



INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the lifeblood of any organisation. People are constantly transmitting information. An organisation's need for an effective communication system increases as the firm gets bigger.

But we, as individuals, communicate constantly every day. Most of the time we are not even aware of it. From the time you got out of bed this morning, and perhaps even before that, you have engaged in communicating several times.

Definition of communication: *communication is the passing on of feelings, ideas, opinions and information from one person or group to another person or group and the eliciting of a discriminating response.*

A few elements of this definition are important.

1. Communication is not just the passing on of information. When you transmit information, you also transmit, to some extent, your feelings about the information.
2. Communication is a two-way process. You must get a response to your message. Thus you transmit a communication to another person, but the other must respond in some way. Our definition says it must be a 'discriminating response'. That means that the response must be a reaction to the specific communication.

FIG. 1 – A MODEL OF ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION

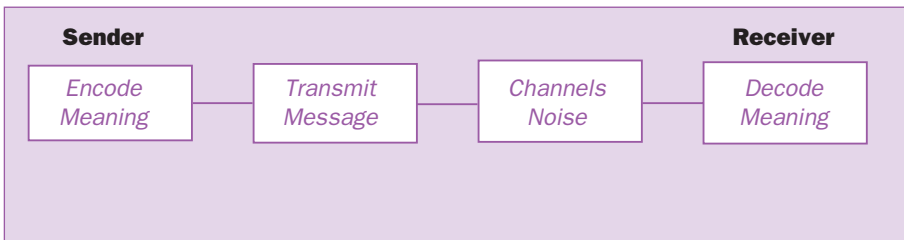
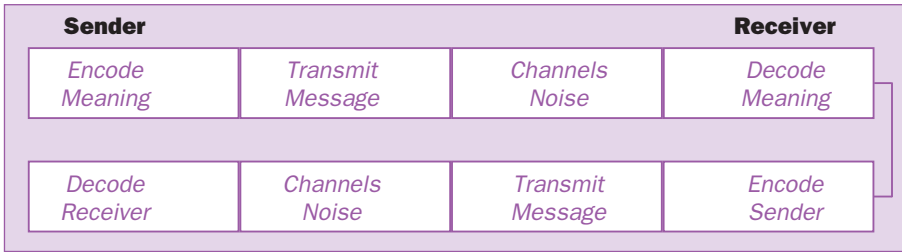


FIG. 2 – A MODEL OF TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION



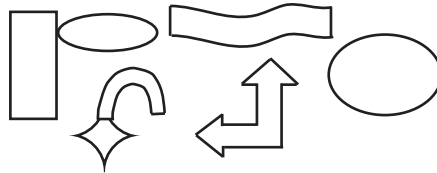
- The *sender* is the person or group who wishes to transmit a meaning to another person or group.
- To *encode* is to put the message in a form understood by the receiver. The usual form used is words. Other ways of transmitting meaning would be sign language, smoke signals, flags and silence.
- *Channel* is the medium by which you transmit a communication. You could send a memo, hold a meeting, use the telephone or send the message by e-mail.
- All channels contain *noise*, which is any interference that may hinder the communication. A meeting held before dinner when people are hungry would be an example of noise.
- To *transmit* a message is to send it across to the receiver. Timing can be very important here, as transmitting a message at an inappropriate time could result in it being misunderstood.
- The *receiver* is the person or group which perceives the sender's message. If there is no receiver, there is no communication.
- To *decode* a message is to translate the symbols in the message into meaning for the receiver. If you are told to do something 'as soon as you can', does that mean you are to do it immediately, or when you have your present task completed?
- *Feedback* is the reaction to a communication. There are three types of feedback:
 - *Informational feedback* is when the receiver simply provides the sender with non-evaluative information. For example, the sender asks how many students study at the Institute of Technology, Carlow, and the receiver provides the information.
 - *Corrective feedback* is when the receiver responds by challenging or correcting the original message. For instance, the receiver may point out that it is not his responsibility to monitor student numbers.

- *Reinforcing feedback* is when the receiver acknowledges clear receipt of the intended message. An example of this would be the grade a student receives in an examination. It is important to note that reinforcing feedback can be either positive or negative.

GROUP ACTIVITY

One-way communication

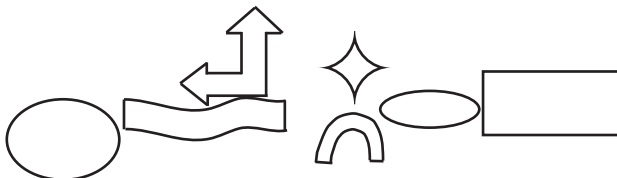
Form the class into groups of five. One person is appointed as the sender of the communication, three are the receivers and the fifth person is the timekeeper. The sender of the communication can use only words to transmit the message. The receivers, who must have a pen and blank page, cannot ask questions. The timekeeper simply records the time it took to complete the exercise. The sender must transmit the following message to the receivers:



When the receivers have the message recorded on paper to their satisfaction, the exercise is complete. Do not show the message to the receivers before going on to the second part of the exercise.

Two-way communication

Again, form the class into groups of five. One person is appointed as the sender of the communication, three are the receivers and the fifth person is the timekeeper. The sender of the communication can use all the techniques available to transmit the message. However, the message must not be shown to the receivers. The receivers, who must have a pen and blank page, may ask as many questions as they wish and the sender may answer all questions. The timekeeper again simply records the time it took to complete the exercise. The sender must transmit the following message to the receivers:



Normally, two-way communication will take longer but the message will be transmitted more accurately. Discuss the difficulties the senders and the receivers experienced during the exercise. What mistakes did the senders make? How did the receivers misinterpret the message?

