



**ERICSA 62ND ANNUAL
TRAINING CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION**

MAY 18-22, 2025

NORFOLK

VIRGINIA



Effective Communication: **Building Stronger Connections and Clearer Messages**





**Georgia Department
of Human Services**
Division of Child Support Services



MONICA HALL

DIRECTOR, TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT





**Georgia Department
of Human Services**
Division of Child Support Services



HAROLYN DAVIS-MCKEE

TRAINING MANAGER,
SPECIAL PROJECTS



TIFFANY KAY

TRAINING DEVELOPMENT
SPECIALIST III



Training Objectives



1

Identify

Identify various communication styles and understand how they influence interactions.

2

Learn

Learn and apply active listening techniques to improve understanding and engagement.

3

Adjust

Adjust communication approaches based on audience needs

4

Identify

Identify and address common obstacles to ensure smoother exchanges.

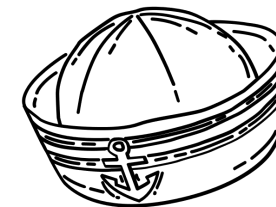
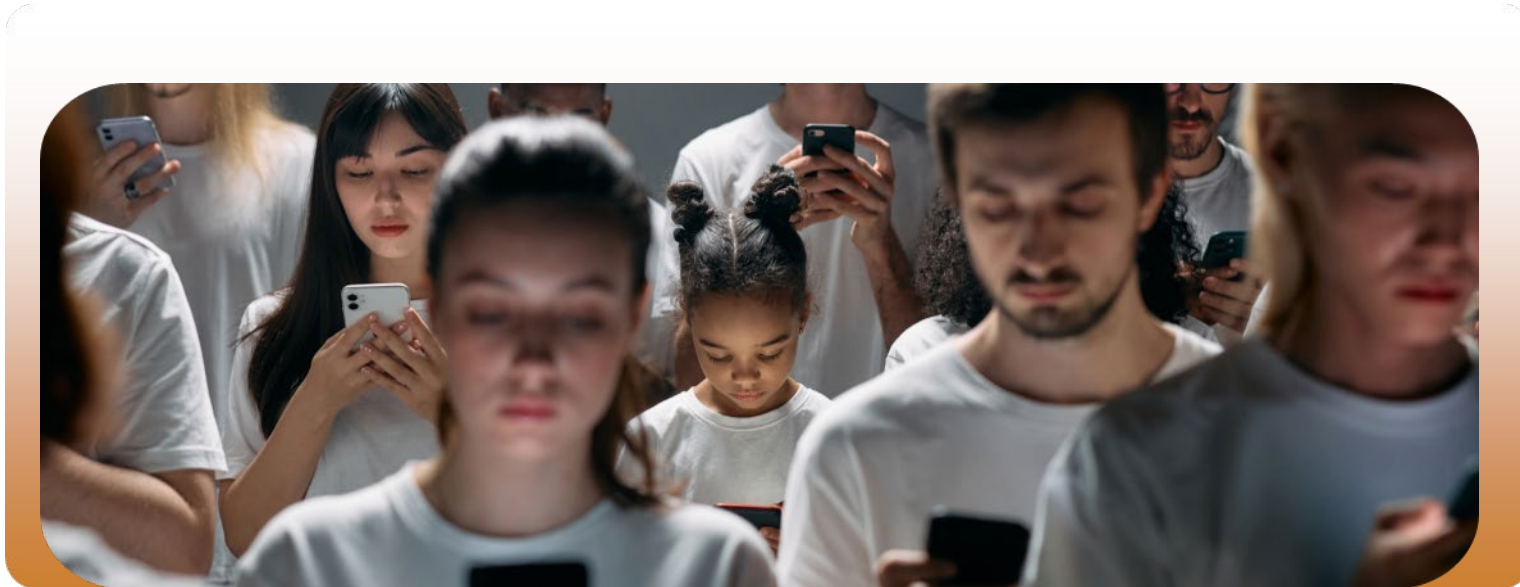




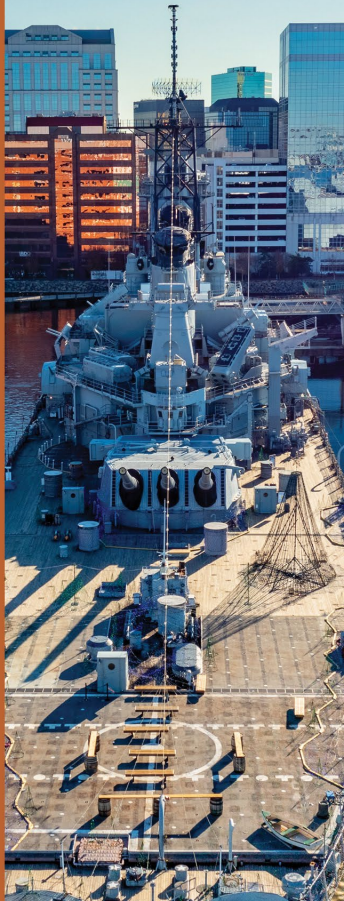
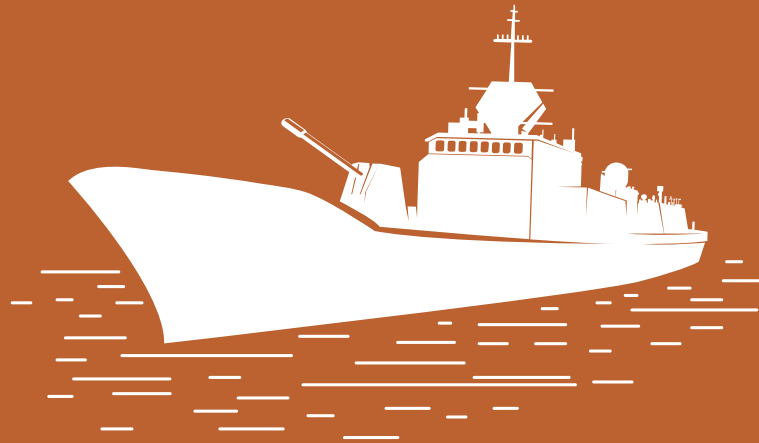
- **Passive**
- **Aggressive**
- **Passive Aggressive**
- **Assertive**



Join Us At Menti.Com

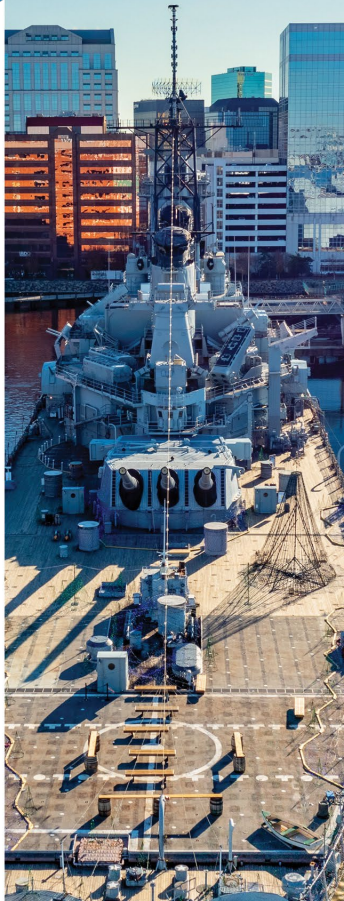


The Power of Active Listening





Why Active Listening Matters



Why Active Listening Matters



Builds Trust

- When people feel heard and valued, it strengthens relationships and encourages openness.

Enhances Understanding

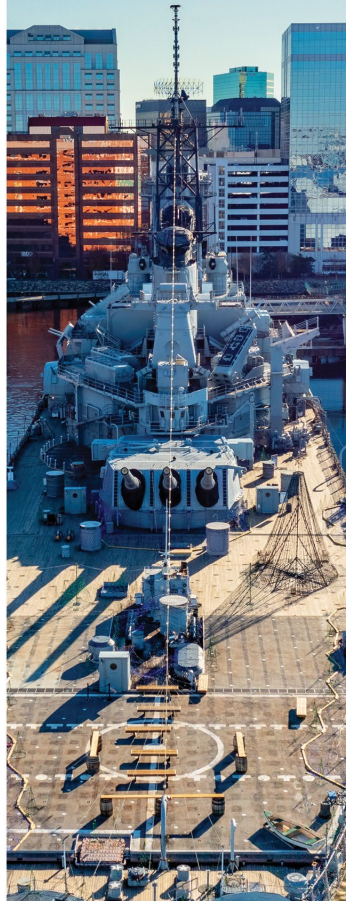
- This deeper understanding helps in interpreting messages accurately, leading to more meaningful conversations.

Reduces Miscommunication

- By focusing on the speaker and clarifying any ambiguities, active listening minimizes the chances of misunderstandings.

Boosts Retention

- Retention is essential for follow-up conversations and for applying what you've learned in real-life situations.



