BREAKING THE BARRIERS: IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS
Teacher’s Guide
INTRODUCTION
This Teacher's Guide provides information to help you get the most out of the Breaking the Barriers: Improving Communication Skills series. The contents of this guide will allow you to prepare your students before using the program, and to present follow-up activities to reinforce the program's key learning points.

Good communication skills are essential in today's workplace. The ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively in any environment is key to your success. The first CD-ROM (Communication Barrier Basics) in this two-part series is designed to help you recognize and break through common communication barriers. The second CD-ROM (Can You Break the Barrier?) contains real-world interactive situations that allow you to put the content from the first CD-ROM into practical every day use. After experiencing this series, users will understand the fundamentals of verbal, written, and visual communication and be able to apply the skills they've learned to their own lives.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
After using Communication Barrier Basics students will be able to:
■ Understand the basic sender-message-receiver model of communication.
■ Define the basic three types of communication: oral, written, and visual.
■ Understand the key barriers to successful communication within each component of the sender-message-receiver model.
■ Identify breakdowns in verbal communication that can affect the transmission of the message.
■ Identify breakdowns in written communication that can affect the transmission of the message.
■ Identify breakdowns in visual communication that can affect the transmission of the message.
■ Understand how to break communication barriers and develop effective interpersonal communication skills.

After using Can You Break the Barrier? students will be able to:
■ Analyze real life communication situations to determine factors affecting successful transmission of a message.
■ Apply effective communication techniques to avoid creating common communication barriers.
■ Apply effective communication techniques to resolve common communication problems.

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS
National & State Standards:
This program correlates to the National Standards for English Language Arts from the National Council of Teachers of English and to the National Standards for Business Education from the National Business Education Association. The content has been aligned with the following educational standards and benchmarks from these organizations:

■ Identifies and analyzes the related components of the communication process as a foundation for communication skills.
■ Explains the importance of communication in daily interaction.
■ Identifies characteristics of oral language and analyzes standards for using oral language appropriately.
■ Identifies types of nonverbal communication and analyzes their effects.
■ Identifies the components of the listening process.
■ Uses appropriate language conventions for a wide variety of social situations and formal situations.
Recognizes how culture influences communication.

Applications are used to identify, analyze, develop, and evaluate communication skills needed for professional and social success in interpersonal situations, group interactions, and personal and professional presentations.

PROGRAM SUMMARY
Program Overview
All of us have experienced the frustration that goes along with being misunderstood—at home, at school, or in the workplace. Many misunderstandings are caused by common communication barriers in three key areas: sender, receiver, and message. This two-part multimedia program combines an overview of the basic communication process with an in-depth look at real-world situations in which interpersonal communication problems could have been avoided if common barriers had been recognized and dealt with appropriately.

The first CD-ROM, Communication Barrier Basics, provides an overview of the three-part communication process (sender, message, receiver), the three types of communications (verbal, written, and visual) and common barriers that exist in each combination. For example, the Receiver-Verbal barriers include ignoring the tone of the message being delivered, not focusing on what is being said, finishing the sender’s sentence, not asking questions if you are confused, or not practicing “active listening.”

The second CD-ROM, Can You Break the Barrier?, provides five interactive situations that allow the student to put the content from Communication Barrier Basics into practical use. Each situation presents a scenario—using role-play video clips—that contains at least three distinct communication barriers. As a barrier occurs within each scenario, the video clip freezes and the user is prompted to answer questions about the communication barrier and how it could be avoided. Users are then given feedback about the specific barriers and the choices that they made. These situations are realistic, and applicable to a variety of vocations.

MAIN TOPIC AREAS
Communication Barrier Basics
Topic 1: Communication Overview
Barriers to communication are very common. This section explains what they are, and why they exist. We also learn about the Communication Model, and begin to understand the importance of good communication skills.

Topic 2: Sender Barriers
When the breakdown in communication occurs with the sender (that is, the person with whom the message originates) it’s known as a sender barrier. In this section we examine the types of sender barriers that prohibit effective verbal, written, and visual forms of communication.

Topic 3: Message Barriers
When the breakdown in communication occurs within the message (the content of the communication), it’s called a message barrier. In this section we examine the types of message barriers that exist within verbal, written, and visual forms of communication.
**Topic 4: Receiver Barriers**

When the breakdown in communication occurs with the receiver (the person or group of people receiving the message), it’s called a receiver barrier. In this section we examine the types of receiver barriers that bring effective verbal, written, and visual communication to a standstill.

**Topic 5: Physical Barriers**

Physical barriers are communication barriers that relate to environmental factors. In this section we examine the types of physical barriers that impede verbal, written, and visual communication.

**Topic 6: Assessment**

In this section, user comprehension is tested with a series of multiple choice questions.

**Can You Break the Barrier?**

**Topic 1: A “Goode” Investment**

This scenario depicts a financial advisor giving a presentation to the employees of Designs Unlimited. Can you identify they barriers introduced by the sender and the receivers?

**Topic 2: Misunderstood Memo**

This scenario illustrates what happens when miscommunication in a written memo confuses an employee at Westside Widgets.

**Topic 3: Dress Code Debate**

Tempers flare and communication goes awry as two coworkers at the Moynahan Marketing Agency discuss an office policy in a public place.

**Topic 4: New Job Jitters**

Cultural differences get two coworkers off on the wrong foot at Coastal Car Parts. The sender manages to make one mistake after another when trying to get to know the new guy.