ACTIVITY I

1. List five communications you engaged in today in which you were the sender of the communication.
 2. List five communications you engaged in today in which you were the receiver of the communication.
 3. In what way were the five messages encoded? For example, did you write, speak or give signs?
 4. What feedback did you get to the five messages you sent?
 5. What was the purpose of each of the five communications you sent?
 6. What problems did you have in decoding the five messages you received?
 7. What feedback did you give to the five messages you received?
 8. In what way were the five messages you received encoded?
 9. What channels were used in each of the five messages you sent?
 10. What channels were used in each of the five messages you received?
 11. Give examples of any noise which occurred in the messages you sent.
 12. Give examples of any noise which occurred in the messages you received.
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ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Once the decision to communicate has been taken, the next step is to select the method. The style of the communication can be formal or informal. The reason for the communication, its priority and the recipients will all determine the selection of method and style of communication.

Formal communication

Formal communication follows the hierarchy as depicted in the organisation chart. It is standard acceptable procedure within an organisation and hence carries with it a degree of authority.

- *Upward*: goes from a person or group to a higher level of the organisation.
- *Downward*: goes from a person or group to a lower level in the organisation.
- *Horizontal (lateral)*: goes from a person or group on one level of the organisation to a person or group on the same level of the organisation.

Examples of formal communications include:

- traditional written forms, e.g. memo, circular, letters, reports
- notice or bulletin board
- meetings or briefings
- company publications, e.g. staff report, magazine, induction manual
- corporate video.

Advantages and disadvantages of formal communication

The advantages of formal communication are:

- Information is distributed in a predictable way, following the hierarchy of the organisation.
- The message is well prepared and less likely to be distorted in transmission.
- The authority of the sender is transmitted with the message, so the message carries a high degree of success, as it is seen as a direct order or instruction.
- Formal communication tends to involve a medium, which means a record of the message is often kept.

The disadvantages are:

- The message may have a management bias and thus may be viewed with suspicion.
- Employees may find formal channels intimidating to use.

Informal communication

All organisations have informal communication networks. Examples of informal communications may include a chat in the corridor, the office grapevine or a short, informal e-mail. Good managers are aware of the importance of informal communication and use it as part of the communication process. Informal communication flows up, down and across the organisation independently of the organisation chart and outside of management control.

Advantages and disadvantages of informal communication

The advantages are:

- It can often be the only real source of information for employees.
- It is speedy and used more often than formal channels.
- It is normally accurate, despite its dismissal by many as just gossip.
- A good manager can use the grapevine to float new ideas and gauge staff reaction prior to launching a new policy.

The disadvantages are:

- Everyone may not hear the information, as it can be selective, i.e. some groups may be bypassed or excluded.
- Information travels by word of mouth, so errors can occur as it passes along the line.
- The grapevine can include rumor and gossip, which can be damaging to individuals or the organisation as a whole.

ACTIVITY 2

1. Give three examples of formal communication you engaged in during the past week.
2. Give three examples of informal communication you engaged in during the past week.
3. Give an example of upward communication.
4. Give an example of downward communication.
5. Give an example of horizontal communication.
6. The tutor asks you a question in class. What type of communication is this?
7. You respond to the tutor's question. What type of communication is taking place?
8. You have a discussion with your friend during lunch hour. What type of communication is taking place?
9. Draw an organisation chart of your college and show how upward, downward and horizontal communication take place.
10. Give one example of a communication you are aware of that is both formal and downward.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Barriers to communication are any elements which may hinder or prevent communication from taking place. It is possible to generate a lengthy list of such barriers. The most important ones are:

- *Language*: using too many words or words people are not familiar with can be a barrier to communication. For example, Samuel Johnson is said to have defined a window as ‘an orifice in an edifice for the admission of luminary particles’.
- *Jargon*: jargon is technical language belonging to a profession, e.g. economists use such terms as ‘GDP’ and ‘GNP’. You should be careful of using jargon with people who do not understand it.
- *Status*: people at different levels of an organisation may have difficulty in communicating with each other. What the managing director may express as merely a desire may be taken as a command by someone further down the line.
- *Education*: this can be a barrier, as educated people tend to see matters not as black and white, but as various shades of grey.
- *Timing*: if a communication is badly timed, it can be misunderstood.
- *Placing*: if a communication is placed or posted in an incorrect position, it may not be noticed by the people for whom it is intended. This can happen frequently at work when notices are placed on the wrong notice board.
- *Noise*: noise can be physical or psychological. If people cannot hear a speaker clearly, they may not understand the message. If a room is too hot, this can interfere with communication. When a person is tired, communication may be less successful.

There are a number of different kinds of noise.

- *Psychological noise*: a person’s mind may be tired, and they will not be as successful in communication as if their mind was fresh.
- *Emotional noise*: if a person is upset or disturbed about something, it will hinder their communication.
- *Social noise*: if the communicator dislikes the person with whom they are communicating, this will be a barrier to successful communication.
- *Technical noise*: some people may be uncomfortable with some of

the new technology used in communication, and this can be an obstruction to communication.

- *Observation/inference confusion*: this barrier arises when you observe something and based on that evidence you infer or arrive at some conclusion. For example, when you are driving up the street and the traffic lights are green, you infer that the other lights are red. That is a reasonable inference to arrive at. However, you may sometimes make an incorrect inference. For instance, if you see a person with a tattoo, you may come to certain conclusions about the person which may not be accurate.
- *Information overload*: this occurs when so much information is available to a person that he or she cannot process or understand all of it. It is becoming more and more of a problem, as computers generate so much information.

Some examples of barriers to communication

The Black Hole of Calcutta

In 1756 the Nawab (governor) of Calcutta led a successful rising against the British East India Company. The British surrendered and the Nawab ordered the 146 captives to be put in prison for the night. He then went to bed. There was only one cell available and this was just twenty feet by twenty feet. All 146 captives were placed in the cell. Without air, panic broke out among the captives. In the morning 123 of the prisoners were dead.

