

Communication Skills for Command

Lesson Objective: Communication skills are especially important for commanders. This module explores the role of communications in command and the skills necessary for success.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Understand how the communications skills needed by commanders differ from those needed by members.
2. Explain the skills and behaviors of an effective commander.
3. Assess communication skills and develop a plan to improve effectiveness.

Scheduled Lesson Time: 60 minutes

Introduction

Communication skills are important to most every career field and opportunity. Leaders and followers utilize communication skills differently. Understanding how leaders use communication skills effectively is an important skill for success as a commander. While some of us may have excellent communication skills, self-assessment is an important part of growth. This module explores assessing your communication skills and improving effectiveness.

1. Understand how the communications skills needed by commanders differ from those needed by members.

Think about your experiences. Can you think of any leaders who were exceptional communicators? What skills did they possess? What impact did they have on their organization? Can you think of any leaders who were poor communicators? What skills did they lack? What impact did they have on their organization? Good communication skills are critical for all members of CAP. If a team member cannot efficiently and effectively share information, the team suffers. If the leader cannot efficiently and effectively share the goal of the team, the team will suffer. Commanders and other leaders rely on communication skills for success in their leadership roles. Commanders need more advanced communication skills than the foundation of skills their followers have. Over the course of a CAP career, as you become a leader, you will improve your communication skills. You can learn more about [Why Communication is so Important for Leaders](#) in this short article from the Center for Creative Leadership.

Level 3 Communication Skills for Command
Student Guide
(Command Elective)

2. Explain the skills and behaviors of an effective commander.

In the eSchool at Air University, they have outlined five skills commanders use when communicating and behaviors that are tied to each skill.

Skills	Behaviors
Interpersonal skills The skills used by a leader to interact with others in the flight. Can also be referred to as the ability to get along with others while getting the job done.	Building effective relationships, inspiring others, emotional intelligence, building trust
Written communications You will not always be able to speak to someone face-to-face, so effective written communication skills are vital.	Prepare influential documents, demonstrate coherence, demonstrate brevity, demonstrate clarity
Oral (spoken) communications Face-to-face communication is significant when building trust and rapport and is essential for teamwork within a flight.	Conduct influential conversations, listen actively, present unbiased ideas, use effective presentations
Shared understanding A perspective shared by the group. This can be influenced by participation and collaboration on various tasks.	Present important information, coordinate with stakeholders, provide current information, provide guidance for absence, know your audience, demonstrate clarity
Encourage candid communications Start by listening and encouraging others to talk.	Provide a forum for questions, learn how to have crucial conversations, speak candidly about yourself, demonstrate a willingness to delay judgement, give positive feedback, be interested, keep confidences, share information with speakers, display a positive attitude, ask questions

Note: Developed from materials created by the eSchool of Graduate PME.

Communication skills are vital for commanders. They are vital for all members but it is more obvious sometimes when we are in a leadership role because how we communicate can impact our team and the success of the mission. Commanders also have more opportunities to communicate with members and share some very important concepts like mission, vision, etc. What communication skills does a commander use? If we discussed the topic and made a list, it would include the following

- Good interpersonal skills or relationships with others.
- Good oral communication skills.
- Good written communication skills.
- Good listening skills.
- Engages others for their viewpoints.

While commanders and members can benefit from the same communication skills, being able to create a shared understanding is critical for commanders.

Level 3 Communication Skills for Command

Student Guide

(Command Elective)

There are several resources to help you communicate as a commander. Three good resources include books and articles by Dr. John Kline, a former Air University Chief Academic Officer:

Write Right! - <http://www.klinespeak.com/pdf/How%20to%20Write%20Right.pdf>

Speaking Effectively - <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/kline-speak/kline-speaking.pdf>

Listening Effectively - <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/kline-listen/kline-listen.pdf>

Other resources that can help you with written communications include the templates in the publications area of the CAP website at <https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/members/publications/publications-management> . Whether you need a memo, a business card, or an email signature block, this is the place to look. Some tools are used more by commanders. A staff officer might use a Personnel Authorization or a business letter more often. Commanders use memorandums. Pay close attention to the memorandum style used to garner approval for a request. These are sent in many situations to a higher headquarters. Everything you send forward to higher headquarters or release to the unit is a reflection of your command. Only send forward high-quality products that speak well of your unit. Sending sloppy documents with errors can negatively impact your unit. It is always a good idea to have someone read your work or help you prepare it. A second set of eyes can be invaluable as your mind's eye sometimes corrects its own errors when proofreading, etc. Something that is clear to you may lack clarity for others. Sharing your work for feedback is also a good way to develop staff officers by exposing them to command communications processes and expanding their vision.

3. Assess communication skills and develop a plan to improve effectiveness.

How would you rate your skills in each of the five areas we listed that were key for commanders?

- Good interpersonal skills or relationships with others.
 - Build effective relationships
 - Inspire others
 - Demonstrate emotional intelligence
 - Build trust
- Good oral communication skills.
 - Conduct influential dialogue
 - Employ active listening skills
 - Present unbiased ideas
 - Employ effective presentations
- Good written communication skills.
 - Prepare influential documents
 - Demonstrate coherence
 - Demonstrate brevity
 - Demonstrate clarity
- Good shared understanding
 - Present essential information
 - Coordinate with stakeholders
 - Provide current information
 - Know your audience
 - Limit miscommunication
- Engages others for their viewpoints.

Level 3 Communication Skills for Command
Student Guide
(Command Elective)

- Respectful, focused feedback
- Positive attitude
- Reinforce minority viewpoints
- Guard against groupthink

Which area needs the most work? The least? Who might be able to help you improve these skills? Make a plan to improve the skills you rated lowest on the list above. Practicing speaking and writing often help us improve those skills.

Lesson Summary and Closure

Good communication skills are a benefit to commanders. The ability to speak, write, listen and build strong relationships can help commanders achieve their goals.

Exercise: For this exercise you will play the role of a unit commander who wishes to seek approval for a non-citizen to serve as a cadet or senior in your squadron. Use the memorandum format on letterhead to seek approval in accordance with CAPR 39-2 for this non-citizen to join. Use endorsements for the approval chain. Bring your memorandum to class for an in-person session or turn it in on Axis for an online module.