

Communication and Interpersonal Relationships

Dave Marks

National Writing Institute
624 W. University Dr. #248
Denton, TX 76201-1889

Copyright © 1996-2009
by Dave Marks

All rights reserved. Except for use by the purchaser's immediate family members, no portion of this book may be reproduced without written permission of the publisher.

Manufactured in the United States of America

ISBN10: 1-888344-15-6
ISBN13: 978-1-888344-15-8

For information, contact

National Writing Institute
624 W. University Dr. #248
Denton, TX 76201-1889

(800) 688-5375
info@writingstrands.com

Cover art by Matt Payovich

National Writing Institute Publications

For Students

Writing Strands 1
Writing Strands 2
Writing Strands 3
Writing Strands 4
Writing Strands 5
Writing Strands 6
Writing Strands 7
Writing Exposition
Creating Fiction

Communication and Interpersonal Relationships

Dragonslaying Is for Dreamers
Axel Meets the Blue Men
Axel's Challenge

For Parents and Teachers

Evaluating Writing

Reading Strands

Analyzing the Novel: Dragonslaying Is for Dreamers

Essays on Writing

Preface

This is a book about the uses and effects of your communication techniques in your relationships with people who are close to you. Words are so much of an important part of what we do, what we think, and how we create bonds between people that our lives truly are controlled and defined by them. How we use words and to what purposes we use them determine who we are as people.

Most of us cannot go for twenty-four hours without saying something unkind about another person. If you doubt this, keep a listing of what you say and hear in a one-day period that would hurt those talked about. I think you'll be surprised at how often hurt-filled words are spoken by people, who don't realize what they're doing.

There probably is no part of life in which so many of us violate the Golden Rule. One reason is that we were brought up to think that "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me." As much as this sounds nice and even rhymes, it's just not true. Words can lead to pain and hatred as well as to love. We should be constantly aware of how they are used.

It may be hard to understand the justice of it, but we are defined, in other people's minds, by what they have heard about us. The way people feel about us is shaped by the words of others, just as we create perceptions about people when we talk about them.

Your ability to use words to effect your desires can be a tremendous asset to you. The techniques presented in this book should enable you to have thoughtful, positive interactions with those who are close to you.

Using This Book

This is not a speech course, or even a book about making speeches. There are lots of those and some are very good. If you want to learn to make public speeches, your library should have many fine aids.

These exercises will help you relate to others in ways that will allow you to understand what you and others are feeling and saying. These exercises were designed for teenagers. If there are some that you don't understand, that's fine; wait for a year or so and try them again.

You can practice all of these techniques this year and again a couple years from now and then again later and gain more understanding and skill each time around.

This is not a textbook to be used in a school. Most of the techniques presented are too complicated for classroom use. The exercises are best practiced at home. Many of the skills offered here are ones that most parents would like their children to have exposure to.

I taught in public schools for 30 years, and I never heard of these kinds of skills being taught in classrooms. And yet, they are so very important for young people to have or to have a chance to learn.

If you have bought this book for yourself or for your family, you should have the people using it read through an exercise together, discuss the ideas, and work out the strategies for doing them. It's not necessary to keep any regular schedule. What is important is that young people learn to communicate with others in ways that will produce pleasant and productive relationships.

Contents

Eye Contact.....	1
Verbal Reinforcement	4
Physical Reinforcement	7
Meeting People	10
Classroom Techniques	16
Interviewing	26
How Not to Be a Bore.....	32
I Can Top That	39
You Become What You Pretend to Be	41
Understanding Other People’s Points of View.....	44
How to Disagree	47
How to Reduce Aggression.....	51
The Only Speech You’re Likely to Have to Give	56
Appendix: Speaking with Body Language	63
Selected References	66

Eye Contact

This exercise will help you to understand:

1. The conventions of eye contact in conversations for:
 - A. Speakers
 - B. Listeners
2. The security in conversations where the conventions are kept
3. The insecurity in conversations where the conventions are broken

Understandings

One of the conventions (the way we do things) of conversation in our culture is that the listener looks at the speaker's eyes or face about 80% of the time the speaker is talking. The speaker looks at the listener's eyes/face only about 15 to 20% of the time. These percentages aren't true unless the two people feel that they're equal. That is, if they're about the same age or if they feel equal in social position.