‘Get me coffee’

The former president of the US, Mr Richard Nixon, was working late one night in his hotel room while on a trip. He opened the door and asked his aide to ‘Get me coffee.’ It was late and the hotel kitchen was closed. Some hotel personnel were contacted and a fresh pot of coffee was brewed. On a number of occasions while this was being done the president kept asking for coffee. Finally, a tray arrived with the coffee. It was only then that it was discovered that the president did not want coffee to drink, but wanted to talk to his assistant whose name was Coffee.

(Recounted in D. Rather and G. Gates, *The Palace Guard*, New York: Harper & Row, 1974, p. 109.)

The Duggan case

Mr Harry Whelehan, the attorney general, was nominated president of the

High Court by the government on Friday, 11 November 1994. Before his appointment, the Labour members of the government withdrew from the Cabinet meeting because of the delay in executing an extradition warrant for Fr Brendan Smith. Within a few hours, Mr Whelehan was sworn in as High Court president at Áras an Uachtarán by President Robinson. Mr Eoghan Fitzsimons was appointed as the new attorney general. On Monday, 14 November the Fianna Fáil ministers were meeting to discuss and work on the Taoiseach, Mr Reynolds's, speech to be delivered in the Dáil on the following day. The new attorney general was called to the meeting and he told those present that he had discovered a new case similar to the Smith case. Mr Fitzsimons later said he made it clear that the Duggan case should be referred to in the Taoiseach's speech the next day. Others present said his information was not clear. Fianna Fáil ministers and advisers spent all day and late into the night drafting the speech. Some of them admitted to being very tired. For example, Mr McCreevy was just back from a trip to India and had had very little sleep. When the Taoiseach spoke in the Dáil on Tuesday, 15 November he did not mention the Duggan case. He was accused of misleading the Dáil and the future of the government was threatened. The question was asked later whether the Fianna Fáil ministers deliberately misled the Dáil, did not understand the significance of the Duggan case because of tiredness and confusion, or if the attorney general's advice was unclear.

This was the beginning of an episode that ended in the fall of a government which was very popular, as it had just helped to negotiate a ceasefire in Northern Ireland.

ACTIVITY 3

1. *'Be back as soon as you can.'* How might a person misinterpret that message?
2. *'Move it over a little.'* What barrier to communication might be present in this sentence?
3. Give two examples of jargon which you have experienced.
4. A manager in a company calls an important meeting for 3.00 p.m. on 23 December. Comment on this.
5. Give two examples of notices which you think were posted in the wrong place.
6. A company puts a memo about threatened redundancies in with the monthly cheques. Comment on the barriers to communication which might arise.
7. Give two examples of observation/inference confusion from your own experience.

8. *Judges in court wear wigs. Comment on this as a barrier to communication.*
 9. *Give examples of other clothes which may be a barrier to communication.*
 10. *'All I expect of you is that you do your best in the exam.' What different interpretations might a student put on this sentence?*
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DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

In business, it is important that your message is delivered, understood and acted upon. By paying particular attention to some key factors before you communicate, you will ensure a high degree of success in your communication.

In deciding to communicate, it is important to consider all the factors.

- Ask yourself why you are communicating this information. What is your purpose and objective in sending this information?
- Consider your target audience and their expertise and knowledge.
- Select the most appropriate method (medium) and style to deliver your message. Draft the message, paying particular attention to using codes understood by the receiver.
- Attempt to see the message from the receiver's point of view.
- Select the most appropriate time (context) to deliver the message.
- Check for understanding and feedback.

As a receiver, you have an important role in the communication process.

- Pay full attention, listen actively and observe all verbal and non-verbal codes.
- Decode the message carefully. If you are unsure of the meaning, seek clarification.
- Be objective, regardless of your personal feelings or prejudices. Focus on the message, not the sender.
- Provide appropriate feedback, acknowledge receipt of the message, note important details and take the necessary action.

PERCEPTION

Definition of perception: *perception is the process by which a person selects, organises and interprets stimuli to give them meaning.* Stimulus or stimuli (the plural) are anything we see, feel, hear, etc. We get stimuli through our senses. The senses are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. An old philosopher said that there is nothing in the mind that

was not first in the senses. We learn through our senses. Perception is a very individual aspect of behaviour. We all perceive in our own way. Perception is the interpretation of a message by the receiver.

There are a multitude of objects and stimuli that vie for our attention. We select the ones that are important to us. This is called *perceptual selectivity*. In driving a car we perceive what is important, such as traffic lights, people crossing the road and road signs. We tend to perceive what we are motivated to perceive.

Many things compete for our attention. Why do we pay attention to some and not to others? The following are the factors which influence our attention:

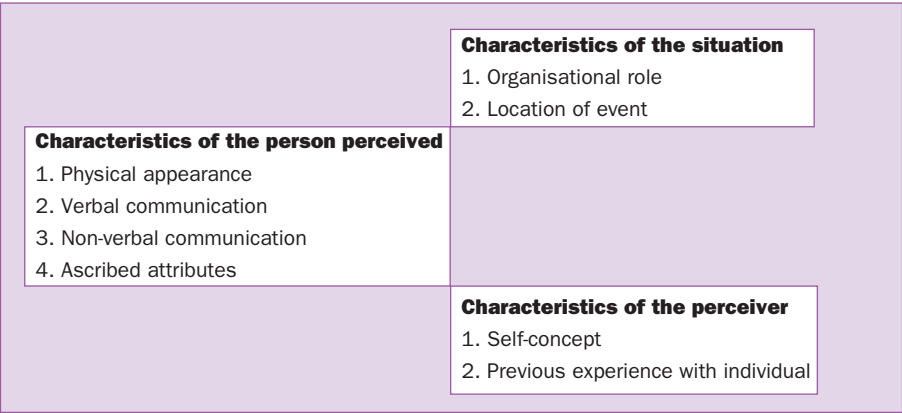
- *Size*: we will perceive a big object before a small object.
- *Intensity*: we will pay attention to a loud sound rather than a whisper.
- *Contrast*: if three people are sitting down and one person is standing, we will pay attention to the person standing. Directors of plays make use of this technique frequently.
- *Novelty*: something we have not seen before will engage our attention.
- *Movement*: most advertisements make use of this fact and have plenty of movement. They also tend to use intensity in speech and music. Guinness had an advertisement in contrast to this which had no sound at all. A quiet voice said at the end of the ad: 'This twenty seconds of darkness was brought to you by Guinness.'
- *Repetition*: if something is repeated often enough, you will pay attention to it.