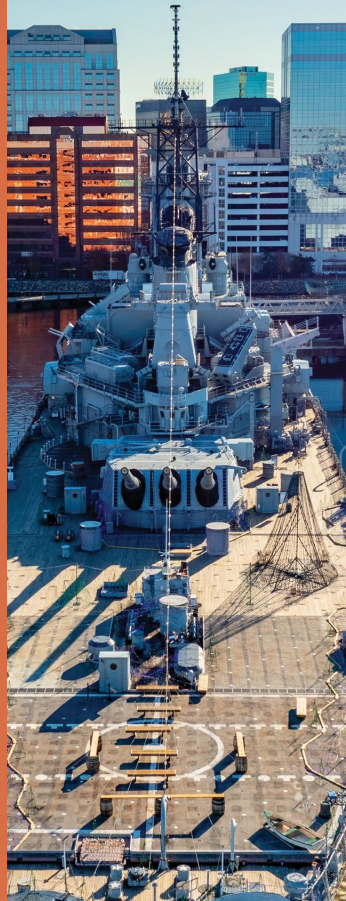
Differences between Hearing and Listening

Hearing

This is a passive process involving the perception of sound. Hearing does not require any effort or intention

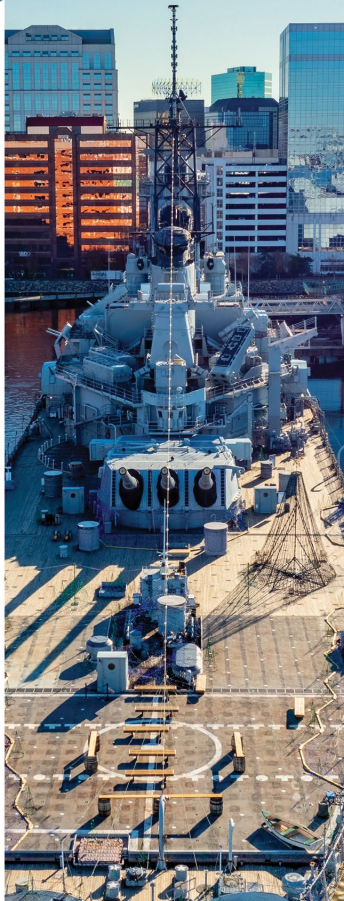
Listening

In contrast, listening is an active, intentional process. It requires mental engagement, attention, and effort to understand the message being conveyed.





Key Techniques for Active Listening



Key Techniques for Active Listening



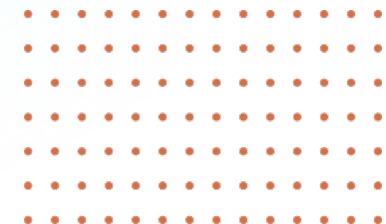
Paraphrasing



Clarifying



Summarizing





PARAPHRASING





Paraphrasing

Maintaining Meaning

- The core message should remain the same, even though the wording changes.

Using Your Own Words

- It requires you to express the ideas differently, often simplifying or clarifying complex language.

Reflecting Understanding

- Paraphrasing shows that you have understood the speaker's message and are actively engaged in the conversation.





CLARIFYING



Clarifying



ASKING QUESTIONS

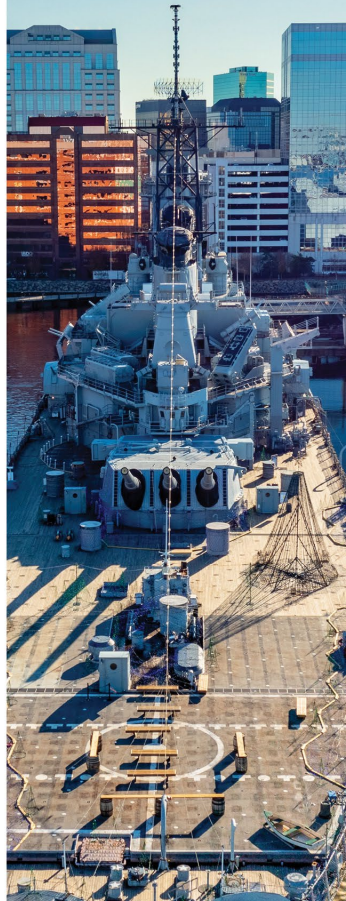
Posing open-ended questions to gather more information or to clarify ambiguous points.

RESTATING

Repeating or rephrasing what the other person said to confirm your understanding, similar to paraphrasing.

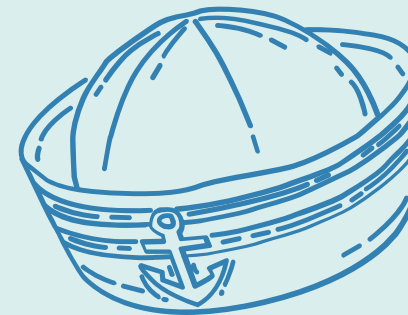
PROVIDING EXAMPLES

Offering specific examples or analogies to help illustrate or explain concepts more clearly.





SUMMARIZING



SUMMARIZING



IDENTIFYING MAIN IDEAS

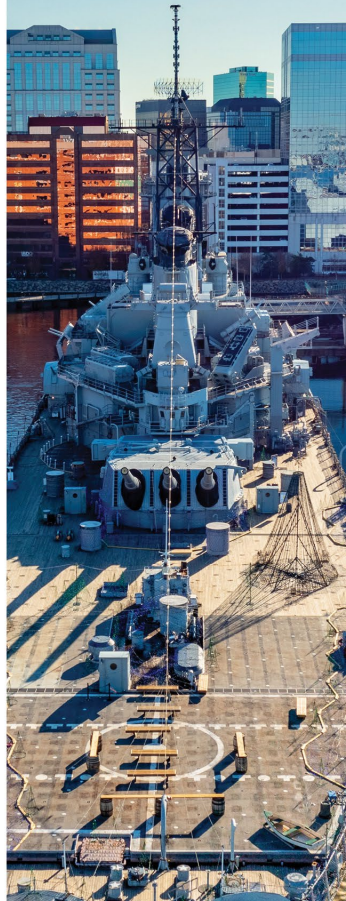
Focus on the most important concepts or arguments presented in the conversation or text.

CONDENSING INFORMATION

Reduce lengthy explanations or discussions into shorter, more digestible statements without losing the core meaning.

ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

Encourage feedback or questions to ensure the summary resonates with the audience and fosters discussion.



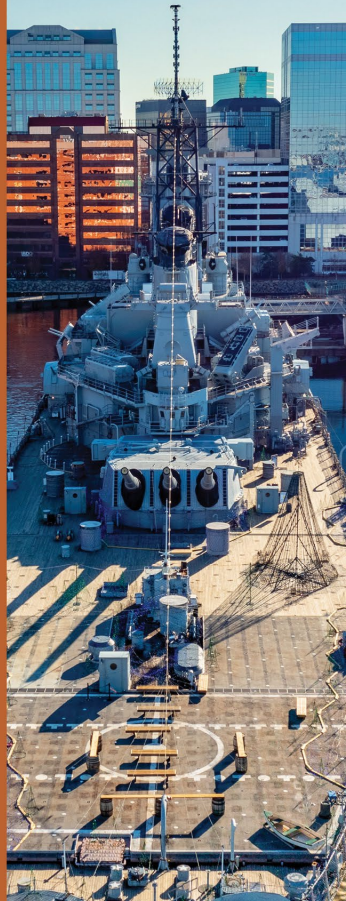
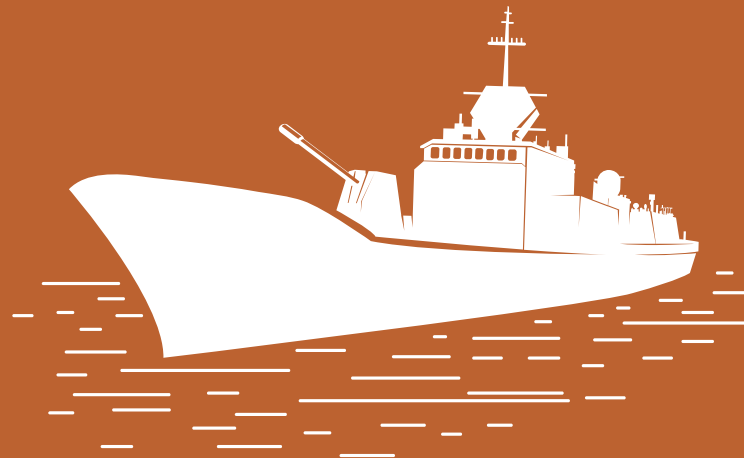


INTERACTIVE LISTENING BREAKOUT

Pair up with a partner. Take turns guiding each other through the process of tying a tie. One person will give step-by-step instructions while the other follows them. After completing the task, switch roles and repeat the process.

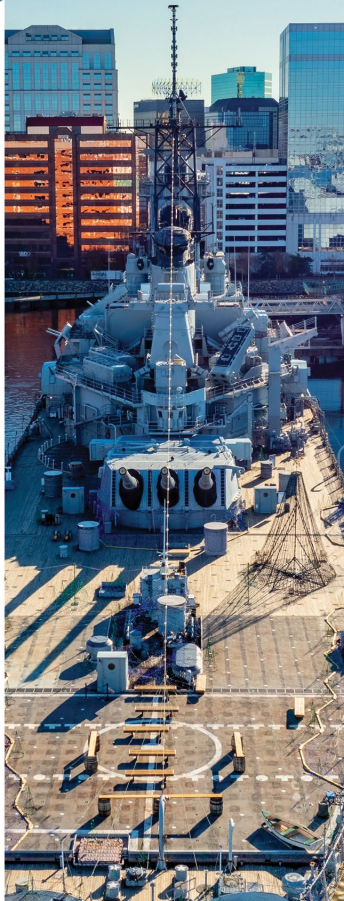


Adapting Communication for Different Audiences





Recognizing Your Audience's Needs



Recognizing Your Audience's Needs



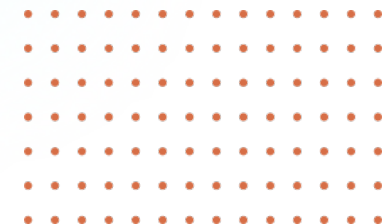
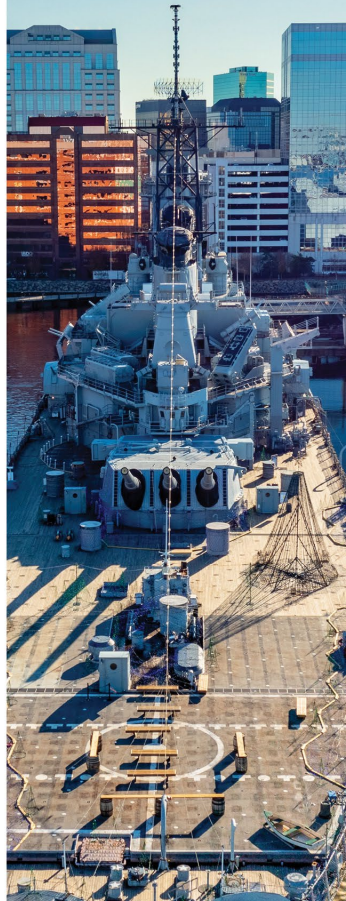
Adjusting Tone



