



November and the Thanksgiving holiday mark the beginning of the end-of-year festivities and the rapidly approaching deadlines associated with the end of the semester. For some, the days ahead are filled with anticipation and excitement; for others these days may be marked by sorrow, mourning, or depression. Layered on top of the usual stresses, this year has added in the stresses of the pandemic, its impact on our workplace at UNM as well as within our families, and an apparently increasing social and political polarization in the US and around the world. Times are simply hard.

Effective communication can be one tool to reduce stress and improve relationships. In this issue, we focus on faculty-to-student communication as we look to the rapidly approaching end of the semester. Our articles highlight some very basic communication skills that are valuable in any conversation between two people and that are framed in the context of the classroom and faculty-to-student communication: listening, providing feedback, and being aware of the messages of non-verbal communication. Applying these skills in the development of clear expectations in the classroom (one such model is briefly summarized in our newsletter) can lead to a more productive, safer, and more enjoyable academic experience.

There are, of course, many resources that address these tools and skills. We've presented a few of our favorites in our November newsletter.

Please feel free to contact us with some of your favorite resources. §

*“Listen with curiosity. Speak with honesty. Act with integrity. The greatest problem with communication is we don’t listen to understand. We listen to reply. When we listen with curiosity, we don’t listen with the intent to reply. We listen for what’s behind the words.”*

Roy T. Bennett, [The Light in the Heart](#)

## Effective Communication Between Faculty and Students

Aasma Batool, ODR Graduate Assistant



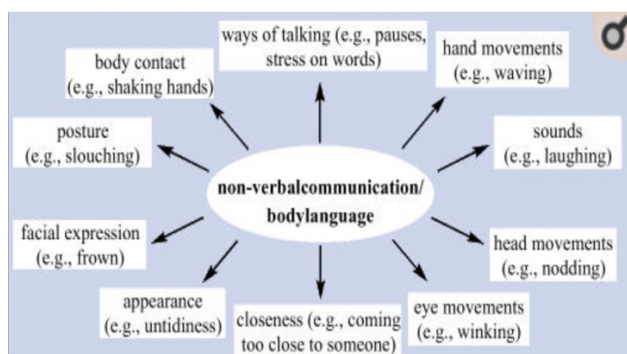
### Value the casual conversations and academic discussions:

Appreciate the casual banter and academic debates students have. Everyone wants to be heard and understood, no matter how some students try to disguise it. The best instructors pay attention to their students when they speak.

**Create a safe environment:** Create a friendly and safe environment in which students can open up and express their views and ideas. It is critical for students' academic performance to have an environment where they can seek for help if they need it. It's critical to foster this kind of nonjudgmental environment at all phases of the teaching process.

**Active Listening:** Listen to your students in order to understand them, not only to respond and provide an answer. Simply offering an ear can go a long way toward fostering a supportive and caring environment. Students may also have a question concerning homework or require clarification on a topic that has been presented and for which an answer is required. By paying attention to your students, you will be able to provide greater support and, as a result, a better education.

**Positive Feedback:** Teachers frequently overlook positive aspects of a student's performance in favor of focusing on negative aspects such as poor behavior. This can have a tremendous impact on a student's morale. Although negative feedback can lead to beneficial outcomes by assisting students in improving, positive feedback is an essential component of developing effective classroom communication. It has been proven that students who are praised are more inclined to believe they can complete assignments and surpass their own expectations for themselves. It can also aid in the development of a student's confidence, as well as the development of a positive rapport and a supportive environment.



**Non-Verbal Communication:** This type of communication is frequently unconscious — we use it without even realizing it, which is why we say that 'lying in body language is tough.' Teachers who pay attention to their students' body language will notice whether they are bored or confused. Students may tell whether or not their teachers are confident and enthusiastic by looking at their body language. §

### Resources:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1705977/>

<https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/communication-skills-for-teachers/>

## Six Communication Skills for Faculty and Students

Chalon Johnson, ODR Graduate Assistant



It should come as no surprise that good communication skills are essential to faculty success. Especially when communicating with students, it is important to develop good communication skills. This infographic shows six skills which are vital for great communication ([the balance](#)). These are described from the perspective of faculty and student communication but can be applied to any communication between two individuals.