Social perception

Social perception is concerned with the processes by which we perceive people. Social perception is far more complex than the perception of inanimate objects such as chairs, tables and signs. This is true for two reasons: (i) people are more complex than things, and (ii) an accurate perception of people is far more important to us personally than perception of inanimate objects. The consequences of misperceiving people are great. Failure to perceive a desk in a room may mean that we will bump into it. Failure to accurately perceive a social situation may have serious consequences at work.

Factors which influence social perception include physical appearance, verbal and non-verbal communication and ascribed attributes.

FIG. 3 – MAJOR INFLUENCES ON SOCIAL PERCEPTION IN ORGANISATIONS



Characteristics of the person perceived: we partly perceive people on the basis of how they look. Clothing, which is part of physical appearance, also influences our perception. Our use of words (verbal) and such elements as tone of voice and accent (non-verbal) also help to determine our perception of others.

We often ascribe or give certain attributes to a person before or at the beginning of an encounter. These attributes can influence how we perceive the person. Status, occupation and personal characteristics are three ascribed attributes. If we are told the person we are about to meet is the managing director, we will have certain perceptions of the person before she arrives. Likewise, if you are told that the medical consultant will see you now, you will begin to behave towards the person who arrives with a certain amount of deference. An example of a personal characteristic would be intelligence. If you are told by someone whose view you respect that a person is very intelligent, you will conjure up a picture of what you think an intelligent person is like.

Characteristics of the situation: a person's place in the organisation can influence her perceptions. Production workers in a firm will see production as the most important department; members of the sales force will tend to put sales and marketing at the top. Also, where an event takes place may influence perception. To walk about in your bare feet in your home may be acceptable, but a different view of it would be taken at work.

Characteristics of the perceiver: people with a positive self-concept tend to see favourable characteristics in others. Also, our previous experience with others will often influence how we view their current behaviour.

ACTIVITY 4

1. List the items that gain your attention when coming to college each morning.
 2. What techniques does your tutor use to attract your attention?
 3. Explain how the organisation of your classroom helps your tutor to gain the attention of the class.
 4. Explain why social perception is more complicated than the perception of inanimate objects.
 5. Why is it important to understand the process of perception?
 6. Give three examples of when you and your friend had different perceptions of the same event.
 7. What is meant by saying that 'perception is a very individual aspect of behaviour'?
 8. What attributes would you ascribe to a person with red hair?
 9. What attributes would you ascribe to a person with a tattoo on his arm?
 10. What attributes would you ascribe (a) to a man who dyes his hair (b) to a woman who dyes her hair?
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REVIEW

1. Explain why communication is not just 'sending information from one person to another'.
2. Look up the origin of the word 'communication'.
3. Why is an understanding of perception important in communication?
4. Find two other meanings for the word 'communication'.
5. A lecturer once went into his classroom when no students were present and locked the door. He then proceeded to deliver his lecture. He explained afterwards that his contract obliged him to teach ten hours a week but it made no mention of students having to be present. Did communication take place in this instance?
6. What is meant by self-concept?
7. What is meant by organisational role?
8. Why is it important to plan your communication in business?

PITFALLS

prostrate prostate

The two words *prostrate* and *prostate* are very similar. The word ‘prostrate’ means lying with face to the ground. The word ‘prostate’ refers to a gland near the neck of the bladder.

CONFUSING WORDS

commissar	commissariat	commonable	commonage
commonality	commoner	commutable	commutate
countervail	countervalue	covey	covin

QUIZ

The following words all have their origins in languages other than English. Can you find which languages they spring from?

apartheid, blitz, coup d’état, ersatz, slogan.

SPELLINGS

The words most commonly misspelled are highlighted.

abolition	admittance	anonymous
absence	advertisement	anxiety
accelerate	aerial	appearance
accessible	agreeable	appreciate
accidental	agriculture	architecture
accommodation	already	argument
accomplished	alteration	arrangement
ache	alternate	ascend
achieved	although	assassin
acknowledge	altogether	athletic
acquainted	amiable	atmosphere
acquiesce	among	auctioneer
address	analysis	awful
admirable	anniversary	awkward

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PUNCTUATION GIVES MEANING

INTRODUCTION

Punctuation is not used for ornamentation, but to help the reader understand a passage in the way in which the writer intended. A written text does not have expressions, gestures or vocal inflection to help convey meaning, so written English must depend on punctuation. The main purpose of punctuation is to help the writer convey his ideas clearly and without ambiguity, and to help the reader understand a passage without having to reread it. When we say ‘Are you sad?’, the pitch of the voice or its inflection shows that we are asking a question, which in writing is indicated by the question mark. All writers must decide what type of punctuation to use to convey their meaning.

Sample 1

‘It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.’

(Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Heron Books, Centennial Edition)

Sample 2

‘Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight, is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. For expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs, come best

from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humour of a scholar. They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience: for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need proyning by study; and study themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded by experience.'

(Francis Bacon, 'Of Studies')

Sample 3

'Momentous day. The sun is shining. That in itself is not momentous – merely, for August, surprising.

The house sits sideways to the sea and facing south, so all the rooms are filled with sun. Judging by the haze on the horizon, almost like steam rising off the sea, the sun is shining everywhere, not just on this stretch of the east coast of Ireland, but in Cork, Skibbereen, Galway and Kilkenny; drying up the grass and causing anxiety to the farmers. Weather seems permanently to be causing anxiety to the farmers. Even in England, where I have never been, the sun is shining. We read this in the newspaper which arrives in time for breakfast every morning and keeps Aunt Mary occupied for half an hour or so.