Demographics



Approach





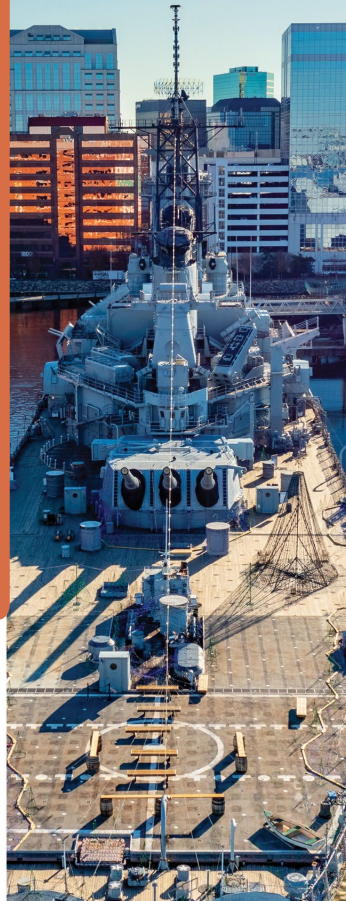
ADJUSTING YOUR TONE



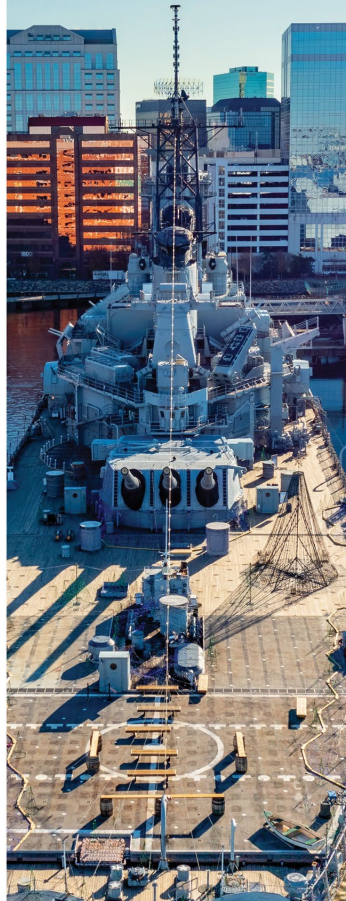


WHAT IT IS

Adjusting your tone refers to modifying the way you speak your pitch, volume, pace, and emotional quality to better connect with your audience.



What it looks like



Engagement

- A well-adjusted tone can capture attention and keep your audience engaged.



Clarity and Understanding

- Speaking more slowly or clearly when discussing complex topics

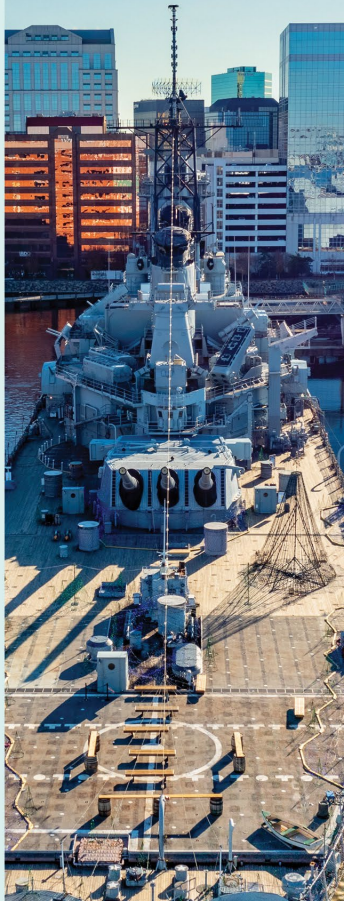


Feedback Sensitivity

- Being aware of your audience's reactions can guide how you adjust your tone.



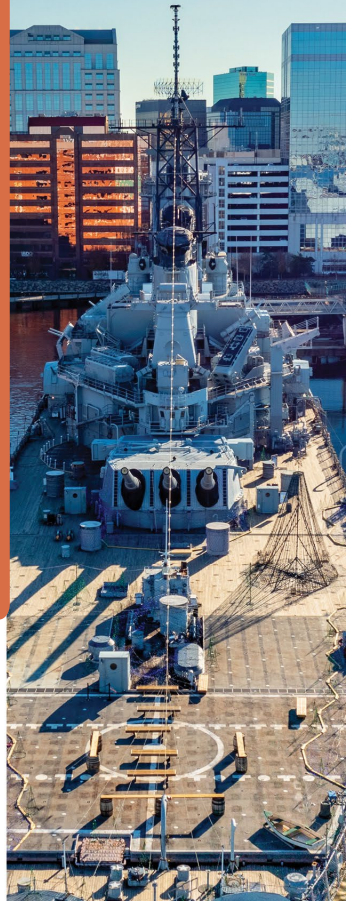
DEMOGRAPHICS





WHAT IT IS

- Demographics refers to statistical data that describe specific characteristics of a population, including factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, education level, income, marital status, and geographic location.
- Understanding the age, background, education level, and cultural context of your audience helps tailor your message appropriately.



What it looks like

Communication Style

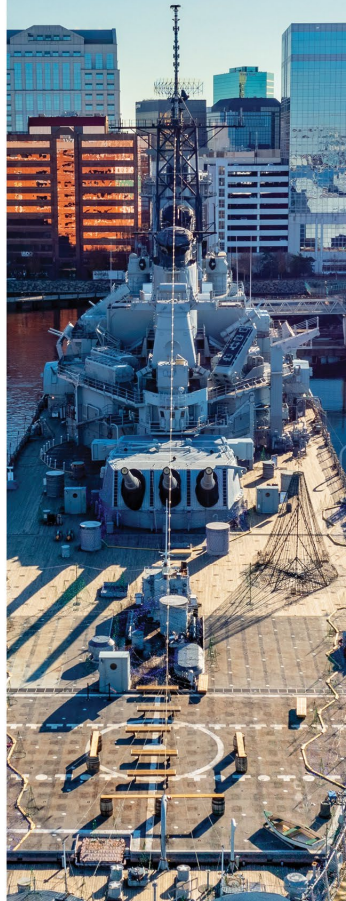
- Different demographic groups may have varying preferences for communication styles. For example, younger audiences might prefer informal, digital communication, while older audiences may appreciate more traditional formats.

Expectations and Interests

- Understanding the demographics can help you anticipate what your audience is likely to find interesting or valuable, allowing you to focus on topics that align with their needs.

Problem-Solving

- Recognizing the challenges specific demographic groups face enables you to address their pain points directly, making your message more impactful and relevant.





APPROACH



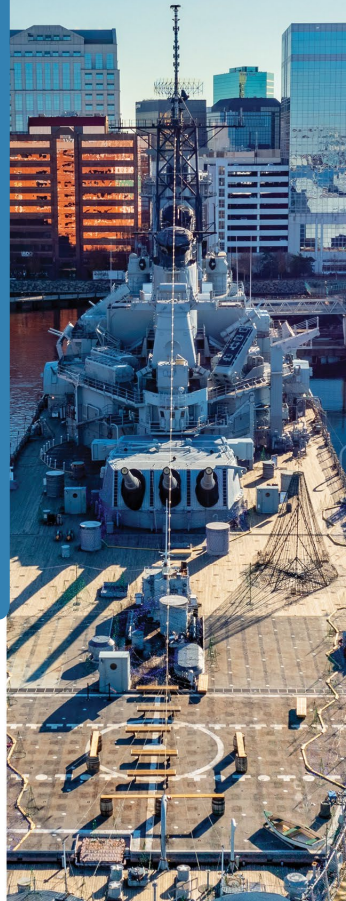


WHAT IT IS

Approach refers to the overall strategy or method you use to engage with your audience. It encompasses your tone, style, content, and how you present your ideas.



APPROACH



What it looks like



Tailored Content

- Understanding your audience allows you to customize your message to their interests, knowledge level, and expectations.

Engagement Techniques

- Different approaches—such as storytelling, interactive elements, or relatable examples—can help capture and maintain your audience's attention.

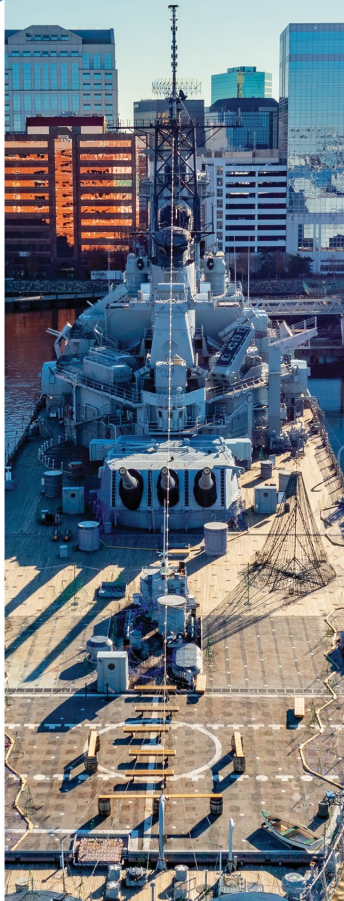
Cultural Sensitivity

- A considerate approach accounts for cultural differences in communication styles.

