FOR

PRIMARY
BOUNDARIES MATTER

SECONDARY
SMART SCHEDULING IS IMPERATIVE

GRAVY
BEND WITH THE BREEZE
Gather Yourself
Don’t log in at the last minute. Take a moment, get yourself mentally prepared for the session.

Only Necessary Calls
Fall will be intense for many. Begin only with sessions you are required to attend and see how you feel.

Pad Sessions
You will need minimally 15 minutes between virtual sessions to get a stretch, breathe, and decompress. Be protective in your scheduling.

Do Not Multitask
Resist this urge during a session. It can cause "Continuous Partial Attention," where no one wins.

It's OK To Be Tired
Set boundaries, especially early on, and gauge accordingly. You are not selfish for saying no to a family or friend zoom catch up!

Remember This Isn't Real Life
This screen is not your only window unto the world. Never forget that. You will go out to different places soon. It will be ok.
What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson
RESOURCES | REFERENCES

- http://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/nonverbal-communication-examples
- http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-words/201109/is-nonverbal-communication-numbers-game
CLOSED CAPTION RESOURCES
ZOOM | TEAMS | COLLABORATE | KALTURA

- [http://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Closed-Captioning](http://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Closed-Captioning)
- [http://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Administrator/Accessibility/Captions](http://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Administrator/Accessibility/Captions)
- [http://oit.colorado.edu/tutorial/kaltura-adding-closed-captions-videos-canvas](http://oit.colorado.edu/tutorial/kaltura-adding-closed-captions-videos-canvas)
- 3 PLAY Media for captioning Webinars:
  [https://www.3playmedia.com/learn/recorded-webinars/](https://www.3playmedia.com/learn/recorded-webinars/)
QUESTIONS?
VIRTUAL COFFEE CHAT?

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

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