If you climb up the hill at the back of the house, you can see Wales on a clear day. It's not really very exciting, just a grey lump in the distance, but it's somewhere else. Somewhere new. For the last two weeks there has been no sign of Wales at all, just that pale haze steaming gently up into the sky, shutting this island off from the rest of the world.

The morning trains from Dublin have been filled with people coming down from the city to sit on the beach, and paddle and throw stones into the sea, and shout at their children, who change as the hours go by from pale city children to fretful whiners grilled beyond endurance by the unexpected sun. They stay mainly up at the far end of the beach, near to the station and the two small cafés that sell fruit drinks and ice creams, and plates of biscuits and delicious cups of reviving tea. They don't in fact bother us over here at all. Two special trains have to be put on in the late afternoon to bring them back to town, as they don't all fit on the five-thirty from Wicklow. They leave an awful mess on the sand but the tide takes care of most of that. Poor Mr Carroll the stationmaster, however, has a terrible time keeping his station clean and tidy, and is the one person in the village to admit to being glad that heatwaves don't happen too often.

Momentous.

It is my eighteenth birthday.'

(Jennifer Johnston, *The Old Jest*, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1979)

Sample 4

‘Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the City Arms hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs Riordan that he thought he had a great leg of and never left us a farthing all for masses for herself and her soul greatest miser ever was actually afraid to lay out 4d for her methyated spirits telling me all her ailments she had too much old chat in her about politics and earthquakes and the end of the world let us have a bit of fun first God help the world if all the women were her sort down on bathingsuits and lownecks of course nobody wanted her to wear I suppose she was pious because no man would look at her twice I hope Ill never be like her a wonder she didnt want us to cover our faces . . .’

(James Joyce, *Ulysses*, London: Vintage Books, 1961)

Discussion on four examples

Each of the four writers above uses punctuation not just to convey meaning, but also tone and emotion. Dickens begins with a very long sentence and rushes along from one short phrase to another using only commas. This gives the impression of confusion and turbulence. It is a passage full of feeling.

Bacon’s ‘Of Studies’, on the other hand, is a short, concise, closely argued piece. It is an intellectual essay bereft of emotion, almost mathematical in its symmetry. There seem to be three reasons or three observations on everything. He uses a number of semi-colons to balance his arguments.

Jennifer Johnston once described herself as ‘fairly handy with the comma’. This extract is written in very simple language and uses only the simplest punctuation. In it a young girl is talking to the reader and the simple words and the simple punctuation help to convey youth and freshness.

The final extract is very different from the others. It has no punctuation at all. In fact, the final forty pages of *Ulysses* have no punctuation except for the full stop at the end. Joyce is depicting Molly Bloom, thinking to herself, as she lies in her bed in Dublin on the night of 16 June 1904. When we think, we do not use punctuation marks but move from one thought to another and back again without maintaining any particular order. So Joyce, instead of putting in punctuation marks to give meaning, in fact dispenses with them.

But for the rest of us punctuation is very important. If you read the following sentences you will see why:

- The prisoner felt the judge was a danger to society.
- The prisoner, felt the judge, was a danger to society.

or

- Peter said the teacher is marvellous.
- ‘Peter,’ said the teacher, ‘is marvellous.’

In both sentences the words and the word order are exactly the same, but there is a considerable difference between them. What has caused the difference? The answer is punctuation.

Punctuation makes the meaning of what we write clear to the reader. When we talk, the rise and fall of the voice and the pauses we use help to make our meaning clear, but in writing, we have no such aids. Instead we use punctuation.

EXPLANATION OF PUNCTUATION MARKS WITH EXAMPLES

Full stop (.)

- The full stop is used at the end of a complete sentence. For example:
‘I will go tomorrow.’
‘Carry it over there.’
‘I feel fine.’
- The full stop is used after abbreviations: e.g., etc., ave., Sept. It is also used after single letters standing for a word:
‘I can type 40 w.p.m.’
‘The car does 30 m.p.g.’

However, modern usage allows you to omit the full stops in well-known abbreviations such as these.

Abbreviations in common use do not require a full stop, e.g. per cent, memo, Mr, St, Dr. The full stop is also dropped from abbreviations that make a pronounceable word, e.g. FÁS.

- Full stops in a series are used to indicate the omission of words from a passage. Three are used if the omission is from the middle of a sentence, e.g. ‘We are experiencing a literary breakdown . . . unlike anything I know of in the history of letters.’ Four are used if the omission is from the end of a sentence, e.g. ‘As Dickens wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”’

Examples

The lights turned red. The car stopped.

The teacher is happy. Run quickly.

It started pouring rain. I never saw anything like it.

David is going to school in September. Gillian is still too young.

Capital letter

- A capital letter is used to begin every sentence, e.g. 'It was kind of you.'
- All proper nouns, proper adjectives and the first person singular pronoun begin with a capital letter, e.g. America, Tipperary, an Irish horse, I.
- People's titles and ranks are always introduced with capital letters, e.g. Professor Scully, Lord Mayor, Captain Kelly, President Douglas Hyde. But lower case should be used for those titles when applied in a general sense, e.g. 'a captain in the army'.
- The days of the week and months are introduced with capitals, but the seasons are not, e.g. Sunday, Tuesday, May, July, but spring, summer. However, in common usage the seasons are often capitalised.
- Buildings, well-known geographical regions and historical events begin with a capital, e.g. Leinster House, the North, the Irish Civil War.
- In titles of books, plays, films, etc., the first word always has a capital, but after that, conjunctions, prepositions and the words *the* and *a* are written in lower case, e.g. *An Only Child*, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, *Lord of the Flies*.

Examples

Who is that?

How is Patricia?

I believe in God.