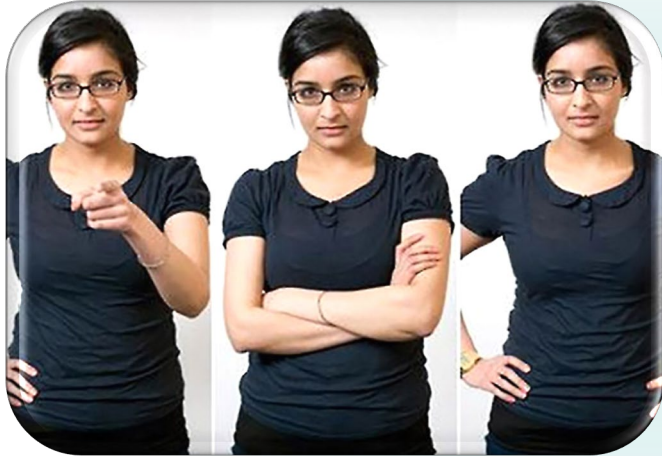




Verbal vs. Non-Verbal Communication



Verbal vs. Non-Verbal Communication



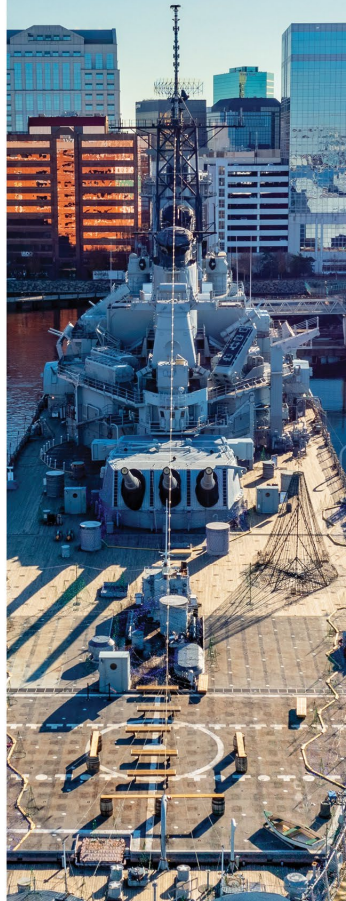
Body Language



Facial Expressions

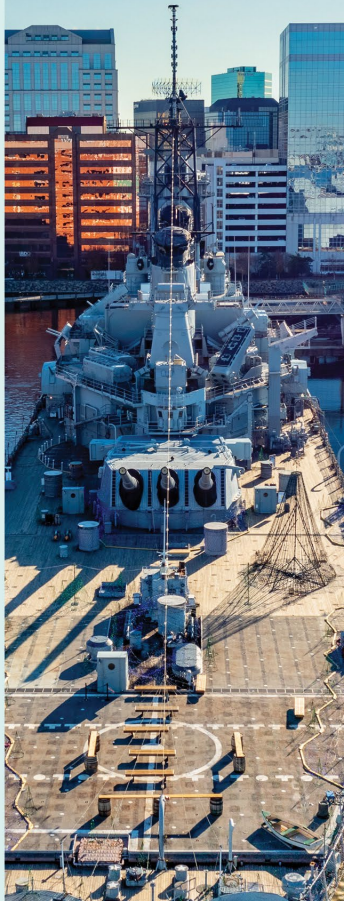


Vocabulary Affects





BODY LANGUAGE



What it is



The non-verbal signals that individuals use to communicate their feelings, thoughts, and intentions through physical behavior. This includes gestures, posture, eye contact, proximity, and movements.



What it looks like

Maintaining Eye Contact:

- Conveys confidence, attentiveness, and engagement.

Open Posture:

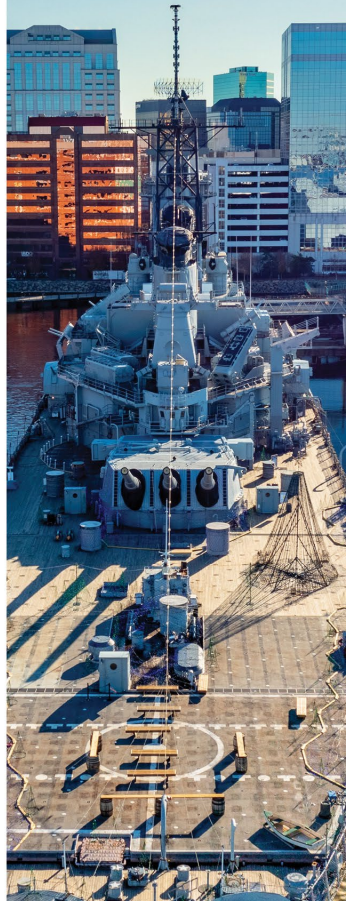
- Arms and legs uncrossed; suggests openness and confidence

Nodding:

- Indicates agreement or understanding.

Facing Someone Directly:

- Shows interest and engagement.





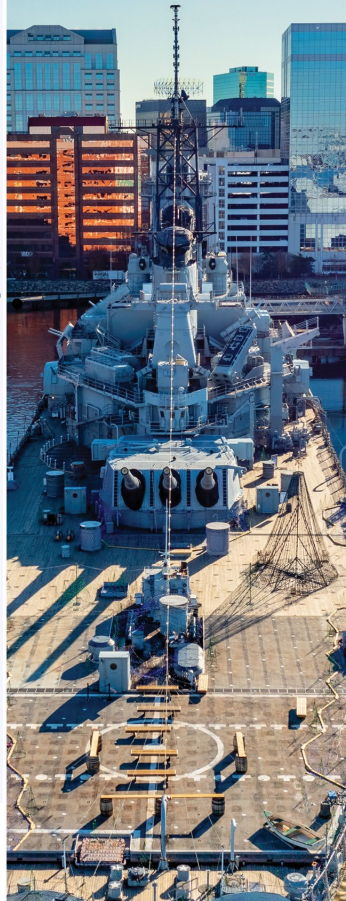
FACIAL EXPRESSIONS





What it is

Facial expressions are the movements and positions of the muscles in the face that convey emotions, feelings, and reactions. They are a vital form of non-verbal communication, allowing individuals to express a wide range of emotions.





What it looks like

Smiling:

- Indicates happiness, friendliness, or approval

Frowning:

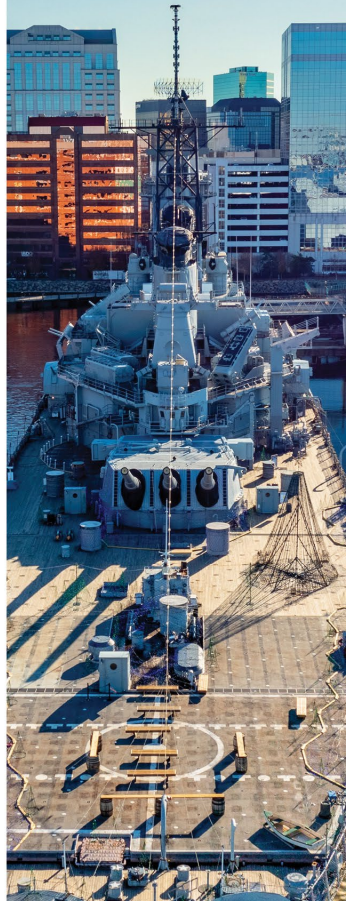
- Shows disapproval, confusion, or concern

Raised Eyebrows:

- Suggest surprise or curiosity

Narrowed Eyes:

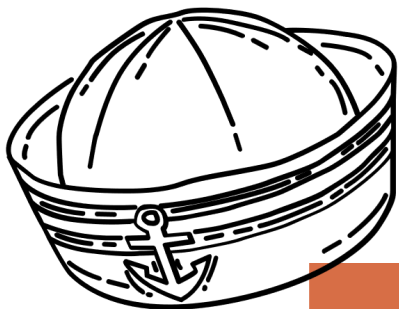
- Often indicates skepticism, anger, or focus





VOCABULARY AFFECTS





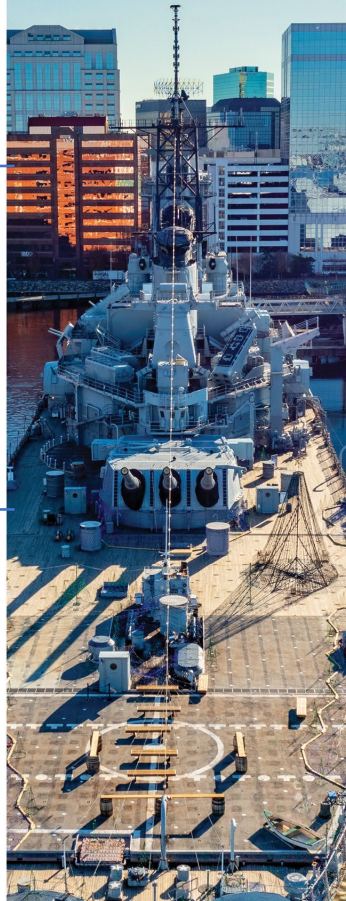
What it is

Vocabulary refers to the set of words and phrases that a person uses or understands. It encompasses not only the words themselves but also their meanings, connotations, and proper contexts for use. Vocabulary is a critical component of verbal communication, and it can also influence non-verbal communication in several ways.





What it looks like



A well-chosen vocabulary helps ensure that your message is clear and easily understood by your audience. Using precise terms can reduce misunderstandings.

The words you choose set the tone of your message. Formal vocabulary conveys professionalism, while informal language can create a relaxed atmosphere. The right tone helps establish rapport with your audience.