For example, if an adult is talking to a child, the adult looks at the child's eyes/face more than that percentage of the time. This proves especially true if the adult's in the act of teaching, scolding or correcting the child. In these cases the percentages are almost reversed.

This exercise is designed to give you an understanding of this convention and to give you an experience with its violation. You'll understand the effects of this violation on your interactions as you perceive your conversational partners beginning to realize that something is wrong or unusual about the conversations you're having.

Exercise

There are two parts to this exercise: Part One, in which you'll take notes on patterns of eye contact during conversation, and Part Two, in which you'll violate those conventions.

Part One

You're to have three conversations and take notes about the eye/face contacts of both you and the person you're talking with. These notes should be about both when you're speaking and when you're listening to your conversational partners.

Of course, you're not to tell your partners what you're studying so as to avoid influencing the outcome. You'll be having conversations with three people for this part of the exercise.

1. The first conversation will be with someone your own age.
2. The second will be with an adult, other than your parents.
3. The third will be with an adult—again not one of your parents—and you'll be asking for information or directions about how to get somewhere or to do something.

Your notes for these conversations might look like the following examples:

First Conversation

When I Was Speaking to a Friend My Age:

- M (me): *Talked about my trip to the (store, beach, or whatever). I started the conversation with e/c (eye contact) about 20% of the time. This seemed to be a normal conversation and my friend's reactions were what I expected them to be after reading about eye contact.*
- F (friend): *As he listened to me, he had the normal amount of e/c. It was about 80-90% of the time.*

When My Friend Was Speaking:

- M: *I kept e/c while he was speaking to me about 80% of the time. I could see that he felt at ease with me and the conversation.*

When you've finished with the three conversations and have made the notes, you'll have a good understanding about the nature of the convention of conversational eye contact for people in our culture.

Other cultures have different conventions. In some cultures, both parties give almost total eye contact. In others, it is an insult for one person to look directly into the eyes of another while conversing.

Part Two

You're now to violate the conventions of eye contact and to record the reactions of your conversation partners.

You're to pick the same people or people who are like the ones in the first conversations and have similar conversations with them. This means that you'll have three more conversations:

1. This time when you're speaking, you're to look, most of the time, directly into the eyes of the people you're speaking with while you're talking.
2. You should look away most of the time the other people are speaking.

Take notes about your partners' reactions to these violations of the conventions of eye contact. Watch for any indications of your partners becoming nervous. You can tell this by their beginning to fidget with things, look around the room, tap their fingers or blink rapidly.

This experience should give you some new understandings about your conversations and make it possible to demonstrate respect for the ideas of the people with whom you talk. When you're done with these exercises, you'll understand much more about what's of interest to people when you talk with them.

Keep in mind that it's not a kind thing to intentionally make other people uncomfortable or nervous, and it might make them less than eager to talk with you in the future. If you feel you've made someone uncomfortable with this exercise, it might be wise, after the conversation, to explain what you've been studying.

Verbal Reinforcement

This exercise will help you to understand:

1. How people reinforce others in conversation
2. How this understanding can benefit you in your conversations

Understandings

When we talk with another person, we reinforce the speaker and what the speaker says, which encourages that person to continue talking. This isn't something we were taught directly by our parents or friends. It's something we learned to do when we were four or five years old by watching how other people acted when they had conversations.

Reinforcing someone or something someone has said is a way to say to that person, *I understand what you're saying*, or, *What you're saying is interesting to me*, or, *I agree with you*.

We each have our own methods of reinforcement and they're different for different situations. We learned what worked best for us as we practiced having conversations after watching how the adults in our families used reinforcements when they were talking together.

Even though we all have special ways to reinforce our conversational partners, there are some general rules for this. Most people reinforce what others say by:

1. Saying *Yeah* or *Yes*, *Go on* or *Sure* or *Okay* or *Uh huh*, or *Cool*, or *Right on*
2. Grunting
3. Repeating what was just said
4. Smiling or laughing

Another part of this convention of reinforcement is when the speaker asks for reinforcement. We're so used to this happening in our conversations that we're not conscious of being asked to reinforce what is being said to us. As you have the four conversations in this exercise, watch for how people ask you to reinforce what they've said. They will:

1. Raise the pitch of their voices almost as if asking questions.

"You go two blocks down and turn left. You'll see a McDonald's on the corner. Turn there. . . At the McDonald's?"