It is Friday.

The Taoiseach spoke at length.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed.

The Minister for Finance attended.

Michael Collins was the Commander-in-Chief.

The North is in turmoil.

Comma (,)

- The comma is used to mark off a natural pause at the end of a phrase, e.g. 'When we had seen the fire, we went home.'
- The comma is also used to mark off phrases in the middle of sentences. For example:
'The student, standing just outside the door, heard the teacher laughing.'
'The enclosed book, which you may retain, is sent to you for your comments.'
- If a sentence contains two or more phrases or clauses linked by *and*, *but*, *for* or *nor*, then a comma precedes the linking word, e.g. 'He decided to do his lessons first, and then watch television.'
- Commas are used with words and phrases such as *at last*, *finally*, *however*, *of course*, *in fact*, *meanwhile*, *nevertheless*. Here are two examples:
'However, we will do the best we can.'
'It is clear, however, he was not telling the truth.'
- Commas are used to separate items in a list, e.g. 'The bag contains books, pencils, ink, paper and envelopes.'

It is not necessary to use a comma before the *and* separating the final two items unless not using it would cause ambiguity, as when one writes: 'At school I studied French, Biology, Physics, Irish, English and American History.' Did he study the subject English or was it English History? It would be clearer to write '. . . English, and American History' or '. . . English History and American History.'

Examples

The boy, with great expectation, waited for the result.

A loud, heavy bang was heard.

People of Westmeath, the famine is over.

The rain having stopped, all went home.

Every day, every week, every year, his mother worries about him.

Semi-colon (;)

The semi-colon is a longer stop than the comma. It is used in the following situations:

- If two sentences or main clauses are logically connected but not joined

by a linking word, then they are separated by a semi-colon. For example:

‘I went to their last production; it was not very good.’

‘The product is selling well; I think it will continue to do so.’

‘The firm is doing badly; it will close soon.’

Sometimes these same statements could be written in separate sentences, e.g. ‘I went to their last production. It was not very good.’

- The semi-colon is also used to separate items in a list when these are phrases rather than single words, e.g. ‘The weather was at its most wintry: dark, heavy clouds that rode quickly across the sky; gusts of wet wind that rattled the slates on the houses; the chill in the air that makes the body shiver.’

Examples

He is very happy; you should be also.

Go home; it would be better.

He was going out the door; otherwise I would not have seen him.

I refused to say what he asked me to say; I felt he had been misinformed.

ACTIVITY I

Punctuate the following.

1. *go home*
2. *i will do it*
3. *carlow is a small county cork is a big one*
4. *the boys waited all night for the train it was very late*
5. *hurling is a great game i like playing it*
6. *when we got to the field we could not get in as we had forgotten our money*
7. *i dont like examinations yet they have to be faced*
8. *most schools in Ireland now are modern not like years ago*
9. *the leaves on the trees are turning brown now what a pity*
10. *when i was young we kicked the dead leaves before us as we ran to school*
11. *the towns main streets are very narrow two cars can barely pass*
12. *people in general are fairly conscientious at their work i think*
13. *the all ireland football final is a great occasion for kerry people some others*

arent all that interested

14. *there are many more female than male primary teachers is this a disturbing trend*
15. *vocational schools are governed by the vocational education act 1930*
16. *in ireland we have schools that are privately owned and schools that are in public ownership which gives parents a choice*

ACTIVITY 2

Punctuate the following.

1. *the organisation known as teagasc deals with agriculture*
2. *the gaa was founded in 1884 at hayes hotel thurles co tipperary*
3. *the firm is going to establish an o and m department*
4. *a car able to travel 60 mpg would be very useful*
5. *ireland has a great tradition in the short story russia has also*
6. *the ida tries to attract foreign firms to ireland with a package of attractive grants*
7. *when the school year finishes students look for work*
8. *it is always sad i think to remember the last summer of your childhood*
9. *somebody once said when youve seen one city youve seen them all*
10. *the enclosed form which you should complete as soon as possible will guarantee you entry*
11. *he went into the house and closed the door behind him*
12. *nuim dublin is now a university*
13. *did he cut his hand with a knife or did he fall*
14. *he stumbled but he didnt fall*
15. *ill be there tomorrow however dont expect me to be on time*
16. *according to you i should win easily*
17. *he did it yesterday in fact he might have done it the day before*
18. *never do that do you hear me as long as im around*
19. *i rushed into the room and i threw books papers pencils rulers and maps on the table*
20. *the enclosed book which you should read carefully and which youll find interesting was in fact written four years ago and then according to the best*

information i can find was published immediately well not immediately but as soon as the publisher could manage it after all someone had to edit it

Colon (:)

The colon used to be looked on as a longer pause than a semi-colon. It is now rarely used in this way. It is now used to indicate that something is to follow.

- The colon is used to introduce a list of items, e.g. ‘The bag contains the following: hurley, football, jerseys, first-aid kit, sweat bands and a whistle.’
- A quotation, if it is a long one, is also introduced by a colon, e.g. ‘The President went to the platform and said: “I want to speak about a very serious matter”’
- The colon is also used to separate two statements in a sentence which are in sharp contrast to each other. For example:
‘If you join us you will succeed: if you do not, you will fail.’
‘Kings rule: subjects obey.’

Examples

Man proposes: God disposes.

Send me the following: a pen, a brush, a pencil and some ink.

Then the chairman stood up and said: ‘I would like to welcome you all here this evening’

Good health gives happiness: there is none without it.

Parentheses ()

- Parentheses are used to separate words in a sentence which provide additional information or which explain something about certain words in the sentence, e.g. ‘The subjects I like most are history (Irish history) and biology.’
- Parentheses are used to explain foreign words, e.g. ‘My attitude is *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* (of the dead speak nothing but good).’

Examples

He gave all he had (it wasn’t much) to the cause.

Be there on Wednesday (I’ll be there myself) at 3 o’clock.