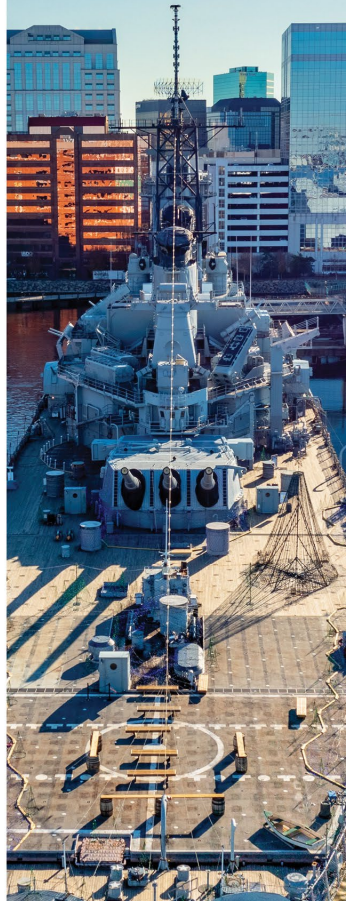
The words you use can complement your body language and facial expressions. For example, saying "I'm excited!" with an enthusiastic tone and a big smile reinforces the message.

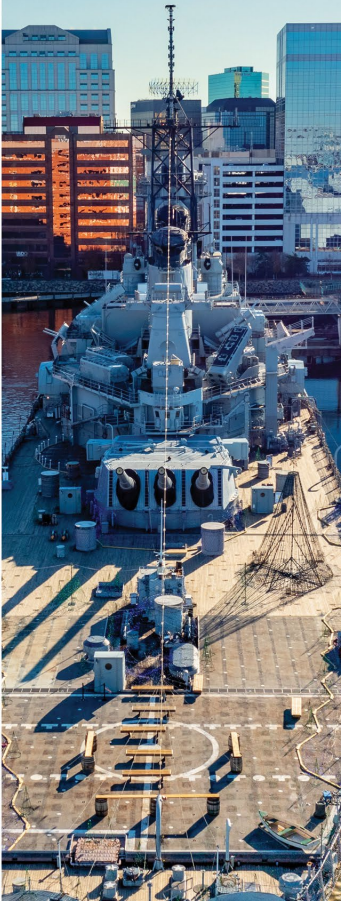


P.A.U.S.E.



P	Pay attention to what's happening beneath words (i.e., tone, body language)
A	Acknowledge and be aware of your reaction (i.e., defending, justifying, interpreting, judging).
U	Understand there are other possible explanations and interpretations.
S	Search for the most constructive, empowering, or productive way to deal with the situation.
E	Execute the plan that is mutually agreed upon.

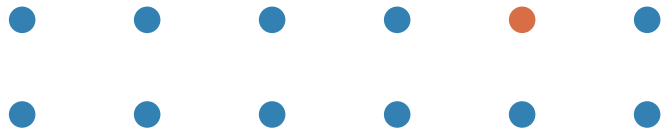






Case Study

Discussion



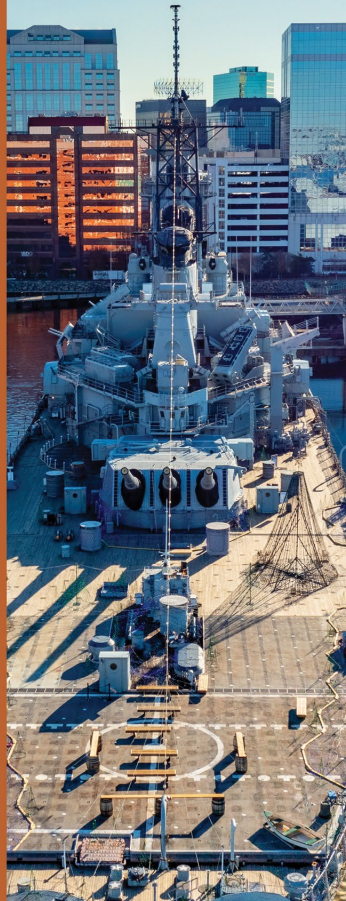
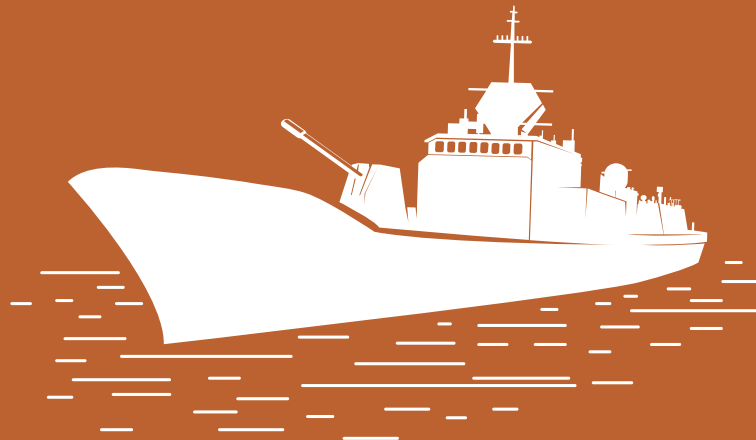


Why **Adapting** Communication **Matters**



- **Addresses Diverse Needs:** Different individuals have varying preferences, backgrounds, and levels of understanding; adapting ensures that you meet those diverse needs
- **Facilitates Collaboration:** In team settings, adapting communication can lead to more effective collaboration, as team members feel heard and valued.
- **Promotes Inclusivity:** Adapting communication fosters a sense of belonging and inclusivity, making everyone feel valued and respected.

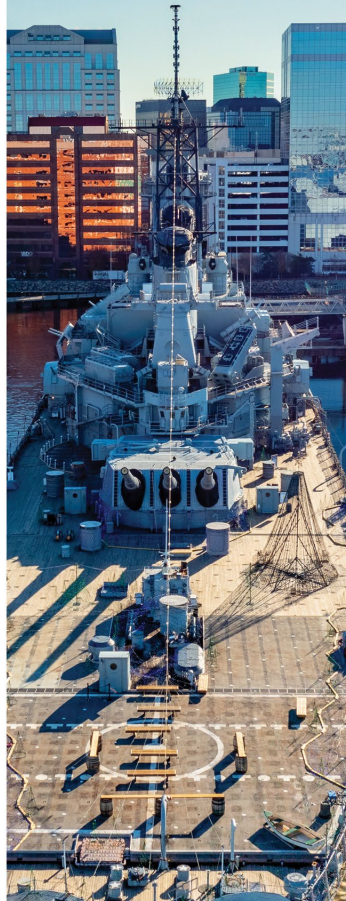
Overcoming Communication Barriers





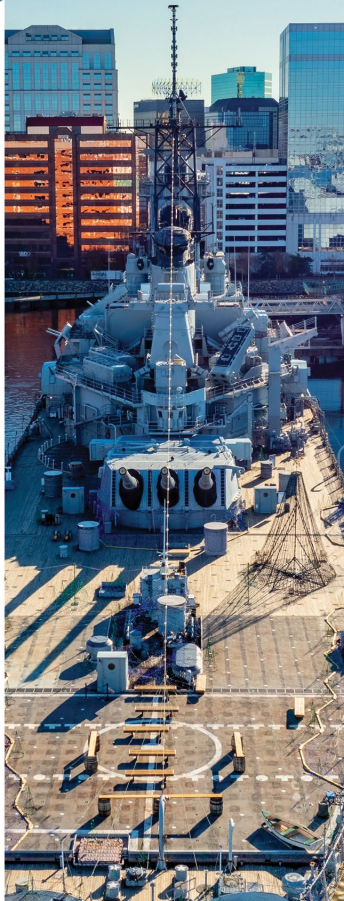
WHAT ARE COMMUNICATION ROADBLOCKS?

Definition: Communication roadblocks are obstacles that prevent clear and effective messaging.





Common Communication Roadblocks



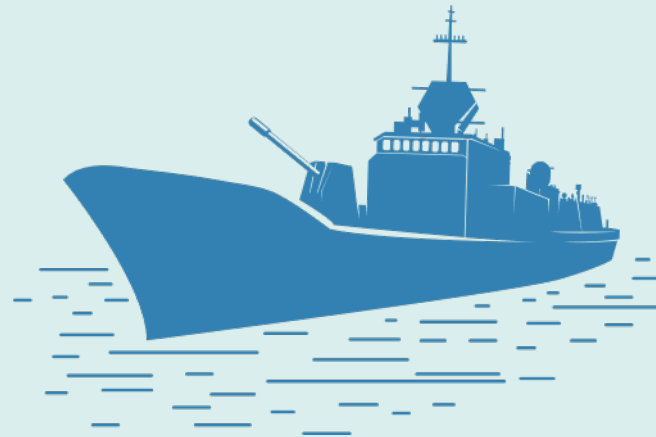
Common Communication Roadblocks

- Misinterpretation
- Cultural differences
- Emotional barriers



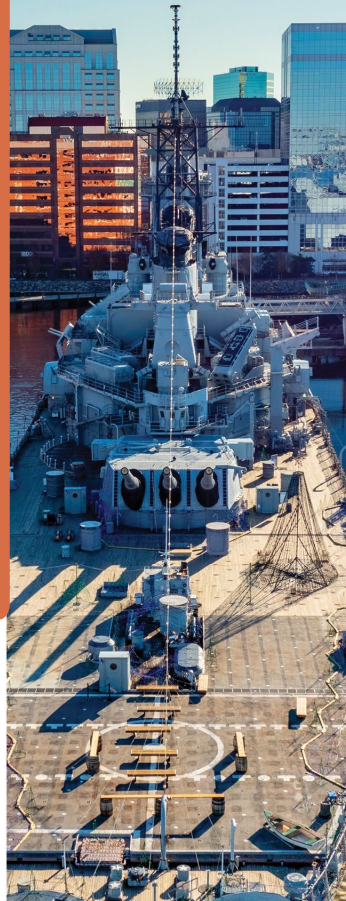


Misinterpretation



WHAT IT IS

- Misunderstanding words, tone, or intent.
- Clients may interpret legal terms differently.
- Written communication (emails, letters) can lack context