You'll find that the speaker will raise his voice on the last sentence. He'll be asking you if you understand where you're to turn left. If you reinforce what he's just said in some manner, he'll go on and tell you the rest of the directions. If you don't reinforce him, he'll most likely go over again the same directions. He'll feel you don't understand where to turn. This works the same way even when one person isn't asking directions; when people are just talking together.

2. Raise their eyebrows.

This acts in the same way as raising the voice does. It's a request for the listener to acknowledge that the speech is understood.

3. Pause and look at the listener.

If this doesn't work, the speakers try other request-for-reinforcement methods.

4. Raise both hands and spread them outward, and at the same time nod the head and lift the eyebrows. This is a very strong request for reinforcement and isn't common for ordinary conversations. It's used by people in authority when explaining something to younger people who don't understand what to do or to employees who have done something wrong.
5. Pause and look the listeners in the eye. If this doesn't get a reinforcement, then the speakers make a sound almost like clearing the throat or humming and again look at the listeners.

Exercise

There are two parts to this exercise:

1. You're to have two conversations in which you reinforce in the normal ways what the speakers say; and
2. You're to have two conversations in which you don't reinforce what the speakers say.

Part One

In the first set of conversations, you're to have one where you ask for directions to a well known place, and you're to give normal reinforcements. The other conversation can be about anything your partner wants to talk about and you're to again reinforce the speaker.

Part Two

In the second two conversations, you're to have one where you ask for directions, but you'll not reinforce anything the speaker says. You'll find that this is hard to do. You've become so accustomed to the conventions of reinforcement that you'll have to concentrate to be able to avoid reinforcing the speaker.

When I was learning about these reinforcement conventions, I did these things I'm suggesting you do. I remember asking directions of a gas station attendant who was out by the pumps.

I didn't reinforce what he told me, and after repeating the directions a number of times, he asked me to get out of the car and come to the curb with him. He took me to the edge of the road and pointed in the direction I was to go. He then pointed out the place where I was to turn. I was careful not to let on that I had understood this all along. He would have been embarrassed.

The second conversation will be about anything your partner wants to talk about. You'll again have to concentrate so that you don't reinforce your speaking partner.

You should take notes about these two sets of conversations. They might be similar to the notes that you took for the "Eye Contact" exercise. In your notes for the conversations where you reinforce what the speaker says, you should record three things:

1. What types of reinforcements you used
2. How often you used reinforcements
3. Your speaker's reactions to your reinforcements

In your notes for the conversations where you don't reinforce what the speaker says, you should record:

1. The speaker's reactions when you didn't reinforce what was said
2. What devices the speaker used to get you to reinforce what was being told to you

You'll find that when you don't reinforce the speech of the people you're with, they get nervous. They feel you don't understand what they're saying or that you don't agree with them.

If you're successful in not reinforcing the speech of the people talking to you, they'll continually ask for reinforcement. I have a friend who, when I don't reinforce what she says, reaches out and touches my arm. Sometimes she even grabs the arms of people she is talking with so as to get more reinforcement.

Physical Reinforcement

This exercise will help you to understand:

1. The common physical methods of reinforcement
2. The effectiveness of physical reinforcement on speakers' attitudes
3. The effect of negative physical reactions and non-reinforcements on speakers' attitudes

Understandings

The conventions of physical reinforcement are as well known and as widely used as the verbal ones. We let our conversational partners know we do or don't understand what they're saying and how we feel about what they're saying by the ways we react with our bodies to what is being said. We do this by:

1. Nodding
2. Smiling
3. Glancing at the eyes of the speakers
4. Leaning forward or toward the speakers
5. Opening up body posture (turning toward the speakers)

We also indicate to speakers that we don't agree with them or don't understand what they're saying by giving negative body reinforcements. We do this by:

1. Downturning or flattening the lips
2. Shaking the head
3. Turning the face away
4. Casting the eyes upward and/or sighing
5. Turning the shoulders away from the speaker
6. Crossing the arms over the chest
7. Crossing the legs away from the speaker
8. Showing obvious interest in something else, such as a piece of lint on clothing or what other people are doing

