

# How to Communicate in an Assertive Manner

Assertiveness is a particular way of communicating with others that is direct and honest, but also respectful. An assertive communicator knows what they think or what they want, and they are not afraid to ask for it directly. They don't...

## Steps

Method 1 of 4:

### Developing Assertive Communication Skills



**Clearly define and state your needs or expectations.** Passive communicators tend to hide or qualify their needs. Assertive communicators decide on what they want and then directly ask for it or state it. Next time you have the opportunity, try to give at least one direct statement to communicate your thoughts or express your needs.<sup>[1]</sup>

1. You should still be respectful of other people's needs and schedules, but you shouldn't avoid making your own needs or concerns known just to accommodate someone else. For example, instead of saying, 'I would like to speak with you for a few minutes if it isn't too much trouble,' tell someone, 'We need to talk about a plan for our assignment today. What time works for you?'
2. Establishing Boundaries goes hand in hand with expressing needs. Try to clearly communicate your boundaries to others. For example, if someone at work keeps bothering you and interferes with your

- ability to complete tasks, say 'I have a hard time focusing on the tasks I need to complete when I am interrupted. Perhaps you and I could meet before lunch to discuss everything you want to tell me.'<sup>[2]</sup>
3. If your value system and priorities are not straight in your mind, it may be difficult to articulate them to others. Make sure you figure out exactly what you want, need, or think before you express it to others.



**Use 'I' statements instead of 'you' statements.** Being assertive means that you value your own needs. It does not mean being aggressive. Use 'I' statements to express what you want or need in a situation. Try to avoid 'you' statements, since these tend to cast blame and show anger.<sup>[3]</sup>

1. For example, instead of saying, 'You always make it difficult for me to do my job,' try saying, 'I need better resources to do my job properly and efficiently.'
2. Think about what you want and need, and try to focus on that. Don't spend time blaming someone else. Blame comes off as more aggressive than assertive.



**Practice saying 'no' respectfully.** Passive communicators may struggle to say no at all, while aggressive communicators can be disrespectful in their rejections. An assertive communicator says 'no' when they truly cannot do something or accommodate someone, but they are respectful to others in the process. Try offering alternatives or resources if you cannot take on the task or challenge yourself.<sup>[4]</sup>

1. If, for example, a client asks you about a project that is beyond your job duties and expertise, tell them, 'I cannot do that for you right now, but I know a specialist in another department that may be able to help. Let me get their phone number for you.'
  2. While it's nice to offer an explanation for why you're saying 'no,' it is not required in order to effectively communicate in an assertive manner.
4. **Practice speaking more professionally.** Pay attention to your speech habits and patterns and try to adjust them if they aren't assertive. Avoid using casual, unprofessional words, such as 'yup,' 'literally,' or 'like.' You may find that you talk too fast or speak with a rising tone of voice because you aren't sure if others will listen to you or you aren't sure if what you're saying is right. These habits are inconsistent with assertiveness as they communicate uncertainty and insecurity. Work on changing them in order to be a more assertive communicator.<sup>[5]</sup>



**Use proper body language.** Assertive communication isn't just verbal. Make sure your body language is strong, confident, and relaxed. This includes making eye contact with others when they speak, and keeping an upright posture.<sup>[6]</sup>

1. Eye contact is important, but try not to stare. Blinking and glancing elsewhere are natural. Staring at someone, on the other hand, may come off as aggressive or intimidating.
2. For your posture, keep your back upright and your shoulders held back slightly. You should not be tense, but you should be mindful of your body and its composure.
3. Try not to close yourself off. Keep your arms and legs uncrossed, and keep your face from furrowing or scrunching as much as you can.
4. Be aware of muscle tension in your body. Stretch slightly or take deep breaths to relax your muscles.

Method 2 of 4:

## Practicing Assertive Speaking



**Swap out exaggerations for factual statements.** Practice using facts in everyday conversation to help yourself stay on track and avoid confrontation when you are being assertive. Try using factual statements instead of hyperboles, which can cast unnecessary blame.<sup>[7]</sup>

1. For example, if you're talking to someone about an assignment you don't want to do, say, 'I think I'll need to spend a full month preparing for this,' instead of, 'This thing is going to take forever.'



**Keep your responses simple.** Often, those who lack confidence feel the need to explain themselves. To keep yourself from speaking like someone who is unsure, practice using fewer words to communicate. Simplified speech and assertive speech are often one in the same.

1. For example, when asked to go out for happy hour after work, avoid saying something like, 'I can't go tonight, I have to go to the grocery store, stop by my mother's house to let her dog out, then take

my own dog for a walk and once I finally get home I have some cleaning to do before my favorite show comes on.' Instead, politely and briefly decline by saying something like, 'No thank you. Tonight doesn't work for me, but maybe another time soon.'

2. This may also make it easier for others to obey your requests. Keep your statements short, direct, and relevant.<sup>[8]</sup>
3. If you tend to use fillers such as 'like,' 'um,' or 'yeah,' try to take small breaks in your speech instead. A pause is generally less discernible to your audience than it is to you, and it doesn't muddle your speech as much as filler words.



