

# Communication Skills

## Directions

This activity will help you to differentiate among appropriately assertive, aggressive, and nonassertive communication behaviors. Read each situation and classify the response as *assertive* (+), *aggressive* (-), or *nonassertive* (N). Compare your responses with the answers provided when you have finished.

Situation	Response	+ -- N
1. A friend has asked you for the second time in a week to baby-sit for her friend who drank too much while she goes and parties. You respond,	“You’re taking advantage of me and I won’t stand for it! It’s your responsibility to look after your own friend.”	
2. An attendant at a gas station you frequently stop at for gas neglected to replace your gas cap. You notice this and return to inquire about it and you say,	“One of you guys forgot to put my gas cap back on. I want it found now or you’ll buy me a new one.”	
3. You’d like your roommate to clean up and say,	“Do you think that, ah, you could see your way clear to cleaning up your side of the room?”	
4. Someone asks for a ride home and it is inconvenient because you’re late, and have a few errands, and the drive will take you out of your way. You say,	“I am pressed for time today and can take you to a convenient bus stop, but I won’t be able to take you home.”	
5. You enjoyed the teacher’s class and say,	“You make the material interesting. I like the way you teach the class.”	
6. A club meeting is being established. The time is convenient for other people but not for you. The time is set when it will be next to impossible for you to attend regularly. When asked about the time, you say,	“Well, I guess it’s OK. I’m not going to be able to attend very much but if it fits everyone else’s schedule...”	
7. In a conversation, a man suddenly says, “What do you feminists want anyway?” The woman responds,	“Fairness and equality.”	
8. You’ve been talking for a while with a friend on the phone. You would like to end the conversation and you say,	“I’m terribly sorry but I’m late for class, and I have to go. I hope you don’t mind.”	
9. At a meeting one person often interrupts you when you’re speaking. You say,	“Excuse me. I would like to finish my statement.”	
10. You are in a hard-sell camera store, and you have been pressured to purchase an item. You say,	“Well, OK, I guess that’s pretty much what I was looking for. Yes, I suppose I’ll get it.”	

11. A good friend calls and tells you she desperately needs you to canvass the street for a charity. You don't want to do it and say,	"Oh gee, Fran, I just know that Jerry will be mad at me if I say "yes." He says I'm always getting involved in too many things. You know how Jerry is about things like this."	
12. You are at a meeting of seven men and one woman. At the beginning of the meeting, the chairman asks you to be the secretary, you respond.	"No, I'm sick and tired of being the secretary just because I'm the only woman in the group."	
13. Chris asks you for a date. You've dated Chris once before and you're not interested in dating Chris again. You respond,	"Oh, I'm really so busy this week that I don't think I will have time to see you this Saturday night."	
14. The campus library calls and asks you to return a book that you never checked out. You respond,	"What are you talking about? You people better get your records straight—I never had that book and don't you try to make me pay for it."	
15. You are in a line at the store. Someone behind you has one item and asks to get in front of you. You say,	"I realize that you don't want to wait in line, but I was here first and I really would like to get out of here too."	
16. You're talking with your mom on the phone and she's asked you to come home to visit. When you politely refuse, she says,	"You're never available when I need you. All you ever think about is yourself."	
17. Plans to go on spring break vacation together are abruptly changed by a friend and reported to you on the phone. You respond,	"Wow, this has really taken me by surprise. I'd like to call you back after I've had some time to think about what's happened."	
18. Your roommate habitually leaves the room a mess. You say,	"You're a mess and our room is a mess."	
19. Your roommate wants to watch a football game on TV. There is something else you'd like to watch. You say,	"Well, ah...OK, go ahead and watch the game. I guess I could do some studying."	
20. It is your turn to clean the apartment, which you have neglected to do several times in the last month. In a very calm tone of voice your roommate asks you to clean up the apartment. You say,	"Would you get off my back!"	
21. An acquaintance has asked to borrow your car for the evening. You say,	"Are you crazy! I don't lend my car to anyone."	
22. A loud stereo upstairs is disturbing you. You phone your neighbor and say,	"Hello, I live downstairs. Your stereo is loud and is bothering me. Would you please turn it down."	
23. A friend often borrows small amounts of money and does not return it unless	"I only have enough money to pay for my own lunch today."	

money and does not return it unless asked. She again asks for a small loan which you'd rather not give her. You say,	own lunch today.”	
24. A neighbor has been constantly borrowing your iPod. The last time, she broke it. When she asked for it again, you reply,	“I’m sorry, but I don’t want to loan my iPod anymore. The last time I loaned it to you it was returned broken.”	
25. Your romantic partner wants to go out for a late night snack. You’re too tired to go out and say,	“I really don’t feel like going out tonight. I’m too tired. But I’ll go with you and watch you eat.”	

### Answer Key

1. -	6. N	11. N	16. -	21. -
2. -	7. +	12. -	17. +	22. +
3. N	8. N	13. N	18. -	23. N
4. +	9. +	14. -	19. N	24. +
5. +	10. N	15. +	20. -	25. N

### Processing:

How did you do? Did you correctly evaluate which behaviors were assertive, aggressive, and nonassertive?