Exercise

You're to have four conversations in the two parts of this exercise:

1. You're to have **two** conversations (not asking directions):
 - A. One in which you reinforce **just with your body** what the speaker says
 - B. One in which you reinforce **both with your voice and your body** what the speaker says

2. You're to have two other conversations:
 - A. One in which you **don't reinforce** in any way what the speaker says
 - B. One in which you **give negative reinforcements** (both voice and body) to what is said to you

Part One

These two conversations will be harder for you to engineer because you'll be with people who'll want to talk to you. In these instances, you'll be indicating to these people that you don't want to talk to them or that you don't understand what they're saying or that you don't agree with them.

To make this a meaningful experience, you'll have to find people who want to talk to you, and you might have to try a few times before you're successful. That's okay, because the benefit you'll get from really understanding the power you'll have with your command of positive and negative reinforcements will make the effort worthwhile.

1. The first conversation will be hard because you'll have to reinforce with *only your body* and control your verbal reinforcements. You might have to try this conversation a few times before you're successful. It's hard to give just body reinforcements. You'll find that you'll have to concentrate very hard to keep from giving verbal indications of how you feel.
2. The second conversation will be with you *reinforcing with both your voice and your body* what the speaker says to you. You'll be surprised at how easily you'll be able to understand how the speaker feels about talking with you.

Part Two

In these two conversations you're to indicate to the speakers by *negative body and voice non-reinforcements* that you're not interested in the conversations you're having.

You'll find that the speakers will quickly lose interest in talking with you. They might even become upset with your showing a lack of interest in what they have to say. When you notice this, it will be time to stop the conversations and explain what you're doing.

Be very careful with this understanding of how other people feel. Keep in mind that with any knowledge comes responsibility. If you find that you understand how other people feel, you have the responsibility not to make them feel badly about themselves.

When you've finished the conversation, it might be a good idea to talk with them about what you were doing when you were talking with them. You might explain that you were doing an exercise in reinforcements so that they don't feel embarrassed.

1. In this second set of conversations, you're to have one where you ask for directions, but you'll not reinforce anything the speaker says. You'll find that this is hard to do. You've become so accustomed to the conventions of reinforcement that you'll have to concentrate to be able to avoid reinforcing the speaker.

2. The second conversation will be about anything the speaker wants to talk about. You'll again have to concentrate so that you don't reinforce your speaking partner, but even more, this time you're to give your partner negative reinforcements. Negative reinforcements are just the opposite of positive reinforcements. Do the opposite of what you did to positively reinforce. For instance, you nodded your head to reinforce what was just said to you. To negatively reinforce, you would shake your head. Instead of looking into the eyes of the speaker, look around the room or look at something in your hands.

You should take notes about these two sets of conversations. They might be similar to the notes that you took for the "Eye Contact" exercise.

In your notes for the conversations where you reinforce what the speaker said, you should record three things:

1. What types of reinforcements you used
2. How often you used reinforcements
3. Your speaker's reactions to your reinforcements

In your notes for the conversations where you didn't reinforce what the speaker said and even gave negative reinforcements, you should record:

1. The speaker's reactions when you didn't reinforce what was said
2. What devices the speaker used to get you to reinforce what was being told to you when you used negative reinforcements

Remember that if speakers don't get reinforcements or if they get negative reinforcements for what they say, they'll often do things to get the reinforcements they need to feel comfortable. They will:

1. Repeat what they have just said
2. Talk louder
3. Reach out and touch their listeners
4. Raise their eyebrows
5. Nod
6. Even ask if they're understood

Remember that when you don't reinforce the speech of the people you're with, they get nervous. They feel that you don't understand what they're saying or that you don't agree with them. Again, keep in mind that it isn't kind to make people feel uncomfortable. If you find that you've done this, you might explain what you've been studying.

Meeting People

This exercise will help you learn to make a good first impression when you meet people by the way you shake hands, make eye contact, greet them, and use body language.

Those things that your parents told you about first impressions being important are true. You'll have just one chance in your life to meet anyone for the first time. What your body and voice tell that person about you during this encounter will stay with that person for a long time. It's possible to change another's first impression of you, but, to do this, you have to be very conscious of what that impression was in the first place and what parts of it you want to change. You then must plan on how you're going to change that person's mind about you and then take the time to do it. As you can see, it makes more sense to make the impression you desire on the first meeting.