How to overcome it:

Use simple, clear language

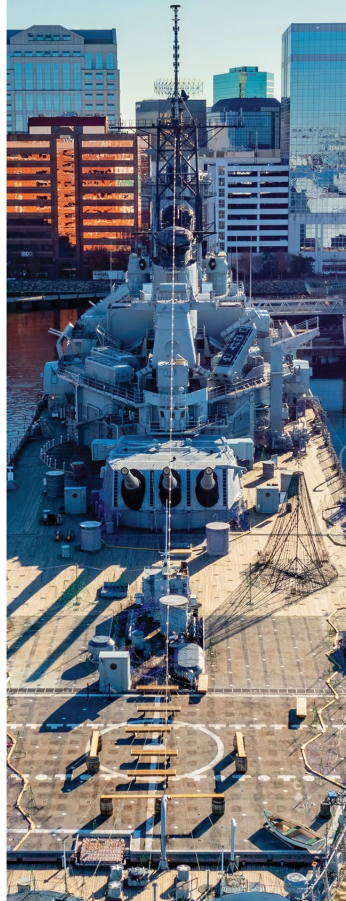
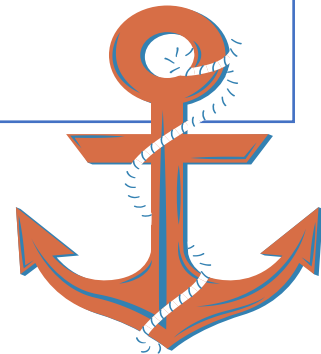
- Avoid jargon.

Summarize and confirm

- Ask, *“Can you repeat in your own words what we discussed?”*

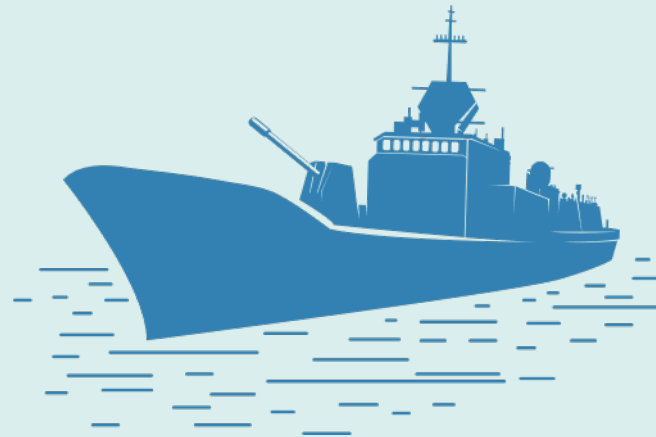
Be aware of tone

- What you say and how you say it matters.



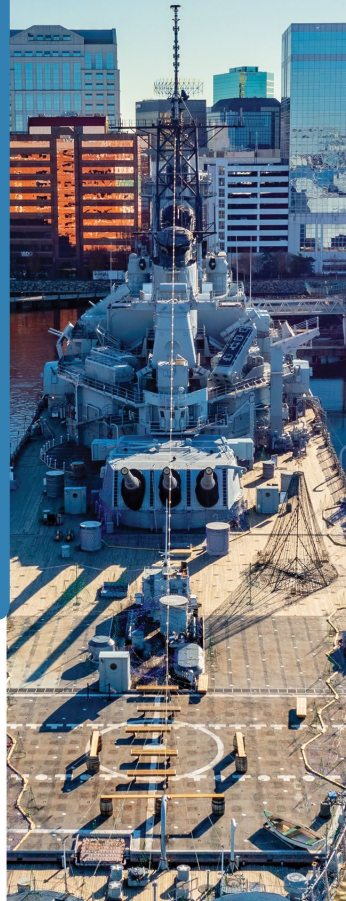
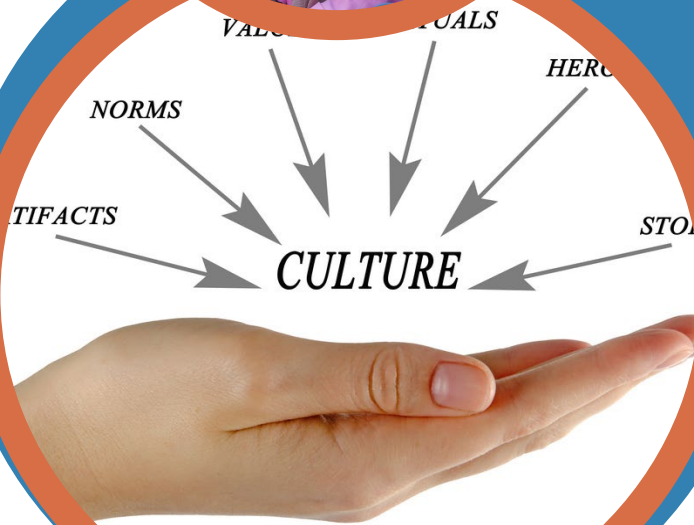


Cultural Differences



WHAT IT IS

- Different values, beliefs, and communication styles across cultures.
- Body language, eye contact, and personal space vary.
- Language barriers may exist.



How to overcome it:



Be culturally aware

Respect different perspectives.

Ask rather than assume

Clarify cultural preferences when appropriate.

Use **interpreters or translated materials** when needed.





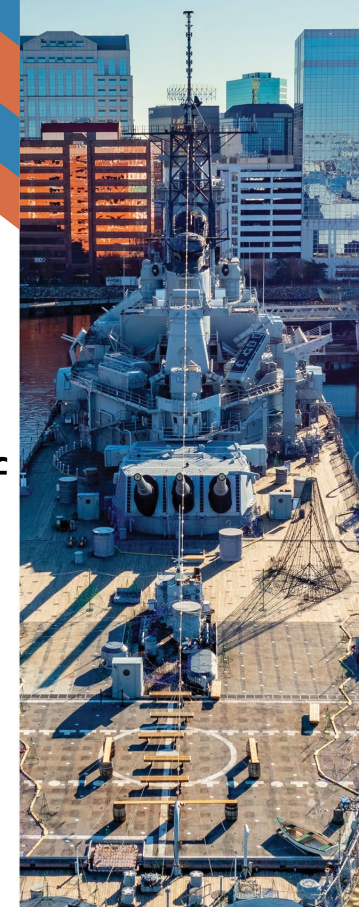
Activity

Cultural Differences Breakout

Pair into groups of four. Discuss the scenario below:

A Middle Eastern client avoids direct eye contact as a sign of respect, but their Western counterpart sees it as dishonesty.

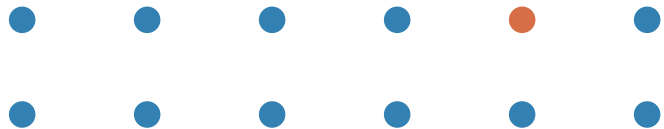
How would you address this situation?





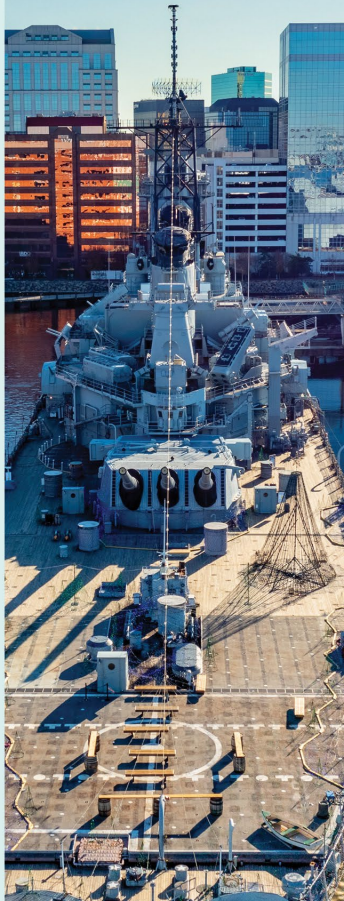
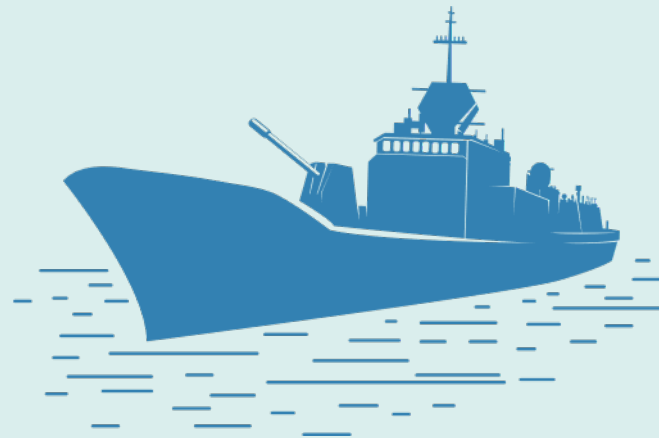
Activity

Discussion





Emotional Barriers

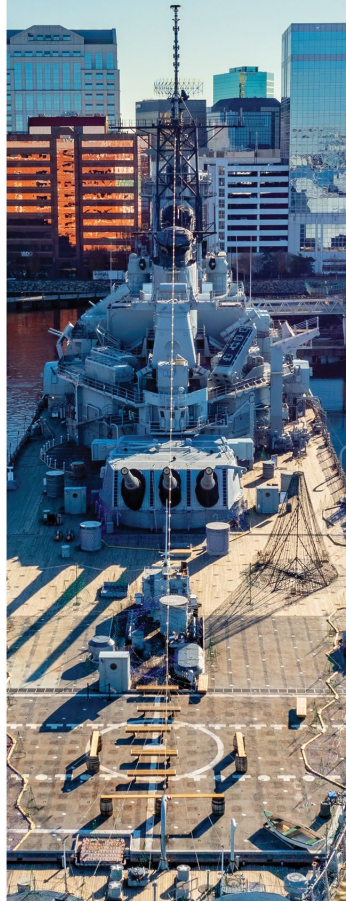


What **it** is

Clients may feel stressed, defensive, or angry about child support situations.

