

Summary of Skills for HUM 201 Skills Assessment

The following material comprises a checklist to help you in preparing your Skills Assessment. It is not intended to replace the instructional materials used in HUM 101 and HUM 102, but it does intend to review in summary form a variety of interpersonal and small-group skills which are significant to effective human service work.

The material is organized into three sections. The first section consists of a brief review of information about barriers to effective communication, the second contains a checklist of fundamental interpersonal skills, and the third comprises a summary of small-group skills.

All students who are entering HUM 201 should be at least familiar with the material in this summary and should possess at least minimal competence in the skills represented here. However, it is understood that the level of individual students' skills will vary greatly, and it is for the purpose of enabling you to improve and develop your human service skills that this major assignment has been given

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Section I: Barriers to Effective Communication

This first section is a summary of facts rather than of specific skills. The facts are concerned with what gets in the way of effective communication -- whether on a one-to-one basis or within a small group. The information here relates to your skills assessment in this way: you must be aware of these barriers to communication, and you must be able to avoid them in your dealings with clients and with co-workers.

A. General "Noise" Factors

In communication theory the term "noise" is often used to refer to specific behaviors or conditions that interfere with the communication process. These factors may come from the sender, from the receiver, or from the environment. The following list summarizes a variety of such noise factors.

1. Noise factors from the sender

- Physical mannerisms
- Verbosity
- Insensitivity towards other.
- Imbalance of content -- verbal, nonverbal, voice tone.
- Incongruency between words and nonverbal or tone.
- Lack of self-confidence
- Defensiveness
- Lack of clarity
- Depersonalized speech
- Lack of credibility

A. General Noise Factors, cont.

2. Noise factors from the receiver

Lack of concentration.  
 Lack of input.  
 Disinterest.  
 Lack of respect for the sender.  
 Overemphasis on content, deemphsais of feelings.  
 Oversimplification of message.  
 Discomfort or upset  
 Premature judgment.

3. Noise factors from the environment

Visual and auditory distractions  
 Temperature  
 Spatial distance

Whether you are the sender or the receiver, in your communication with clients and co-workers it is within your power to control the factors noted above. You are obligated to control them so as to maximize the effectiveness of your interactions.

B. Communication "Stoppers"

A communication "stopper" is a type of statement which stops, or at least seriously disrupts, communication. This happens because of the emotional impact of the "stopper" upon the receiver. You must be aware of the fact that your communication consists of both thought and feeling, and that the types of statements you make may affect the other person's feelings so as to interfere with the thought process. An effective communicator must be sensitive to that fact, and the following information should help you to improve your communication skills.

1. Judging: The receiver is likely to "tune you out" if it seems you are being judgmental. The following are commonly perceived as statements which are judgmental.

Criticizing -- "You're being foolish!" "That was stupid!"

Name-calling -- "Don't be a baby!" "That's a macho pose."

Diagnosing -- "Your problem is that you're insecure." "That's a defensive reaction."

Praising evaluatively -- "You're being a really good daughter to visit your old mother." "I'm really pleased with you because you're sticking to your diet."

## B. Communication "Stoppers," cont.

2. Sending solutions: The client should be helped to reach her/his own solutions. The following are generally perceived as being inappropriate.

Ordering -- "I want you to shape up!" "You have to make peace with your brother!"

Threatening -- "If you keep that up, I'll send you to the principal." "Keep talking like that and I'll leave."

Moralizing -- "Good girls (boys) don't do that!" "That was a dishonest thing to do."

Excessive questioning -- (simply means what it says. Give the other person a chance to think and respond in his/her own way.)

Inappropriate questioning -- "Don't you think you should call your sister?" "Wouldn't your life be better if you obeyed him?"

Advising -- "What you should do is ..." "Well, if you ask me, you should quit."

3. Avoiding the other's concerns: As a worker, your task is to hear both the thought and the feeling in the client's communication. If you say things that tend to avoid the message or the feeling, the other may turn off on you.

Diverting -- "Try not to dwell on that." "You really must think about other things."

Logical argument -- "I realize you're upset, but the fact is you can't change it." "Be realistic. You have to accept your father's decision."

Reassuring -- "Just remember that every cloud has a silver lining." "There, now, it's going to be all right, you'll see."

## Section II: Interpersonal Skills

This section reviews five skill areas -- Attending, Following, Reflecting, Assertiveness, and Conflict Management. Under each skill area are a number of specific skills which contribute to competence in the skill area. For the purpose of the Skills Assessment, I want you to refer to the specific skills rather than to the skill areas.

### A. Attending

1. Posture of involvement: Do you show by the way you position yourself and hold your body that you are interested in the other person?