Understandings

When you first meet someone, there are a number of ways you have of demonstrating just what kind of a person you are. You'll be revealing things about yourself and your attitude towards the meeting by the way you:

1. Shake hands
2. Look at the person
3. Choose the first words you say
4. Stand
5. Let your face talk

Of course, the actions in this list will depend on:

1. Your age
2. The age of the person you're meeting
3. The circumstances of the meeting

This can get complicated, but generally the circumstances will break down similar to this:

1. Your age:
 - A. 10 or under
 - B. 11-15
 - C. 16-20
2. The age of the person you're meeting:
 - A. Same age as you
 - B. You're older (by 4 - 10 years)
 - C. You're younger (by 10 - 20 years)

3. The situation of the meeting

- A. Formal (new boss, teacher, minister, group leader)
- B. Informal (new member of group, neighbor, friend of a friend, teammate)

The way you feel about the meeting and your prior training will dictate to you your attitude in any meeting in any of the above situations. But, it's important to understand that there are some general rules about meeting people under any circumstance. It's best to do two things on first meetings:

- 1. Show respect
- 2. Indicate that you enjoy the opportunity of meeting that person

Let's go back to the first list—how you present yourself.

1. Shaking Hands

Shaking hands is a gesture of friendship and an offering to be non-aggressive. You want to say to the other person, regardless of age, that you're a positive and friendly person. To do this you'll have to do the following:

- A. Look other people in the eye as you shake hands. You'll have a tendency to want to look at the two hands to make sure you won't miss the other person's hand. This isn't necessary. You'll never miss. Practice this with your parents or your brothers or sisters. You'll find that you'll be able to look other people in the eye and still know where their hands are. This is especially important when shaking the hands of people who are older than you are. This says about you that you have a great deal of confidence in your meeting with them.

Notice that, when you shake hands with people your age or ones who are younger than you are, they look at your hand to make sure that they don't miss it. To do this you'll have to watch their eyes. This will be good practice for looking into the eyes of others when you shake their hands.

- B. Give a firm, but not hard, hand clasp. This will take practice. If the person you're shaking the hand of is younger than you are, be gentle. It is easy to hurt other smaller hands, and this won't say about you what you want said. If you're under 15 years old, let the older person initiate (offer) the hand shaking.

If the person is your age or younger, you've the choice of whether to shake hands or not. If the other person offers, of course, you'll respond by offering your hand. Otherwise be guided by how you feel about the meeting.

If you're shaking the hand of a person who is older, let that person do the arm pumping. You just hang on and follow along. Remember, look into the eyes.

If you're a male, always allow a girl or woman to initiate the hand shaking. Never start this ritual yourself.

Be firm, but not hard with the hand. If you're a girl, these last few rules are reversed for you. Practice with your father or brothers. If you're about 15, you can initiate this ritual as you see fit.

- C. Don't pump your arm when you shake hands. You'll run into people who'll pump your arm like it's an old-fashioned water pump and they're trying to get water to flow out of your mouth. Resist doing this yourself. One or two slight pumps is fine, but remember, *slight*.

2. Looking at the Person

When we look at people's eyes and at their faces when we meet them, we're saying to them: *I like what I see*. Do this. It's important. If you're like the rest of us in this respect, you'll have a tendency to look away from the faces of the people you meet after first establishing eye contact. It'll take some practice to get over this. Work on it. It'll pay big dividends (rewards). Later in the "exercise" portion of this activity, you should design one exercise to practice this very important skill.

3. The First Words You Say

"It's nice to meet you," is always good. This, accompanied by looking into the eyes and smiling as you offer to shake hands, will go a long way in saying what you feel about the meeting.

It's especially important to use the other person's name when you meet for the first time. We all like to hear our names spoken. This says that you heard the name in the introduction, cared enough to remember it, and that you think the name is important. Try this with an older person while shaking hands and smiling: "It's nice to meet you, Mr. Jones."

