



Why This Checklist Exists

Most professionals don't lose opportunities because of a lack of technical skill. They lose them because of how — or how poorly — they communicate. A brilliant idea buried in a rambling email, a great candidate who stumbles through interviews, a capable manager who triggers miscommunication in every team meeting — these are not talent problems. They are communication problems.

The challenge is that most communication mistakes are invisible to the person making them. You can't see your own blind spots. That's exactly what this audit checklist is designed to fix.

What Problem This Solves

This resource gives you a structured, honest lens to examine your current communication across three professional contexts — written, verbal, and interpersonal. It moves you from vague self-awareness ("I know I should communicate better") to specific, targeted action ("I interrupt people when I'm anxious — here's what I'll do instead").

- Diagnose patterns, not just individual incidents
- Prioritise the fixes that matter most to your career
- Build a personalised communication improvement plan

How to Use This Resource

You can use this checklist in three ways:

1	Read-Through Read once for full awareness of all common mistake categories.
2	Active Audit Tick off each item honestly — mark what applies to you right now.
3	Reference Tool Revisit before high-stakes moments: presentations, appraisals, client calls.

Written Communication Audit

Written communication is the most visible and permanent record of your professional voice. Unlike spoken words, written messages can be re-read, forwarded, and judged out of context. Mistakes here compound quietly — a poorly structured report or an ambiguous email chain creates confusion, erodes trust, and signals disorganisation. Use this section to audit every channel you write in: email, Slack/Teams, reports, proposals, and client documentation.

1

Email & Messaging

- My subject lines clearly state the email's purpose or required action
- I keep emails under 150 words unless detail is genuinely needed
- I never bury the key ask in paragraph three or later
- I avoid replying to all when only one person needs the response
- I re-read emails before sending — especially when I'm emotional
- I use formatting (bullet points, bold) when emails exceed two paragraphs

2

Reports & Documents

- My documents start with a clear executive summary or TL;DR
- I use headings and sub-headings to aid navigation and skimming
- I tailor document depth and vocabulary to the reader's level
- I avoid passive voice constructions that obscure accountability
- Every recommendation in my reports includes a clear "so what" statement
- I proofread for grammar, not just content — errors reduce credibility

3

Slack / Teams / Chat Tools

- I don't use chat tools for complex decisions requiring nuance
- I avoid sending a wall of text in a single message — I chunk it
- I don't ping colleagues outside working hours unless it's genuinely urgent
- I acknowledge messages even when I need time to respond fully



Quick Fix: If your emails often prompt follow-up questions, your writing is likely missing one of three things: a clear ask, sufficient context, or a defined next step. Before sending, check: *What do I need from this person? By when? Do they have everything they need to act?*

Verbal & Presentation Communication Audit

Verbal communication is where careers accelerate or stall in real time. Whether you're presenting to a room of executives, facilitating a team standup, or handling a tough question from a client, your spoken communication reveals your confidence, clarity, and credibility simultaneously. This module audits three distinct verbal contexts — speaking in meetings, formal presentations, and one-on-one professional conversations.

Speaking in Meetings

- I contribute to meetings with clear, concise points — not long preambles
- I don't repeat what's already been said just to appear engaged
- I avoid filler phrases: "um," "basically," "kind of," "you know"
- I don't speak over others, even when I'm excited about my idea
- I state my opinion directly — I don't hedge everything with "maybe" or "perhaps"
- I know when to be quiet and actively listen instead of preparing my next statement
- I ask clarifying questions rather than making assumptions mid-discussion

Presentations & Pitches

- I open with a hook or key insight, not "Today I'll be talking about..."
- My slides support my story — they are not a script I read from
- I can articulate my core message in one crisp sentence
- I use pauses intentionally — silence is a tool, not a void to fill
- I make eye contact across the room, not just at friendly faces
- I handle questions confidently — I say "I don't know, let me find out" rather than bluffing
- I close with a clear call to action or summary, not "That's it from me"

One-on-One Professional Conversations

With Your Manager

- I frame problems with proposed solutions, not just complaints
- I give context before conclusions — not a data dump
- I follow up verbal agreements in writing

With Peers & Colleagues

- I give credit openly and specifically — not vague praise
- I address conflict directly rather than venting to a third party
- I don't use passive-aggressive language under stress

With Clients & Stakeholders

- I avoid jargon the client hasn't introduced first
- I confirm understanding by summarising before acting
- I communicate delays early — not after they become a crisis

Interpersonal & Listening Communication Audit

Of all communication skills, listening is the most underrated and the most misunderstood. Most professionals believe they are good listeners. Research consistently shows they are not. Active listening — not passive hearing — is what builds trust, prevents misunderstanding, and signals respect. This module goes deeper than what you say, into how you receive, process, and respond to what others communicate.