He’ll be running in the Olympics (not that he has much of a chance) for the last time.

When he was at school (a long time ago) he did well.

Hyphen (-)

- A hyphen is a joining mark, e.g. brother-in-law, commander-in-chief, up-to-date.
- The hyphen is also used to divide a word at the end of a line, e.g. disappointed.

Examples

He is a very with-it person.

He looks very down-at-heel.

She had a hang-dog look.

The word has three syllables, for-mer-ly.

Dash (–)

- The dash is used to denote a strongly marked aside. For example:
‘Many countries – Ireland was not one of them – won gold medals at the Olympics.’
‘Complete the form – and don’t forget to sign it – as soon as possible.’
- The dash is also used to bring together several subjects belonging to the same verb, e.g. ‘If you buy this house, blinds, carpets and heaters – all will be included in the sale.’

Examples

Send down everything next week – this week if possible.

At the age of ninety – such is old age – he could remember nothing.

Last year – the date is uncertain – we bought it at discount.

Padraig was born in Perth, Australia today – I’m not sure what time.

Apostrophe (’)

The rules for the apostrophe are very simple but cause endless trouble to students.

- The apostrophe is used to indicate omitted letters in contractions. It is placed where the omitted letter would appear if the word were written out in full, e.g. do not, *don’t*; could not, *couldn’t*; was not, *wasn’t*; it is, *it’s*; they are, *they’re*.
- The apostrophe is also used to denote ownership, e.g. the boy’s coat, cat’s paw, table’s leg. Here it is used in the singular.

The *s* can still be used even when the possessor’s name ends in an *s*, e.g. Keats’s poems, Dickens’s novels, St James’s feast.

- The apostrophe without the *s* is used if three consecutive *s* sounds come together and make pronunciation difficult, e.g. Moses' Law, Jesus' disciples, St Francis' Day.
- An apostrophe is placed after the *s* in the possessive plural form, e.g. boys' coats, cats' paws, ladies' shoes.
- If the plural of a noun does not end in *s*, then *s* is added in the possessive form, e.g. men's coats, women's shoes, children's hats, sheep's clothing.
- Some possessive pronouns do not take an apostrophe, e.g. his, hers, yours, theirs, its, ours, mine.

The word *whose* does not take an apostrophe. However, note the word *who's*, which means *who is*, e.g. 'Who's there?'

Examples

I won't do it.

I don't like it.

The guard's helmet was knocked off.

Children's hour will begin soon.

Go to the players' entrance.

I'll be there.

It's got a great taste.

Question mark (?)

A question mark is used instead of a full stop when a direct question is asked, e.g. 'When are we going?'

A question mark is not used when the question is indirect, e.g. 'I asked when we were going.' Note the possibility of an indirect question embedded in another question, so that a question mark is needed, e.g. 'Can you tell me what time the next train leaves for Galway?'

Examples

Who's there?

What's the matter?

Are you going?

Exclamation mark (!)

An exclamation mark is used after an exclamatory expression, e.g. My God!, Well!, You don't say!

Examples

How the mighty have fallen!

Well, can you beat that!

I don't believe you!

Quotation marks (“ ”)

- It is fairly common practice now to use single quotation marks, e.g. He said: 'I will go to catch my train.'
- Double quotation marks are used for a quotation within a quotation, e.g. The father said to the boy: 'Did you tell him "Get lost" as you walked out the door?'
- Quotation marks are used instead of italics or underlining for titles of poems, articles in magazines, journals or collections, or individual stories in a collection, e.g. "'Night in Tunisia" is a good story.'
- Punctuation belonging to the quoted words should be placed within the quotation marks, e.g. He asked: 'Have you read the report?'

A separate paragraph is required for each new speaker in a quotation and every quotation begins with a capital letter, unless the quotation begins in the middle of a sentence, e.g. 'He said he was ". . . tired of life.'"

Examples

'I agree,' said the chairman, 'but I still think it should be changed.'

'Put it over there,' she said.

'What did they do to you?' asked the girl.

'They gave me,' he said, 'strict orders, "Nobody to be let in without a ticket.'"

'There it is!' shouted the boys.

'I'm not going,' said Mary.

'You'll go, or I'll give you something to think about,' said her mother.

'Did you say, "Why should I?"' she asked.

'Yes, I did,' said Conor, 'and why shouldn't I do it? I'm entitled to my own opinion. I have my rights.'

ACTIVITY 3

Punctuate the following.

1. *it should be marvellous go to it*
2. *down came the rain on went the coats*

3. *out went the windows in came the snow*
 4. *hes doing very poorly he wont last long*
 5. *off with the coats get down to work*
 6. *work never killed anyone many never recover from it*
 7. *on the table are the following items money cheque books credit cards cancelled cheques and a bank statement*
 8. *dont you think that i said to him going out the door is a very remarkable sky*
 9. *put it over there she shouted or ill give you something to think about*
 10. *i didnt say youre a fool did i*
 11. *when were in company with other people am i to do nothing am i*
 12. *the chairman said i now declare this meeting open*
 13. *did you say go at two oclock or did you not*
 14. *judges differ teams lose*
 15. *the president began her speech thus it is a great honour to be here*
 16. *have you seen that play by hugh leonard*
 17. *if you say once more i knew it ill shout*
 18. *it is a sound proverb never put all your eggs in the one basket*
 19. *it is a very true saying that goes the evil that men do lives after them the good is oft interred with their bones*
 20. *history is bunk said henry ford*
-

ACTIVITY 4

Punctuate the following.

