

5. Communication skills for entrepreneurs

Personal business and enterprise skills

Communication and pitching skills for entrepreneurs

Engineering relies on precision, and this includes the technical information engineers share, such as material specifications, dimensions, and performance characteristics. But engineers also need to communicate their ideas, creativity, and different perspectives that help define and explain what they are producing, for whom, and why, to effectively underpin teamworking, client services, and investor relations in engineering and enterprise.

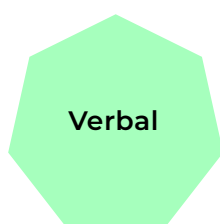
What do entrepreneurs communicate?

Communication means exchanging information, to understand and be understood. Entrepreneurs need to communicate well with both engineering and non-engineering audiences.

Technical team	Design team	Company	Finance team	Investors	Customers
dimensions tolerances materials performance	dimensions aesthetics functionality	vision timescales tasks progress	costs income profits cashflow	vision innovation growth value sustainability	innovation customer value sustainability

Your non-engineering audiences are vital partners, and your communication goal is to translate your technical innovations into persuasive forms of value that convince potential investors, partners, and customers.

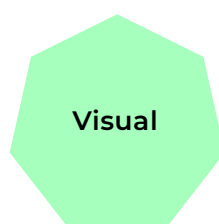
High-quality communication means choosing the right form of communication for your audience and the information you need to share.



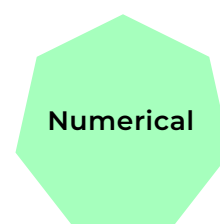
Meeting
Conversation
Call



Document
Email
Plan
Memo
Teams chat
Text



Graph
Chart
Flowchart
Diagram
Calendar
Photo
Illustration



Spreadsheet
Table
Graph
Chart

Some of these are formal, some are informal, and some may be used in both contexts. The right choice will reflect your organisational culture, audience, and the outcome your communication must support, for example, understanding, insight, analysis, evaluation, or decision-making.

Check your understanding:

1. Research what modern teamwork and collaboration tools an entrepreneur might use to communicate.
2. Reflect on how you communicate with tutors and friends. What forms of communication do you need to develop, ready to become an entrepreneur?

Skills for high-quality communication

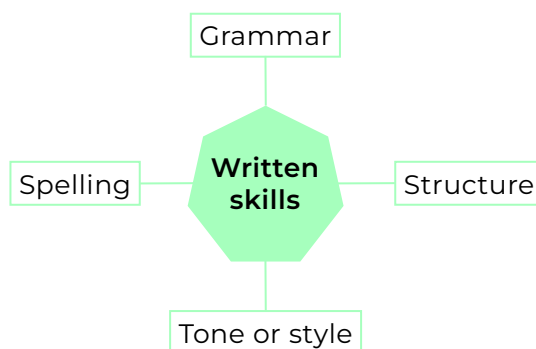
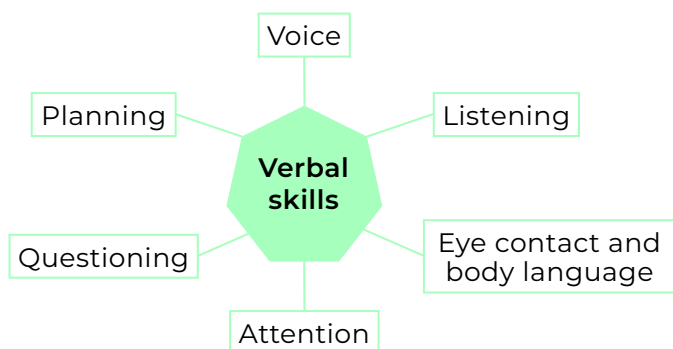
High-quality communication happens when your audience can respond in the desired way. This may depend on their needs, for example, to make an informed investment decision, or it may depend on the needs of the situation, for example, to identify a risk or performance issue.

To enable this, **high-quality communication begins with understanding your audience's requirements and expectations.** This demands **empathy** (to understand their feelings or needs) and **respect** (to show due regard for these feelings or needs).

Use these six Cs as a checklist to ensure all your communications are high quality.

Clear	Is it easy to understand, avoiding complex terms when not needed? Will the audience know exactly what to do with this information?
Concise	Is it to the point, with no 'filler' or waffle?
Complete	Does it include everything the audience needs?
Correct	Is the content factually correct, with no hidden information?
Coherent	Does it make logical sense?
Courteous	Is it polite and professional?

The six Cs are an effective way to evaluate *what* you communicate. They work alongside specific communication skills that enhance *how* you communicate.



It is important to use all the verbal communication skills when you are communicating. While paying attention to your audience, also direct part of your attention to what you will say next, your tone and volume, and how your posture and movements contribute to your message.

Every communication is an opportunity for feedback and reflection that helps you develop these skills to enable you to get to the outcomes you need.

Check your understanding:

3. Use every opportunity to practise and develop your listening skills.
4. Reflect on how well you apply the six Cs in your written and verbal communications.

