

Communicating in the Office

I- Warm-up

Tick the boxes which apply to you and share your responses with your group.

- In a conversation, I do most of the talking.
- In a conversation, I do most of the listening.
- Sometimes I cut people off or interrupt them when they're speaking.
- I feel that I'm a good listener.
- I know how to use non-verbal cues to encourage people to talk.
- I'm good at getting people to open up.
- I always face people when they're talking to me.
- I sometimes check my phone when someone is talking to me.
- I empathise with people.
- I don't have the patience to listen to long-winded people.



II- Tag Questions

Tag questions (also called question tags) are used at the end of a sentence to start a conversation or help keep it going, confirm information or sometimes just to encourage a speaker to continue.

The two basic rules about tag questions are:

- If the statement is negative, the **tag** must be positive. If the statement is positive the **tag** must be negative. ...
- The tense of the **tag** is determined by the tense of the auxiliary/modal verb of the statement that precedes it.

Example :

You haven't renewed your passport yet, have you?
(-) (+)

More examples :

- A- 1-** You haven't done your homework, **have you?**
2- You don't like me, **do you?**
3- You won't tell him my secret, **will you?**
4- He doesn't speak German, **does he?**
5- You're coming to my party, **aren't you?**
6- She's really good at chess, **isn't she?**

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- B- 1-** She comes from Korea, **doesn't she?**
2- You like heavy metal music, **don't you?**
3- He got top grade in the math test, **didn't he?**
4- I really messed up, **didn't I?**

If the statement does not use an auxiliary/modal (in the present or past simple tense), then the auxiliary **to do** must be used.

Practice : Add tag questions to the following sentences:

- 1- The economy is starting to improve, _____?
- 2- We're going to get our bonuses next month, _____?
- 3- That was such a boring talk, _____?
- 4- Tony skis every weekend, _____?
- 5- Jack is never going to change his mind, _____?
- 6- It's going to be hard to replace Sean when he leaves, _____?
- 7- These chairs aren't very comfy, _____?
- 8- You wouldn't happen to have ten Euros, _____?
- 9- Marie spends a lot of time on Facebook, _____?
- 10- This looks like a lovely spot to eat, _____?
- 11- It's pretty quiet in the office today, _____?
- 12- Joe didn't turn his computer off, _____?

III- Modes of Communication



Some experts have identified four modes of communication that we employ when dealing with others. Here is a short description of each:

<p>1- Passive Communication</p> <p>Passive communicators allow others to dominate a conversation or discussion. They avoid conflict in the simplest way possible - by giving in or agreeing readily to others' demands. A passive communicator is thought to be 'meek' or 'shy', but just because a person is shy doesn't mean they are necessarily passive.</p>	<p>3- Passive-Aggressive Communication</p> <p>How can someone be passive and aggressive as the name would suggest? A passive-aggressive type avoids direct confrontation, just like a passive person, but they still try to bully people ... indirectly. A passive-aggressive person prefers to work behind the scenes, spreading rumours or going 'behind your back'. Passive-aggressives are masters of office politics.</p>
<p>2- Aggressive Communication</p> <p>On the other end of the spectrum is the aggressive communicator. This person dominates a conversation, often getting their point of view accepted by simply being the loudest. Aggressive communicators shout and bully others into doing what they want.</p>	<p>4- Assertive Communication</p> <p>Assertive communication is really what we should all strive for. An assertive communicator tackles problems directly, but without being confrontational, like the aggressive type. An assertive communicator enjoys working with others to find a best solution for all. An assertive communicator is thought to be 'confident', but you can be shy and still be an assertive communicator when the need arises.</p>

Practice :

Task 1: *Read the following scenarios and note what kind of communication the person uses:*

Scenario 1

Steve has to work with Debbie to come up with ideas for a product launch. Steve has a lot of ideas to contribute, but Debbie just brushes each one aside. Disappointed, Steve agrees with Debbie's ideas.

Scenario 2

Jenny is a secretary in the small branch office of a big company. When her boss asks her to go out and buy cigarettes for him, she does it without complaint even though she feels she shouldn't be asked to do such a thing. However, when the area supervisor visits, she makes sure she drops it into the conversation and her boss gets in trouble for it.

Scenario 3

Brenda has a busy weekend planned. On Friday afternoon, when her boss suddenly asks her to take some work home, she gets upset and shouts at him.

Scenario 4

Martin has noticed that his secretary is particularly moody these days. Although he doesn't usually like to get involved in such matters, he makes a point to sit with her and ask her what has made her so upset.

Scenario 5

Rosia is irritated by her workmates' constant yakking and horsing around. She waits until everyone has gone home and prints out notices that say, 'Please think of others. You are here to work, NOT to make noise and fool around'. She puts them up all around the office.

Scenario 6

Sven's coworker has been asked to give a presentation. He asks Sven to give it for him, insisting that he has a sore throat, amongst other excuses. Sven agrees, even though he doesn't really want to do the presentation either.

Scenario 7

Ahmed works in a busy hotel. When he sees a guest looking flustered in the hotel lobby, he immediately stops what he's doing and goes over to offer help.

Scenario 8

Norman's office has hired some interns for the summer. When one of the interns asks Norman for help to unblock a paper jam in the photocopier, Norman replies, 'Can't you see I'm busy? Go and bother someone else.'

Task 2: In groups, discuss how you would deal with the following 'difficult people'?

Dealing with difficult people

Scenario 1

You manage a small restaurant and every morning a difficult customer comes in. He's loud and obnoxious and always complains about the food. He irritates the other customers and they have asked you to do something about it.

Scenario 2

You manage a department of about ten people. Recently you have noticed that one employee in particular is acting suspiciously. As soon as you pass near his cubicle, he quickly minimises his internet window.

Scenario 3

You recently started work for a small daily newspaper. At the interview, you were promised that your working hours would be 8:30 to 5:00pm sharp. However, you need to work closely with the features editor and she comes in at 11am and leaves around 8 in the evening. In the morning, you have nothing to do and then she keeps you there until she leaves, around eight in the evening.

Scenario 4

Recently, Ralph, a coworker, borrowed a few thousand dollars from you. You were not keen to lend it, but he seemed desperate and nagged you for days about it. He promised to pay you back by the end of the month, but it's been three months and he trots out excuse after excuse. You're at the end of your tether and you need the money to get your car repaired.

IV- Preparing to Deliver a Presentation

At the end of this lesson, you will be required to deliver a presentation on a health and safety topic. Choose one of the following:

- 1- What to do if there is an emergency at work
- 2- Three ways to stay healthy
- 3 - Three ways to reduce your stress
- 4- What to do if there is a fire
- 5- How to have a more balanced diet
- 6 - Mental health issues in the office
- 7 - The most dangerous jobs
- 8- What to do if a co-worker is injured



Your presentation should last between three to five minutes. This will be a chance to practise your pacing, rhythm and enunciation. You may need to do research on your topic. You may use notes as long as you do not read verbatim.

Adapted from : Serendipity Business English Course, Intermediate Level, pp 63-67. Downloadable from : <http://roadtogrammar.com/units/business1/>