Active Listening

- I give full attention when someone is speaking — device down, eyes present
- I don't finish other people's sentences, even if I know where they're going
- I paraphrase to confirm understanding before responding
- I notice when I've stopped listening and gently refocus



Self-Awareness in Conversation

- I'm aware of my tone — especially under pressure or disagreement
- I don't dominate conversations by speaking for more than 60% of the time
- I can differentiate between reacting and responding
- I notice when I'm being defensive and choose openness instead



Giving & Receiving Feedback

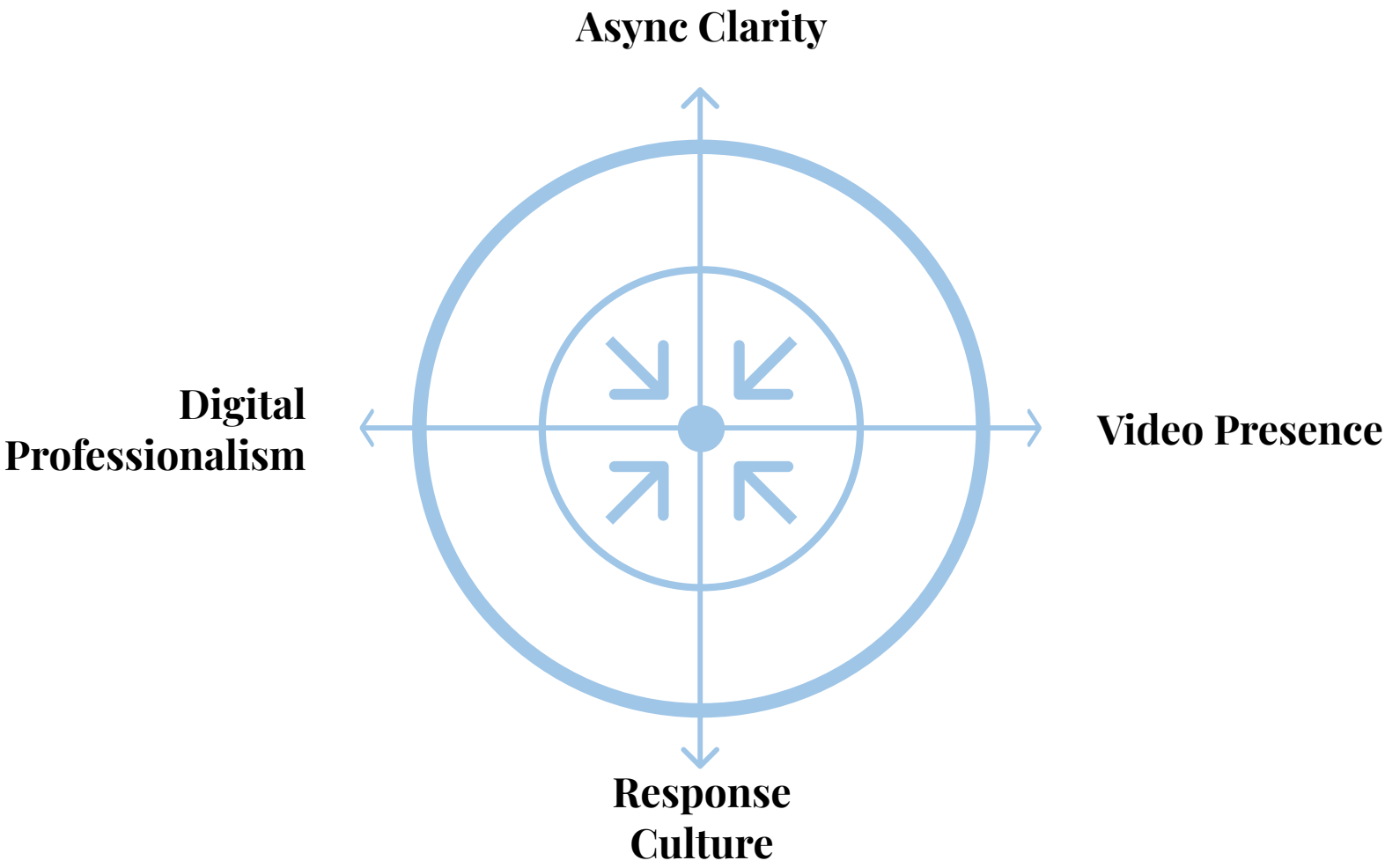
- I give feedback on behaviour and impact — not character or intent
- I receive critical feedback without becoming immediately defensive
- I don't dilute important feedback by sandwiching it in excessive praise
- I follow up after giving feedback to check for understanding



Reflection Prompt: Think of the last difficult professional conversation you had. Did you spend more time planning what you would say, or genuinely trying to understand the other person's position? Your answer reveals your default mode. True communication mastery begins with curiosity, not conclusions.