Communication, ethics, and enterprise

Every communication has an intention or objective to influence the thinking or behaviour of its audience. **When you communicate, you have an ethical obligation to act with honesty and integrity.** The Engineering Council and the Royal Academy of Engineering have jointly created a Statement of Ethical Principles for all engineering professionals, which includes the following guidance.

1 Honesty and integrity

Engineering professionals should:

- act in a reliable and trustworthy manner
- be alert to the ways in which their work and behaviour might affect others
- respect confidentiality
- avoid deception.

2 Respect for life, law, the environment, and public good

Engineering professionals should:

- hold paramount the health and safety of others and draw attention to hazards
- ensure their work is lawful and justified
- respect and protect personal information and intellectual property
- uphold the reputation and standing of the profession.

3 Accuracy and rigour

Engineering professionals should:

- present and review theory, evidence, and interpretation honestly, accurately, objectively, and without bias, while respecting reasoned alternative views
- identify, evaluate, quantify, mitigate, and manage risks
- not knowingly mislead or allow others to be misled.

Your ethical obligations come into sharp focus when promoting a startup or other enterprise situation. As an entrepreneur, you must persuade investors and customers of the value and benefits of your innovation. However, you must balance an optimistic vision of the future with realistic projections for your technology's capabilities and probable commercial success. This is highlighted by the fourth ethical principle, which includes:

4 Leadership and communication

Engineering professionals should:

- be objective and truthful in any statement made in their professional capacity.

Check your understanding:

5. List personal and organisational benefits of upholding these principles in your communications when promoting a new enterprise.
6. Suggest some legal or financial outcomes of misleading investors or customers.

Case study: Investor meeting

Background

You are part of a small founding team in a new engineering startup. You obtained seed funding from an investor to develop your technology into a viable commercial product. You are meeting with your investor to update them on your progress. Your investor has asked to be updated on:

1. the current performance of your technology
2. how you intend to close the gap between current and desired performance
3. your product designs and customer feedback
4. risks and how you will respond to each one
5. key milestones and timings to a full product launch.

Your task

1. Understand your audience: summarise what your investor wishes to know and why.
2. Suggest the best form(s) for communicating each type of information.
3. Identify which of the Academy's ethical principles should guide your presentation.
4. Suggest the right form(s) of communication to follow up with your investor after the meeting.



Extend your learning

- Read the Academy's complete ethical principles: www.raeng.org.uk/media/k3hjb35/statement-of-ethical-principles.pdf
- Research verbal and presentation skills online. Apply the principles you discover when presenting your project work to tutors or employer partners.

Answers: Check your understanding

These are example answers – your own suggestions may differ.

What do entrepreneurs communicate?

1. Engineering teams may use Microsoft Teams, Google Workspace, Slack, or other collaboration tools to share and edit documents, call or videoconference, participate in and manage group chats, and may also use messaging apps like WhatsApp. But in all cases, they will take care to communicate in the right style and tone for the purpose, remembering that engineering and enterprise are professional environments.
2. As you transition into enterprise, you will need to develop your verbal, written, visual, and numerical skills, as well as your ability to discern which form of communication is right for your purpose and your audience. The exact mix of skills will depend on the context: you may need to work with diagrams and dimensions for technical conversations, but with creative ideas and financial forecasts when persuading investors.

Skills for high-quality communication

3. You can develop your listening skills in every conversation you have, with friends and family as well as with your tutors, employer, or other learners. Remember to reflect on how well you are listening and ask for feedback whenever appropriate.
4. The other person's response, and your own recollection of what was said to you, will give you a good indication of how effectively you are listening and how well you apply the six Cs.

Communication, ethics, and enterprise

5. Upholding ethical principles will help build your reputation as a colleague, entrepreneur, or leader, as someone who can be trusted to act with integrity and honesty. This has organisational benefits in making you a more attractive proposition as an employer, investment opportunity, or supplier, contributing to your financial success.
6. Misleading investors or customers will at best damage your reputation, making future investment or sales difficult. They may choose to take legal action against you if you misrepresent your technology, your ownership of intellectual property, your projected sales, costs, and profits, or your product's features, specifications, or performance.

Answers: Case study

These are example answers – your own suggestions may differ.

1. The audience for the presentation is the investor. Their primary concern is that their investment is safe and that you are on track to give them the return they expect, in the timeframe you will have agreed with them.

More specifically, they would want to know that you can deliver a finished product on time and within the financial boundaries you originally calculated. They would also want to know, if you cannot achieve this, how it will affect your product, timescales, costs, and projected sales and profit – and, in turn, their return on their investment.

2. The best forms for communicating each type of information would be:

- graph or chart, with bullet points
- bullet points
- images, diagrams, and representative feedback quotes
- table (eg red/orange/green rating)
- labelled timeline.

3. All the Academy's ethical principles should guide your presentation but in particular:

- Honesty and integrity – avoid deception, including deception by omission
- Respect for life, law, the environment, and public good – draw attention to hazards
- Accuracy and rigour – all
- Leadership and communication – be objective and truthful in any statement made in their professional capacity.

4. The right forms of communication to follow up with your investor after the meeting might include a message or chat to informally thank them for coming and clarify next steps, a formal email to answer any questions and put your commitments in writing, and attached documents that provide the necessary detail.