2. Appropriate non-verbal cues: Do you avoid distracting gestures and movement? Do your gestures and movements convey your interest and attention to the other person?

A. Attending, cont.

3. Appropriate eye-contact: Do you look at the other person's eyes without staring blankly? Do you maintain a friendly eye-contact and do you occasionally shift your glance to other aspects of the person, such as hands, mouth, posture?

B. Following

1. Initial openness: When you first encounter the other person, do your words and your manner invite interaction? Do you sense the other person's mood, and can you use your perception as a non-coercive invitation to communicate with you?

2. Low-level encouragement: Do you use a variety of expressions to encourage the other person to talk without inhibiting openness or interfering with the free flow of her/his expression? Can you convey that you are listening and understanding with a minimum of verbal expressions?

3. Limited questioning: Do you use questions only when absolutely necessary? Do you know how to use non-disruptive questions to encourage the other person's openness and without distracting their thoughts?

4. Thoughtful detachment: Are you able to put your personal concerns aside and focus only upon the thoughts and feelings expressed by the other person? Can you be silent and encourage the other person solely by non-verbal cues?

C. Reflecting

1. Paraphrasing: Are you able to discover the essence or central point of what the other person is saying? And can you express that essence very concisely and in your own words?

2. Reflecting feelings: Are you able to use verbal and non-verbal content to understand what the other person is feeling? Do you have the ability to mirror those feelings in a simple, non-judgmental manner?

3. Reflecting meanings: Are you able to discern the meanings that the other person is conveying? Are you able to analyze the other's communication so as to see relationships between thought and feeling? Can you reflect that relationship so that the other person may gain a helpful insight?

4. Confronting: Are you able to perceive contradictions, confusion, and ambiguity in what the other is saying? Are you able to confront the person with those and help them to resolve the difficulty in thought or feeling?

C. Reflecting, cont.

5. Summarizing and analyzing: Are you able to summarize the most essential points of the other person's communication and express them to him/her in a simple, objective fashion? Can you analyze the key points into a coherent statement about what you have heard?

D. Assertiveness

1. The assertive message: Can you distinguish assertiveness from aggressiveness? Do you understand how to construct and to express an assertive message?

2. Dealing with defensiveness: Are you mentally prepared for the other person's defensiveness in response to your assertive message? Do you know how to deal with your own defensive response?

3. Reflective response: Do you understand the need for silence and thoughtful attention to the defensive response? Are you able to respond reflectively to a defensive response?

4. Repetition: Do you understand the need for repeating the assertive message -- the "broken record" technique? Are you able to persist in the cycle of repetition and reduce defensiveness?

5. Deriving a solution: Are you able to work cooperatively with the other person to develop a solution?

E. Conflict Management

1. Preventing or controlling conflict: Are you able to foresee conflict and to take steps to avoid its developing? If conflict does develop, are you able to contain it so as to avoid escalating the conflict?

2. Dealing with emotions: Are you able to understand the emotional components of a conflict -- both yours and the other person's? Can you deal with the emotions that develop in a conflict situation?

3. Conflict resolution: Do you understand the concept of conflict resolution? Do you have a conflict-resolution technique at your command? Can you guide conflict resolution into a problem-solving channel?

Section III: Small-Group Skills

This section is simply a summary of the "Group Tasks and Group Roles" set forth in the Seminar Manual, Section III, Effective Small-Group Work I. I suggest that you review that section with care. The roles and tasks which follow are based upon active participation in group work, and is divided according to the three phases of an activity:

### Section III: Small-Group Skills, cont.

Initiating Activity, Maintaining Activity, and Concluding Activity. Specific small-group skills that have a special relevance are listed beneath each phase of activity.

#### A. Initiating Activity

This is the phase in small-group work in which the members of the group come together preparatory to undertaking the assigned task. Not only must the formality of beginning the work be accomplished, but also the stage must be set emotionally and mentally.

1. Establishing mood or climate
2. Establishing rapport
3. Stating the task
4. Proposing strategy

#### B. Maintaining Activity

In this phase, with the stage set and a strategy established for carrying on the group's work, a wide variety of tasks must be done in order for for the group to accomplish its assignment.

1. Questioning
2. Providing information
3. Sharing views
4. Expressing feelings (emotions)
5. Clarifying
6. Interpreting
7. Seeking agreement
8. Moderating
9. Monitoring
10. Steering
11. Supporting/Opposing
12. Challenging/Responding

#### C. Concluding Activity

The final phase of a small-group's work is concerned with seeing to it that the task has been accomplished, that all the loose ends have been tied up, and that group members have a sense that closure has been attained.

1. Summarizing
2. Seeking final consensus
3. Formal termination of activity
4. Reporting