3.

**Rehearse what you want to say in advance.** If you know in advance that you will have to speak to someone about a need, concern, or opinion, rehearse what you want to say. Practice keeping calm, speaking clearly, and making positive statements that express your needs. Some people even find it helpful to write out a script or have a practice conversation with a friend or colleague.<sup>[9]</sup>

1. If you have someone act out your conversation with you, ask them for feedback. Let them tell you what you were doing well, and where you could improve.
2. If you are uncomfortable with making decisions on-the-spot, have some pre-scripted answers that will work in multiple situations. For example, 'I need to consult with my spouse, I'll get back to you.' or 'That won't work for me, I already have a commitment.'

4.



**Reflect on your daily interactions.** Take a moment at the end of each day to think back on your interactions with others. Offer yourself praise in areas where you did well, and think of 1-2 ways you could improve for situations in which you were not as assertive as you would like.

1. Ask yourself questions like where did you show assertive communication? Were there chances for you to be assertive that you missed? Were there times when you tried to be assertive but came off aggressive?

Method 3 of 4:

### **Keeping Your Assertiveness Respectful**

1.



**Validate others' feelings.** When you speak assertively, you also need to listen thoroughly. This includes showing the people you're speaking to that you understand their feelings and opinions. You don't need to agree with them, but show them that you are listening, and that you are willing to work with them.<sup>[10]</sup>

1. You can, for example, let someone know, 'I understand that you are concerned about the cost of this product. However, the time it saves us in preparing our reports will more than offset the initial cost.'

2.



**Control your emotions.** Bursts of anger or crying can be offputting to other people and contrast the confident and relaxed qualities of assertive speech. Try your best to control your emotions while you are working with others. Avoid using profanities or inappropriate language. If you feel a swell of anger or tears coming on, breathe very deeply from the stomach, counting to 3 between every inhale and exhale. Keep doing this until you feel calm enough to continue.<sup>[11]</sup>

1. If you struggle to calm down, take a break. Politely request to be excused so that you can step away from the situation and regain self-control.
3. **Clearly state consequences when someone fails to accommodate you.** If your negative emotions are in response to someone continually violating your boundaries or disrespecting your requests, respectfully end the relationship or refuse to deal with them until they respect your boundaries, wants, and needs. Try to do this without interjecting any emotionally-charged opinions into your reasoning.
  1. For example, you might say something like, 'I've respected that you need to be home by 8:00 p.m. to take care of your kids, but many times you've failed to respect my need to spend mornings alone with my wife by coming to my home so early. If you won't respect my wishes, I'm afraid we won't be able to spend time together anymore.'

4.



**Express gratitude when someone accommodates you.** If someone else has done or is doing something for you, let them know you are thankful. Give them a genuine thanks, either written or in person. Then, make sure that you return the favor by listening openly and honestly to them when they express their needs or concerns.<sup>[12]</sup>

1. Let someone know, 'I know it was hard for you to give up your weekend to finish that project. I really appreciate all the effort you put in. We wouldn't have been able to do it without you. Let me know next time you're leading a project and I'll do all I can to help.'

Method 4 of 4:

## Communicating Assertively in Common Scenarios

1.



**Give someone an alternative to problematic behavior.** Whether you're in the office or out with your friends, sometimes someone will do something that makes you feel uncomfortable. Use assertive communication to not only tell them that you're uncomfortable, but to suggest an alternative.<sup>[13]</sup>

1. If, for example, your co-worker keeps taking supplies from your desk without asking, don't just say, "I wish I had more pens, but someone keeps taking mine," when they are near you. This is a passive approach.
2. Instead, confront them directly and say, "I get frustrated when you take my supplies because it inhibits my ability to do my job correctly. I'd prefer you request your own pens from now on. I can show you where the supply room is if you don't know where to get them yourself."



**State your needs and follow through with action with aggressive solicitors.** An aggressive telemarketer or campaigner on the street can be difficult to shake. Use assertive communication to tell them what you need from a situation, and then follow through with direct action.<sup>[14]</sup>

1. If a telemarketer won't stop calling, for example, stop them before they get to their sales pitch and let them know, "I know you are doing your job, but I am not interested in your product. I'd like to be removed from your list immediately. I will escalate this situation if you call me again."
2. Then, follow through with direct action by writing down the name and number of the person and company that called you. If they call again, you can ask to speak to their manager or report the company to an overseeing body like the FCC.
3. You can also take direct action by blocking the phone number and/or ignoring the phone call.

3.



**Use assertive communication skills to ask for what you really want.** In some situations, like asking your boss for a raise, you can proactively use assertive communication. Let that person know what you want and why you want it. Be firm, but stay open to conversation.

1. If you want to ask for a raise, for example, tell your boss "I'd like to discuss a salary increase. My metrics consistently outperform everyone else in the department by 30% and I want my hard work reflected in my paycheck. My goal is a 7% increase. Is this something we can make happen?"
2. Give the other person a chance to respond and enter into a respectful negotiation. Demanding rather than requesting is an easy way to lose the thing you want.

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