Digital & Remote Communication Audit

Remote and hybrid work has fundamentally changed what professional communication looks like. The informal corridor conversation is gone. The quick desk check-in is gone. What's left is a trail of written messages, video calls, and asynchronous updates — all of which carry far more weight than before. Many professionals have adapted their tools but not their habits. This module specifically addresses the communication mistakes that are amplified in digital and remote environments.



Each phase of remote communication carries its own risk profile. The most common mistake professionals make is applying in-person communication norms to digital environments — expecting the same response speed, the same tone interpretation, and the same level of context. They are fundamentally different mediums, and each deserves deliberate practice.

1 Async First Mindset - I don't schedule meetings for information that could be a well-written update - My async updates include context, key points, and a clear next step - I set realistic response time expectations with my team	2 Video Call Discipline - I join calls on time and prepared — not scrambling with my audio settings - My camera is on when the context warrants visual presence - I mute myself when not speaking in group calls - I have a distraction-free, professional background for client-facing calls
3 Channel Discipline - I match message urgency to the right channel — I don't use email for urgent asks - I don't escalate to a call when a clear message would do - I archive or summarise important chat decisions so they're findable later	4 Tone Calibration - I re-read messages in a neutral tone before assuming hostility - I use emoji or punctuation deliberately to signal warmth when needed - I don't send emotionally charged messages — I wait, then write

Real-World Application: The Audit in Action

Theory is useful. Watching someone apply it is better. Below is a composite case example drawn from patterns observed across working professionals in client-facing and team-leadership roles. This is not a single person's story — it's a mirror for the patterns this audit is designed to surface.

The Situation

Priya is a mid-level marketing manager, four years into her role. She's technically excellent — her campaigns perform, her data analysis is sharp. But she's been passed over for a senior role twice. Her manager says she needs to "improve her executive presence and stakeholder communication."

Priya doesn't know where to start. She doesn't think she has a communication problem — she responds to every email, attends every meeting, and never misses a deadline. But when she runs this audit, she discovers a pattern:

- Her emails average 400+ words and rarely have a clear ask in the first sentence
- In senior meetings, she waits to be asked before contributing — she never volunteers a strong opinion
- She hedges recommendations with "it depends" and "there are many factors"
- She doesn't interrupt — but she also doesn't push back when she disagrees

The Fixes She Applied

After completing this audit, Priya identified three priority areas and spent 30 days making one targeted change in each:

1 Emails: Lead with the ask

She restructured every email to open with what she needed, from whom, and by when. Follow-up questions dropped by 60%.

2 Meetings: Speak in the first 5 minutes

She committed to contributing one clear point early in each senior meeting — before she could talk herself out of it.

3 Recommendations: Remove the hedge

She replaced "it depends" with "My recommendation is X, because Y. The risk is Z." Stakeholders trusted her more within weeks.



The Lesson: Priya's communication wasn't broken — it was incomplete. She communicated *information* but not *intent*, *effort* but not *direction*, *presence* but not *perspective*. The audit gave her the vocabulary to name what was missing and the structure to fix it systematically.

Your Personal Communication Improvement Plan

Awareness without action is just self-criticism. This worksheet is designed to help you convert your audit findings into a focused, time-bound action plan. Use the findings from the previous modules — wherever you ticked "this applies to me" — and build your personalised 30-day communication sprint.

Week 1: Audit & Identify

Complete all four audit modules. Circle your 3 biggest patterns — not 10, just 3. Prioritise by professional impact.



Week 3: Practice Deliberately

Apply each fix in real professional contexts. Log one example daily — what you did differently and what the response was.

Week 2: Design Fixes

For each pattern, write one specific behavioural change. "Communicate better" is not a fix. "Lead emails with the ask in sentence one" is.

Week 4: Review & Recalibrate

Re-run the three audit sections you flagged. Have your scores improved? Identify your next three priority areas for Month 2.

Fill-In Worksheet: My 3 Priority Fixes

Mistake Pattern	Where It Shows Up	My Specific Fix	Success Metric
Priority #1: _____	e.g., Emails / Meetings / Calls	e.g., "I will open every email with my ask in sentence one"	e.g., Fewer follow-up questions within 2 weeks
Priority #2: _____	e.g., Presentations / 1:1s	e.g., "I will contribute one opinion in every senior meeting"	e.g., Manager notices more engagement
Priority #3: _____	e.g., Feedback / Listening	e.g., "I will paraphrase before responding in every 1:1"	e.g., Colleagues report feeling more heard

Common Mistakes & Their Professional Fixes

Below is a curated reference of the ten most common — and most career-limiting — communication mistakes observed among professionals across industries. This is not a list of abstract failures. These are the specific patterns that show up in performance reviews, exit interviews, and 360-degree feedback. Use this as a quick-reference guide before high-stakes professional moments.