With a person younger than you are, you might say something similar to: "It's nice to meet you, Billy," and immediately follow it with, "Where do you go to school?" or, "How long have you been homeschooling?" or "Did you like the meeting today?" This will give the younger person something to talk about and will make the meeting less tense. Notice how much more comfortable you feel meeting older people when they give you an opening to speak in this way.

You should practice using the names of people you've just met in the conversations that follow the meetings. This will greatly impress the people you're talking with and will help you remember their names so that the next time you see them you'll be able to use their names. There might be a conversation similar to the following one where you're meeting a person we'll call Mr. Jones. Notice how your use of Mr. Jones' name sounds comfortable. And it will be comfortable for you to do this with just a little practice:

"How do you do, Mr. Jones? It's nice to meet you."

"Hi, Bill. Your dad has said some wonderful things about the skills you're picking up in your homeschooling."

"Thanks, that's good to hear, Mr. Jones. Learning at home's a great opportunity for me. I like it lots better than when I was in school in town."

"How long have you been doing this, Bill?"

"Three years now. Oh, there's my little sister. I've got to catch her to take her home with me. It was good talking to you, Mr. Jones."

This very short conversation should illustrate for you the friendliness and warmth shown by using other people's names when you talk to them.

After you've talked with people you've just met, you'll have another opportunity to let them know that you've enjoyed meeting them. You can again smile, use their names and tell them that you enjoyed meeting them. You might try: "It was nice meeting you, Mr. Jones," as you smile and extend your hand.

This will also take some practice. Don't be embarrassed to practice this with your family. All older people had to learn these techniques, and your parents will appreciate that you're learning to do these things.

4. How You Stand

It will help you understand that your stance talks about the kind of person you are and how you feel about the meeting if you watch the way other people stand when they're meeting and talking together.

I would think that you'd want to be seen as a person who feels good about the meeting and who has a good self-image. This means that, by the way you stand, you're saying two things to the person you're meeting:

A. I'm interested, eager, and glad that I'm meeting you.

B. I like myself, and I'm ready to like you.

You can say these things if you stand erectly. This sounds like Mom saying “Stand up straight,” and it is. But it’s important because of what it says about you.

You might want to practice stepping forward one short step as you offer your hand. This lets the other person know that you’ve confidence in the meeting and in yourself. If you hang back and let the other person step forward to meet you, you’re saying just the opposite.

- C. Lean forward a bit when you offer your hand. If you don’t do this, the other person will have to lean forward for both of you, and this might give the message that you’re not eager to make contact with him or her.

5. How You Talk With Your Face

There’s nothing you can do that will be more important in saying that you enjoy meeting someone than in showing your teeth. Smile! This may sound dumb and phony, but it’s not and it’s a very powerful message about how you feel. We all like to be liked. We like to feel that other people approve of us. A smile does this. It says: “I like what I see, and I like meeting you.”

A good place to observe these patterns of behavior as people meet is just before and after church. People often shake hands then as they greet each other. Your minister will be shaking hands with many people after the service. Watch what he does in relationship to the five points listed at the start of this exercise:

- A. Watch how he holds his hand when he’s offering it to others. Notice how differently he shakes the hands of the women.
- B. Watch very carefully the way he uses his eyes when he greets people. Does he look at their eyes, or lips, or both, and when does he do this?
- C. Note what he says to people. Does he speak differently to people he has just met than he does to people he’s known for some time? What’s the difference? You’ll find that he uses people’s names as he greets them.
- D. Make notes of the different ways people stand when they meet. Make notes about what you felt they were saying about themselves by the ways they used their bodies.
- E. Notice the smiles. Do they smile only when they’re greeting or do the smiles carry over into their conversations? What do you think the difference is in how the people feel about their meetings?

Exercise

In order for you to learn this skill, you'll have to practice meeting people a good number of times. Since I can't plan these meetings for you, you'll have to design the exercises to practice these principles.

You might ask your family to help you practice and then ask each member to introduce you to people. You could even ask them to notice how well you do on each of the points you're practicing. You could keep notes on how well you do and what the reactions are of the other people. This will tell you how much practice you still need.

If you ask your parents or friends to introduce you to people they know but you don't know, so that you might practice, they'll be happy to help you. Don't be discouraged if the first few meetings feel awkward. The more times you practice meeting people, the better you'll get at it.