How would you have responded in these difference scenarios?

Were some more challenging for you than others?

Why?

How are these communication skills related to alcohol and other drug issues on your campus?

When have you found yourself using these three levels of communication with regards to alcohol and drugs?

Are you happy with the results you are getting? Why or why not?

When might aggressive behavior be appropriate? Why?

When is it inappropriate? Why?

How can you use these three levels of communication to help you have a better college experience?

# Expressing Your Ideas Without Alienating Others

Listening constitutes one-half of the communication process. Expressing your ideas and feelings makes up the other half. If you are going to get what you need from your college experience, you will have to learn to communicate your thoughts. Assertion involves the appropriate sharing of thoughts and feelings with others. If you communicate your needs and emotions to other people without putting those people down, then you will feel good and your relationships will flourish.

If you nonassertively keep your needs and feelings to yourself, then you may become hurt or angry, and others may lose respect for you. On the other hand, if you become aggressive and abuse others or force your ideas on them, you may find yourself facing interpersonal problems. People will become angry and avoid you. The goal is to communicate your needs and feelings appropriately without abusing others or depriving them of their rights.

## **Aggressive, Nonassertive, and Assertive Behavior**

As an example of the different ways you can react to any set of circumstances, consider the following situation. A customer in a restaurant orders a steak and requests that it be prepared rare. When the steak arrives well done, the customer may make one of the following responses:

1. *Aggressive:* The customer rants and raves at the waiter, accuses him of negligence, refuses to leave a tip, and threatens to never patronize the restaurant again.  
*Result:* The customer's needs are met, but the waiter feels abused, and the other members of the customer's party may feel embarrassed.
2. *Nonassertive:* The customer eats the steak and says nothing about the poor service. She then feels angry about paying for a meal that she did not enjoy. She becomes angry at herself for being a "wimp," and other members of her party may also lose respect for her.  
*Result:* The customer feels frustrated and loses respect.
3. *Appropriately assertive:* The customer politely explains to the waiter that the steak was not prepared according to her instructions, and she requests a substitution. She then enjoys her meal and leaves the waiter an appropriate tip for good service.  
*Result:* The customer's rights and the waiter's dignity and tip are preserved.

In general, nonassertive behavior (example 2) is emotionally dishonest. The person denies her true needs and feelings. She does not stand up for her rights and allows people to take advantage of her. Other people may feel sorry for her, they may get angry at her, and they may even become disgusted with her spineless behavior. Her resentment may result in emotional outbursts if she has been pushed over the brink by a relatively minor incident. This outburst does not make sense to the other people involved because the issue that triggers it might seem so trivial. This resentment and these temper outbursts may eventually jeopardize relationships with others.

Aggressive behavior (example 1) is inappropriately honest and direct. The aggressive customer may be rude and hurt others by blatantly criticizing and intimidating them. She gets her way by trampling over others' rights and feelings. In other areas of life, the aggressive person may often engage in verbally or physically abusive behavior by yelling at others, belittling them through the use of sarcasm, or even using physical force against them. The aggressive person

may often feel superior or righteous while in the midst of a temper outburst, but she then feels guilty or regretful about her behavior afterwards. She may jeopardize relationships with others by hurting and humiliating them. People will often be angry at her; they will avoid her or seek revenge for their humiliation.

Assertive behavior (example 3) is emotionally honest. The assertive person expresses her true feelings. She respects herself and demonstrates that respect by standing up for her rights. She also respects others and does not put them down in order to make herself look better. The assertive person gets what she wants more often than the nonassertive person, yet she is not as likely to anger people as the aggressive person. Other people involved in relationships with her usually value her and respect her opinions.

Assertive behavior does involve risks, and you may not wish to be assertive in all situations. For example, it may not be in your interest to tell your boss that he is running the company the wrong way, especially if he is someone who does not take kindly to criticism. If you criticize him, you may risk losing your job. On the other hand, if the situation at work really bothers you and you bottle up your emotions, you will end up feeling angry and resentful. You may eventually blow up at your boss unintentionally and really give him a piece of your mind. In that case you will definitely lose your job. If you can afford the possibility of a job change, it may be worthwhile to make some tactful suggestions for change before events reach the boiling point. If you make constructive suggestions while you are in control of your emotions, you might find yourself with improved working conditions and a raise in pay!

The same situation holds true in personal relationships. You may not wish to refuse your roommate when she asks to borrow your new sweater. On the other hand, if she continually borrows your clothes and returns them in poor condition or fails to return them at all, you will eventually resent her behavior. You will become angry with yourself and with her, and your relationship will suffer even though you give in to her requests. If you assertively tell her how much it disturbs you when your things are not returned and mention that you will only allow her to borrow them if they are returned in good condition, she may change her behavior. In that case, your friendship can continue on a basis of mutual respect.