Emotional reactions can block logical discussions.

Professionals may also feel frustrated or overwhelmed.



How to Overcome it

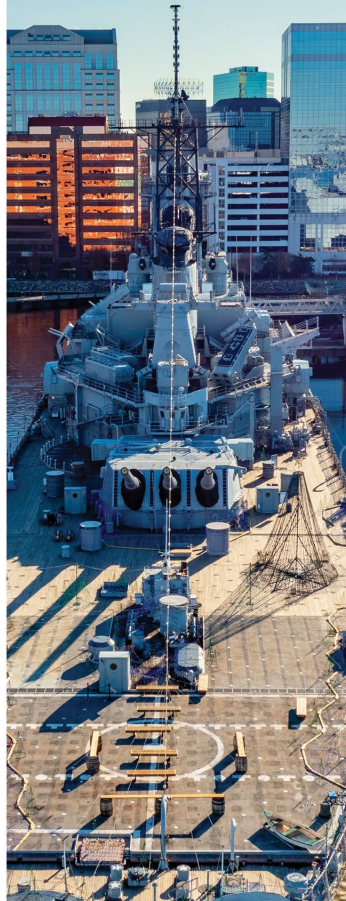
Stay neutral and professional

- Avoid reacting emotionally.

Acknowledge feelings

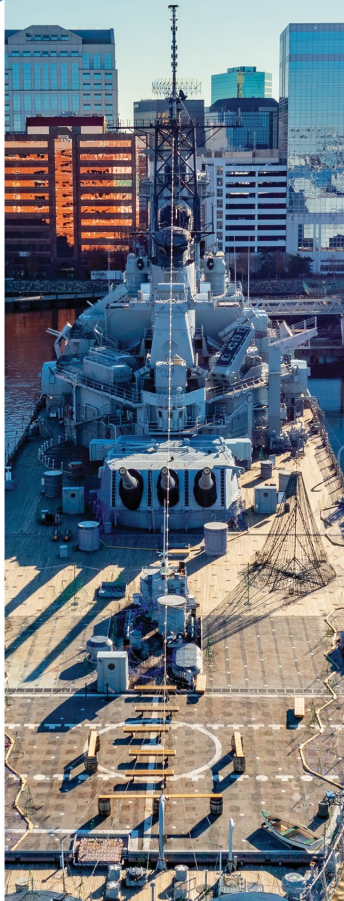
- Say, “I understand this is frustrating.”

Redirect the focus to solutions and next steps.





Strategies for Handling Difficult Customers



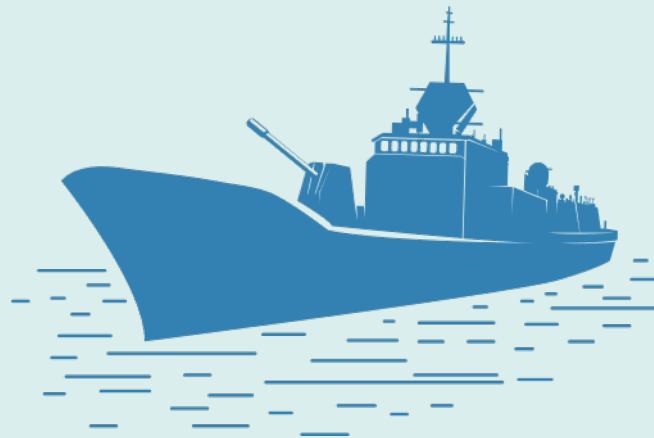
Strategies for Handling Difficult Conversations

- Staying calm
- Using “I” statements
- De-escalation techniques

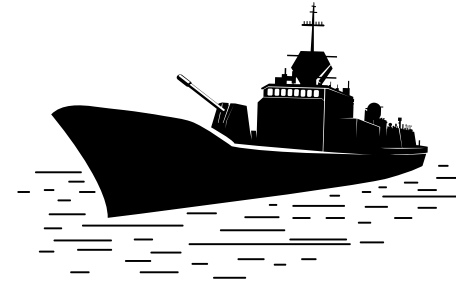




Staying Calm

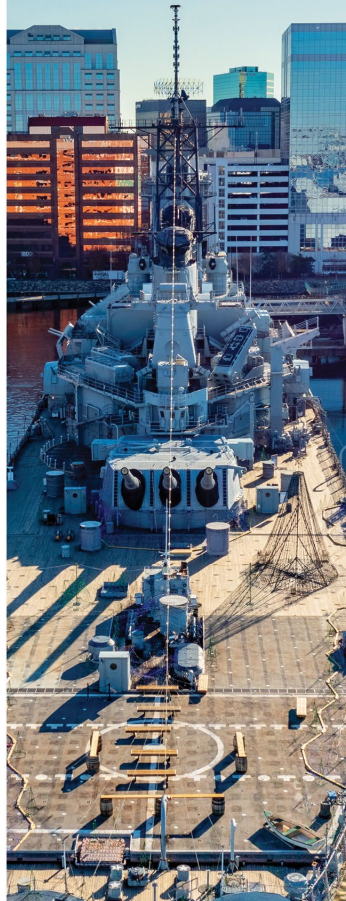


Why it Matters



Emotions can escalate if both parties become defensive.

Staying calm helps **de-escalate** the situation.





How to Stay Calm

- Take a deep breath before responding.
- Use a neutral tone - avoid raising your voice.
- Pause before replying to an emotional comment.

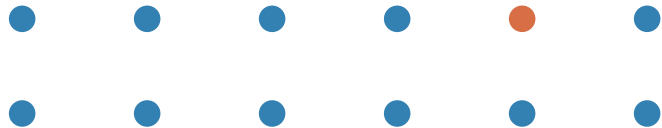






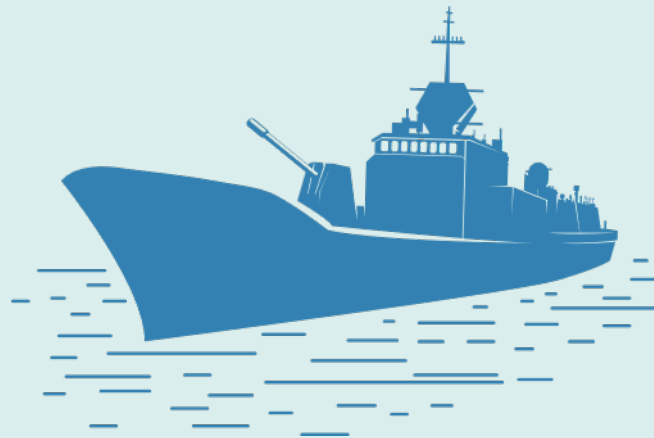
Video

Discussion

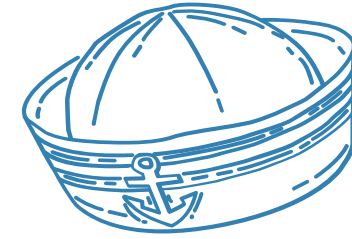




Using “I” Statements

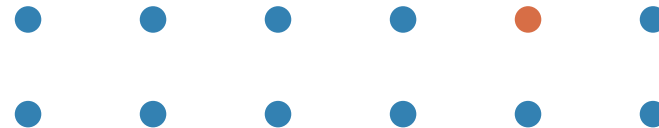


What **it** is



A way to express concerns **without blaming** the other person.

Reduces defensiveness and encourages cooperation.





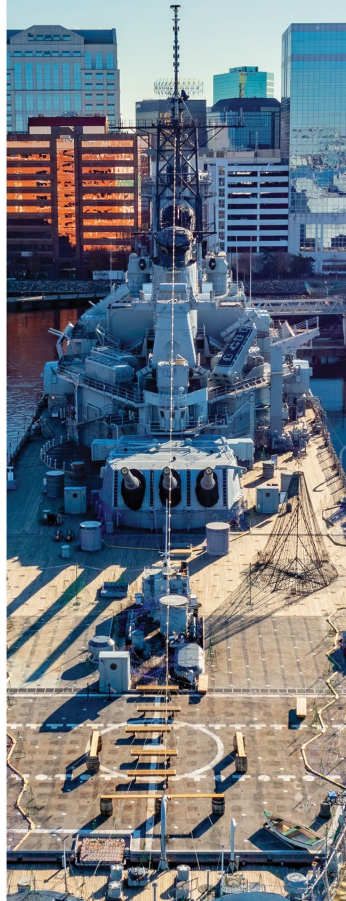
Examples

✗ *“You never provide the right documents.”* → ✗ Blaming, may escalate the conflict.

✓ *“I need accurate documents to move your case forward.”* → ✓
Focuses on solution.