1. The first skill to remember when engaged with students is to *Listen*. When you consider that what your students have to say is important and you listen, it shows you respect their thoughts and ideas. An important component of listening is not to interrupt the student or cut them off while they are talking.
2. The second skill to take note of is to be *Friendly* in communications. I believe even in a professional environment of faculty and student communication we can still be friendly. It is important to remember that we are all working together to learn and teach and therefore there is no reason to be mean or rude in communications. One suggestion is to remember that these college students should enjoy the same standards of kindness and respect you would offer to your colleagues.
3. Moving on to the third skill which is *Open Mindedness*. When a student shares a new idea in class or offers up an unusual topic, consider what they want to discuss with an open mind. Their topic in discussion might not make sense to you as a faculty member but might resonate with another student.
4. The fourth skill for communication would be *Feedback*. This is something to consider differently with each student but overall, your feedback should be positive, encouraging, and constructive. Students who are struggling do not need to be given an essay back filled exclusively with red marks and negative comments. Instead have an open mind (back to point 3) and put yourself in their shoes and see what would be helpful for the student to have feedback on. I believe the best way to give feedback is during a meeting discussing the assignment, for this allows non-verbal communication (skill 6) to be used as well.
5. Communication is best when you have *Confidence* which is the fifth skill. If you are communicating with a student who is nervous or not understanding the material, the confidence in your communication can be helpful.
6. The sixth skill is *Non-verbal Communication*. This one has been hard to demonstrate with the recent and ongoing pandemic leading to virtual meetings and classes. However, tone of voice and facial features are just as important on a video call as they are in an “in person” setting. §

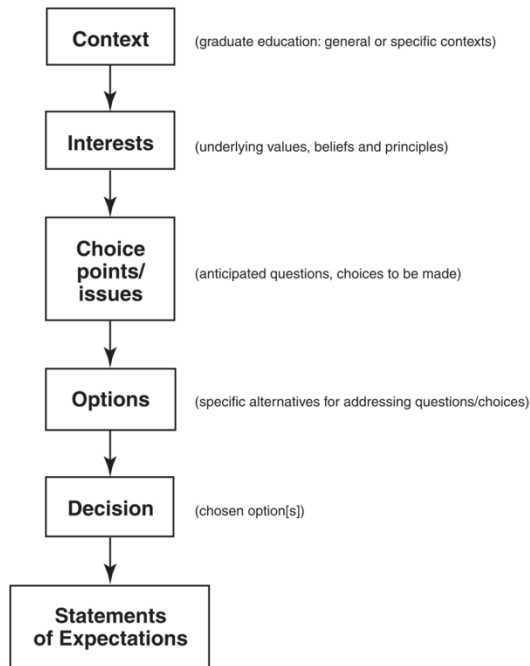
### Resources:

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/communication-skills-list-2063779>

# Communication between Faculty and Students

Margaret Ménache, ODR Interim Director  
Ombudsperson for Faculty

**Figure 2.1.** The steps used in setting explicit expectations using an interest-based approach. New statements of expectations become part of the context.



Student attrition rates are discouragingly high. Not surprisingly, the factors that lead to a student not completing their degree are complex. One factor that we each, as faculty, can work toward improving is faculty-student communication. While improved communication won't solve all the problems, it can make the learning experience more enjoyable and productive for everyone.

Appropriate tools to improve communication depend on where the communication has gone astray, what the stakes are, the levels of stress both individuals are experiencing, and, yes, personality type. In other words, there are as many tools and approaches as there are people. What works for you in one situation might be a complete catastrophe in another. The more options you have for improving your communications, the more likely you and the other person can navigate the treacherous moment and strengthen the positive aspects of your relationship.

Published in 2008, Klomprens et al. wrote *Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts in*

*Graduate Education*. The title says it all. It's an easy 94-page read and, better yet, can be downloaded here: [https://cgsnet.org/sites/default/files/Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts.pdf](https://cgsnet.org/sites/default/files/Setting_Expectations_and_Resolving_Conflicts.pdf)

One form of communication disconnect involves different interpretations of the assumptions and unwritten rules of the department/program/class. While "there will be a comprehensive exam" might be perfectly clear to the speaker, Klomprens and colleagues point out there is lots of ambiguity in that statement. They devote Chapter 2 of their book to defining an interest-based approach to making expectations explicit. The panel above reproduces their Figure 2.1 and outlines the process. The chapter itself defines all the terms, provides context, and includes an example.

Using a very similar model (with just a fewer steps to the process), Klomprens et al. address resolving conflicts that commonly arise between advisors and their students. They propose an "interest-based approach - a bilateral, collaborative strategy." The details are in their book. At UNM, we are fortunate to have Ombudspersons for Faculty and for Graduate Students, who are here to work with you to resolve these problems. §

## Resources:

Klomprens, K, Beck, J.P., Brockman, J. & Nunez, A.A. (2008). *Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts in Graduate Education*. Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools. Council of Graduate Schools: [cgsnet.org](http://cgsnet.org)