1	✗ Burying the ask The mistake: Writing three paragraphs of context before telling someone what you need. The fix: Lead with the ask. Paragraph one = what you need + by when. Paragraph two = context.
2	✗ Hedging every recommendation The mistake: Saying "it depends" or "there are pros and cons on both sides" without committing to a view. The fix: State your recommendation first. Then add caveats. Leaders want direction, not endless optionality.
3	✗ Over-explaining in meetings The mistake: Sharing every piece of background before making the point — losing the room in the process. The fix: BLUF method — Bottom Line Up Front. State your point. Then offer to provide context if asked.
4	✗ Passive feedback delivery The mistake: Wrapping critical feedback in so much praise that the recipient misses the message entirely. The fix: Be direct and kind simultaneously. "I want to share something that I think will help you — are you open to feedback right now?"
5	✗ Silence under pressure The mistake: Going quiet in difficult conversations — avoiding conflict by disappearing from it. The fix: Name what's happening. "I want to think about this carefully before I respond — can I follow up with you by tomorrow morning?"
	✗ Reply-all overuse Only include people who need to act or be informed. Not everyone who was on the original thread. ✗ Emotional written messages Write the message. Save as draft. Re-read in 30 minutes. Then send — or don't. ✗ Vague subject lines "Checking in" tells no one anything. "Decision needed: Budget approval by Friday EOD" tells them everything. ✗ Interrupting to agree Even enthusiastic agreement is an interruption. Let people finish. Your "Yes, exactly!" can wait 10 seconds.
	✗ Jargon as credibility Overusing technical language to appear expert often signals the opposite. Clarity is the ultimate indicator of mastery.

Self-Evaluation: Communication Confidence Score

Before you close this checklist, run this rapid self-evaluation. For each communication dimension, rate yourself honestly from 1 (significant development area) to 5 (genuine strength). The goal is not to score perfectly — it is to see where your efforts will generate the greatest professional return.

1	Written Clarity How clearly and concisely do you communicate in writing across all channels?
2	Verbal Confidence How effectively do you speak up, structure verbal points, and handle questions?
3	Active Listening How fully present and genuinely curious are you when others are speaking?
4	Feedback Quality How specific, timely, and impact-focused is the feedback you give and receive?
5	Digital Communication How well do you calibrate tone, channel, and response expectations in remote/async contexts?

After scoring, identify your two lowest-rated dimensions. These are your highest-leverage development areas — the places where small, deliberate improvements will have the most visible professional impact. Write them here and carry them into your 30-day action plan from Module 4.

 **Remember:** A score of 3 in Active Listening is not a failure — it is a starting point. The professionals who grow fastest are not those who score perfectly on self-evaluation. They are those who are honest enough to see what needs work, and disciplined enough to do it systematically.

Key Takeaways & Next Steps

You've completed the Communication Mistakes Audit Checklist. What you do in the next 48 hours matters more than what you've read in the past hour. Insight has a short shelf life — action is what makes it stick. Below are your seven core takeaways, followed by three specific actions to take before your next working day.

→ **Most communication problems are patterns, not incidents**

You don't have bad communication moments — you have habits. Audit the pattern, not the occasion. One awkward meeting is noise. Ten awkward meetings is signal.

→ **Clarity is a professional superpower**

The ability to say exactly what you mean, to the right person, in the right format, at the right time is among the highest-value skills in any organisation. It is learnable, and it compounds.

→ **Written communication is your permanent record**

Every email, message, and report is a piece of professional evidence. Write as though your most senior stakeholder will forward it — because one day, they might.

→ **Listening is a skill that requires deliberate practice**

You were taught to speak and write at school. Almost no one was taught to listen. That means it's a competitive edge most of your colleagues don't have — and you can build it.

→ **Digital communication needs explicit calibration**

Remote and async work strips away non-verbal cues. Without deliberate effort, tone is flattened, urgency is lost, and misunderstanding multiplies. Invest in your digital communication hygiene.

→ **Three focused fixes beat ten vague intentions**

You cannot improve everything at once. Pick three. Work them for 30 days. Re-audit. Pick three more. This is the system behind every professional who communicates like a leader.

→ **Communication confidence is built, not born**

No one is a natural communicator. The executives, leaders, and colleagues you admire most have put in deliberate practice. So can you. This checklist is your starting line — not your finish.

Do This Today

Open your sent email folder. Read your last five emails. Ask: Was the ask clear in the first sentence? If not, rewrite one as practice.

Do This This Week

Attend your next meeting with one goal: contribute a clear opinion within the first five minutes. Don't wait to be asked. Volunteer your perspective early.

Do This This Month

Complete the personal improvement plan worksheet. Identify your three priority fixes, set your success metrics, and review your progress at Day 30.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." — George Bernard Shaw

Use this checklist not once, but repeatedly. Your communication will evolve as your career does. Come back to this audit every quarter — and watch how your answers change.