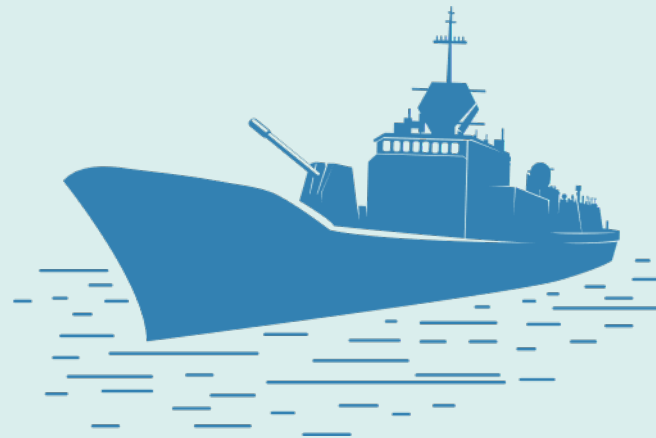
✗ *“You aren’t taking responsibility.”*

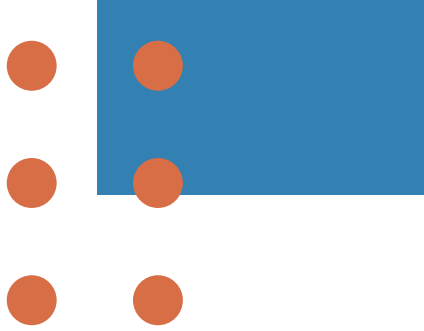
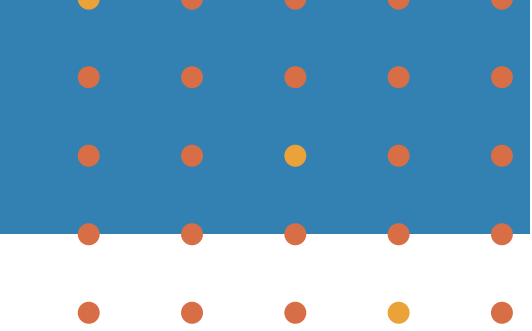
✓ *“I want to help you meet your obligations in a manageable way.”*





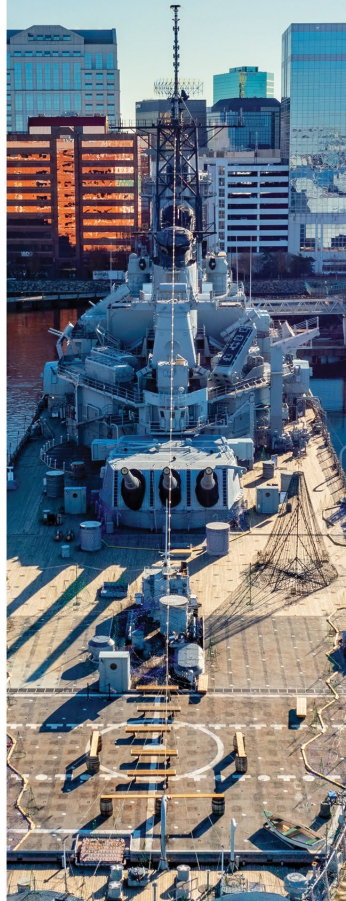
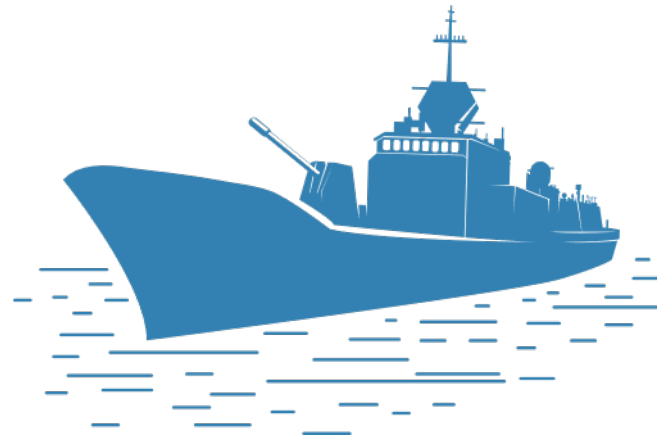
De-escalation Techniques





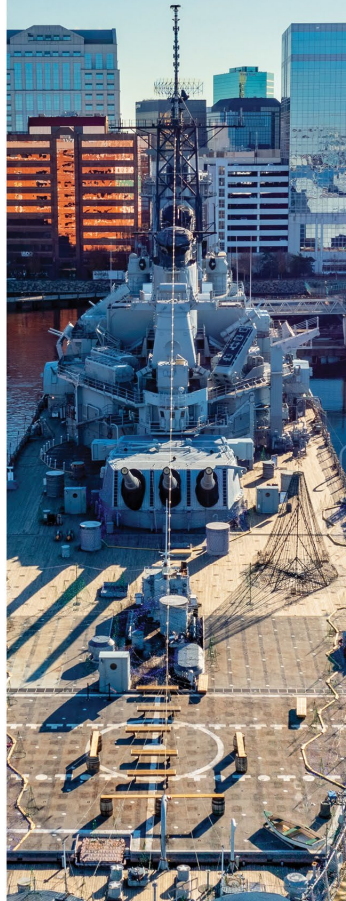
Why **it** Matters

Helps diffuse tension before it escalates into conflict. Encourages productive conversations, even with frustrated clients.

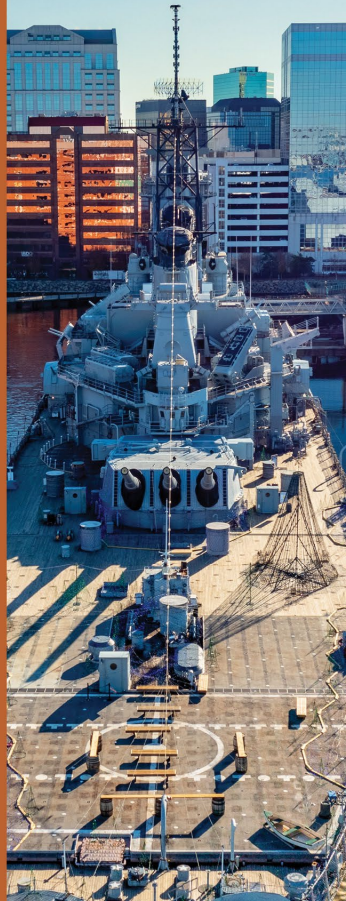
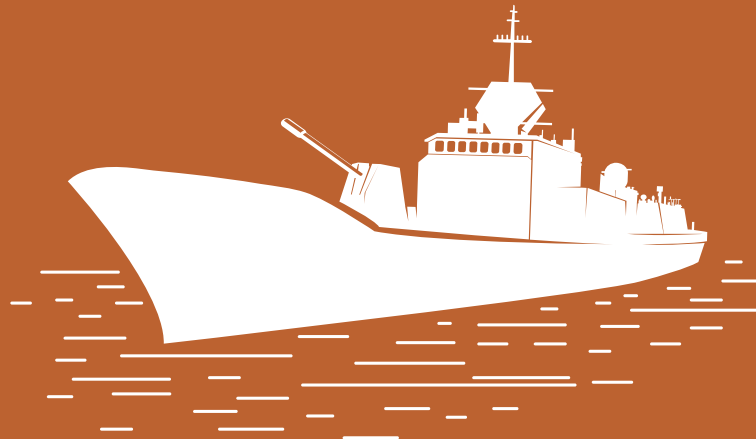


Techniques to Use

- ✓ Active listening: Nod, paraphrase, and show understanding.
- ✓ Lower your volume: Speaking calmly can influence the client's tone.
- ✓ Acknowledge emotions: Say, "I can see that this is upsetting for you."
- ✓ Offer choices: Give options instead of ultimatums.
- ✓ Set clear boundaries: If a client is aggressive, calmly state, "I'm here to help, but I need us to speak respectfully."



Wrap-Up and Action Plan



Developing **a** Personal **Plan**

Step 1 – Self-Assessment

Step 2 – Set SMART Communication Goals

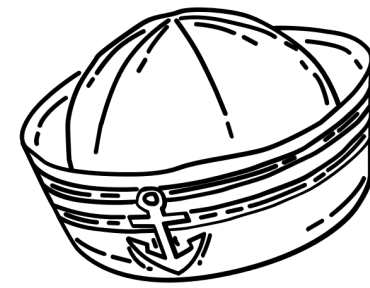
Step 3 – Develop Practical Strategies

Step 4 – Seek Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Step 5 – Commit to Action



Key Takeaways



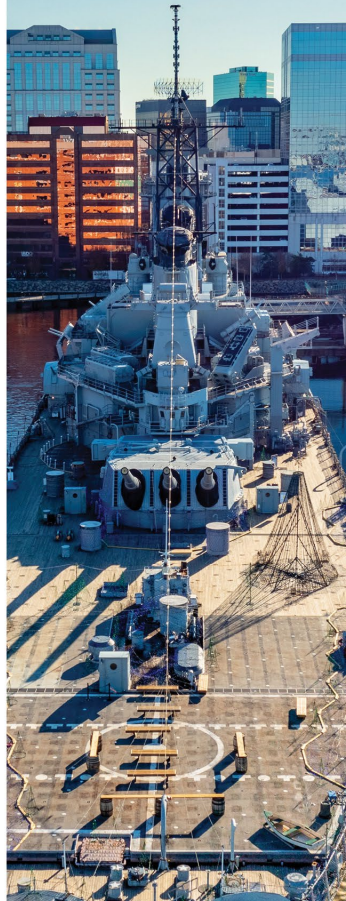
Effective communication is essential for building trust and cooperation between child support professionals and the families they serve.

Active listening and empathy help de-escalate conflicts and create a more supportive environment.

Clarity and simplicity in communication reduce misunderstandings, especially when explaining legal or financial matters.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity ensure respectful and inclusive interactions with diverse clients.

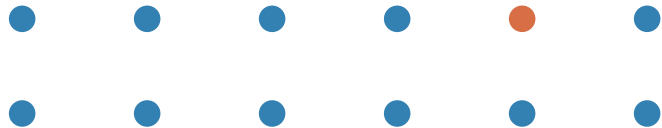
Adaptability in communication styles is key to effectively engaging different personalities and emotional states.





Any

Question?





Thank you for Attending!

We hope you found the content valuable and gained new insights to enhance your skills.