1. *the thing i like best about living in ireland apart from the people is the mild climate*
2. *put it in the box the blue box when youre ready*
3. *youll find it in the warehouse the far corner be careful of it*
4. *the newsletter will be available on wednesday indeed on tuesday perhaps*
5. *the grapes of wrath now thats a good play novel i mean*
6. *did you really say to him get lost*
7. *didnt you say yesterday i like reading the irish times*

8. *when liam returned to work his father in law got to hear of it*
9. *the record book should be kept up to date and always available for the managers inspection*
10. *womens clothes are very fashionable mens are not*
11. *childrens personalities should be given free expression*
12. *his and hers boutique is on the far side of the street*
13. *it is theirs not mine*
14. *i asked her have you any money*
15. *did he say i have no money*
16. *put on your coat quickly or well never be on time*
17. *my favourite season is spring*
18. *who was known as the big fellow*
19. *the rich said f scott fitzgerald are different from you and me yes said hemingway they have money*
20. *have you ever been to the west of ireland*

ACTIVITY 5

Punctuate the following.

1. *fyodor dostoyevsky was born in moscow in 1821 he was the second of a physicians seven children from 1838 to 1843 he studied at the military engineering college in st petersburg graduating with officers rank he was sentenced to penal servitude in 1849 and spent much of this sentence at a convicts prison in omsk as he was a heavy gambler he often found himself in debt however his second wife whom he married in 1867 helped him to put his financial affairs on a firm footing*
2. *capital punishment is not a successful weapon against crime in countries where it has been practised regularly not a great reduction in crime has taken place in fact it has increased capital punishment tends to trigger even more violence to seek revenge on the government which inflicted capital punishment the present prison system is not what it should be the people in these houses of shame as oscar wilde called them require special treatment they certainly should not have to suffer the pain and misery that is sometimes inflicted upon them*
3. *the constitution of ireland came into effect in 1937 it is sometimes referred to as de valeras constitution it was of course voted on by the electorate and a majority was in favour the constitution provides for a president two houses of*

the oireachtas known as the dail and the senate and also provides for the independence of the judiciary the president is commander in chief of the armed forces appoints judges and the members of the government the taoiseach must keep the president informed on all matters of state as far as is known this is not done very thoroughly one taoiseach said he met the president every now and then but their discussions were often about the cartoons in dublin opinion.

ACTIVITY 6

Punctuate the following.

1. a member of the house of commons once asked george stephenson supposing now one of these engines to be going along a railroad at the rate of nine or ten miles an hour and a cow were to stray upon the line and get in the way of the engine would that not be a very awkward circumstance it would indeed said george for the cow
2. well i met someone like you somewhere he said firmly and i have an hour to kill and i was wondering would you like to come and have a hamburger so that we can think where it was you look as if you have nothing to do either you could read the evening paper i said because i am so extremely kind i would never hurt anyones feelings i wouldnt tell him to get lost that he was an inoffensive bore ive read the evening paper i said i was silent well make up your mind he said its starting to rain do we have a hamburger or dont we its stupid standing here getting wet

(Maeve Binchy, 'My First Book', The Irish Times)

3. finally on 31 march i set out to meet cardinal dalton of armagh he was a pleasant withdrawn scholarly looking man our conversation was stilted formal and with the exception of one brief period banal and inconsequential the cardinal gave the impression that he was politely wondering what on earth he was doing sharing his luncheon table with this odd earnest young man who was clearly preoccupied with an abstruse and awkward health problem the sole gain for me was the pleasant hock with the fish at luncheon which i had arrived just in time to share with the cardinal i suspect that he accepted the ordeal and decided to offer it up as did i there was but one reference by me and none by him to the mother and child service

(Noel Browne, Against the Tide, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1986)

4. and when he came to himself he said how many hired servants of my fathers have bread enough to spare and i perish with hunger i will arise and go to my father and will say unto him father i have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son

REVIEW

1. 'Quotation marks ("quotes") or inverted commas are the most troublesome marks in punctuation; and the irony of the thing is that we could easily do without them. In fact, we did until the end of the eighteenth century.'

(G.H. Vallins, *Good English*, London: Pan, 1951)

What do you think?

2. James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* used no quotation marks. Use quotation marks to punctuate this passage from it.

– Well, my little man, said the rector, what is it?

Stephen swallowed down the thing in his throat and said:

– I broke my glasses, sir.

The rector opened his mouth and said:

– O!

Then he smiled and said:

– Well, if we broke our glasses we must write home for a new pair.

– I wrote home, sir, said Stephen, and Father Arnall said I am not to study till they come.

– Quite right! said the rector.

Stephen swallowed down the thing again and tried to keep his legs and voice from shaking.

– But, sir . . .

– Yes?

– Father Dolan came in today and pandied me because I was not writing my theme.

The rector looked at him in silence and he could feel the blood rising to his face and the tears about to rise to his eyes.

The rector said:

– Your name is Dedalus, isn't it?

(James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, London: Viking Press, 1956)

3. See if you can punctuate Activity 6, #4 in the manner in which James Joyce used punctuation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

PITFALLS

prescribe proscribe

Prescribe means to lay down or impose authoritatively, e.g. to prescribe a drug for a patient.

Proscribe comes from the Latin words *pro*, meaning ‘before’, and *scribere*, meaning ‘to write’. It has now come to mean to ban something. The government might proscribe certain organisations.

CONFUSING WORDS

mitten	mittimus	momentous	momentum
motto	mottle	mugger	muggins
nape	napery	mumps	munch
natter	natty	moil	moiety

QUIZ

So now you are very good at punctuation? Then try the sentence below. It can be done.

‘That that is is that that is not is not but that that is not is not that that is nor is that that is that that is not.’

SPELLINGS

The words most commonly misspelled are highlighted.

eccentric	encyclopaedia	exceedingly
efficiency	endeavour	excellent
eight	enormous	exceptional
eighteenth	enthusiasm	excessive
eighty	epidemic	exchequer
elapse	equipment	excitable
electricity	equipped	exclamation
elegance	erroneous	exercise
eliminate	especially	exhausted
embarrass	essential	exhibit
emigrated	establishment	expedite
eminent	etiquette	expense
emphasise	eventually	extremely
encouragement	exaggerated	