**Topic 5: How May I Help You?**

In this example a customer service representative at the Collins Candy Company contributes to communication barriers introduced by the sender, the receiver, and the message during a phone conversation.

**FAST FACTS**

- The Communication Model (sender-message-receiver) describes the process of communication, or the transfer of information from one person to another person or group of people.
- There are two primary ways to communicate—one-way communication and two-way communication.
- Being able to communicate effectively is directly related to your ability to succeed in all aspects of your life.
- Sometimes your actions speak louder than your words.
- Good communication skills can be difficult to learn—like any other skill, they take practice.
- Sender barriers are the most common type of barrier.
- Message barriers occur when there is a problem with the style and/or the content of any type of communication.
- All message barriers are the responsibility of the sender, not the receiver.
- Most receiver barriers are mental barriers, as the receiver is not in the mindset to process the sender’s message.
- Even when you are paying attention and trying to listen, studies show that you will usually absorb only about half of what you hear.
Physical barriers are caused by environmental factors.
Physical barriers are usually neutral barriers, since neither the sender nor the receiver is to blame.
 Receivers are usually the ones to suggest or initiate a way to overcome physical barriers.

VOCABULARY TERMS
Active listener: A communication receiver who not only follows along with the sender/speaker, but who also lets the sender/speaker know that s/he is listening and understanding the message. Through nods, gestures, and utterances, an active listener conveys immediate feedback to the sender.
Audience: A group of listeners, readers, or spectators who are targeted to receive a specific message or communication.
Barrier: Anything that hinders or blocks.
Body language: Gestures, movements, and mannerisms by which a person communicates with others without speaking.
Close-ended question: A question designed to elicit a YES or NO response from the receiver.
Communication model: The three-part process (sender-message-receiver) of communication, or the transfer of information from one person to another person or group of people.
Communication: A giving or exchange of messages or information between two or more people.
Distraction: Anything that draws or directs one’s attention to a different object or in different directions at the same time.
Emoticon: A group of keyboard characters (such as :-) typically representing a facial expression or an emotion or otherwise conveying tone or attitude that is used especially in computerized communications (such as E-mail).
Empathy: The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another
Feedback: Information that communicates how one feels about something another person has done or said.
Inflection: Change in pitch or loudness of the voice that makes one word distinct from another word for a desired effect.
Information overload: A state that occurs when an individual’s efficiency is hampered by receiving too much information.
Irrelevant: Not relevant or applicable to the point; does not have anything to do with the topic at hand.
Language: Human speech or the written symbols for speech; any means used for communication.
Listening: Making an effort to hear and understand a verbal message that is being conveyed.
Medium: A channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment.
Message barrier: A communication breakdown that is caused by a message being sent between a sender and a receiver.
Message: A communication in writing, in speech, or by visual symbols.
Miscommunication: Failure to communicate clearly.
Native tongue: The language one learned first.
Noise: Any random or persistent disturbance that obscures, reduces, or confuses the clarity or quality of a message being transmitted.
Non-verbal: Communicating by a means other than spoken words, such as through the written word or body language.
One-way communication: Any message that does not allow the message receiver to respond directly or immediately to the message sender. Examples include radio, television, and the World Wide Web.
Open-ended question: A question that elicits an explanatory response from the receiver; it usually begins with WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, or HOW.
**Pace:** The rate of speed or tempo of a verbal communication.

**Paraphrasing:** A concise re-wording of a message that is being written or spoken.

**Para-verbal cues:** Elements other than words (such as tone, pitch, pacing) contained within a verbal communication.

**Physical barrier:** Communication barrier caused by an environmental factor.

**Pitch:** Highness or lowness of sound in one’s voice.

**Rate:** The speed at which one talks.

**Receiver barrier:** A communication breakdown that is caused by the person receiving the message.

**Receiver:** Someone who listens to or reads a message being sent to them.

**Sender barrier:** A communication breakdown that is caused by the person sending—or delivering—the message.

**Sender:** A person who communicates a message to a receiver.

**Spell-check:** Any electronic tool that automatically checks a written message for misspellings.

**Tone:** Vocal sound of a specific quality.

**Two-way communication:** Any message that requires at least two people who are able to send and receive messages by responding directly or immediately to one another.

**Verbal:** Communicating by means of words or speech.

**White noise:** A type of noise that is produced by combining sounds of all different frequencies together.

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**PRE-PROGRAM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why is effective communication important?
2. What is the communication model? Who are the players in any communication?
3. What can cause barriers to communication?
4. If there is a breakdown in communication, whose fault is it?
5. What does it take to be an effective communicator?

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**POST-PROGRAM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Is body language important? If so, how?
2. Sometimes barriers to communication are neutral, meaning that they are not the fault of either the sender or the receiver. How can you help to break the barrier in a situation like this?
3. Asking for confirmation or feedback is important no matter which side of the communication you are on. Why?
4. Why is it important for young people to learn how to be good communicators?
5. Effective communication seems complicated; how can you begin to apply what you’ve learned to your own life?

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**GROUP ACTIVITIES**

**Random Road Block**

After using this CD-ROM series, students should have a good understanding of the barriers to effective communication. This activity allows them to test their knowledge, role-play a particular barrier, and find an appropriate solution.

Place students in groups of two or three and have the groups spread out throughout the room. Next, randomly assign one of the following barriers to each group and give them fifteen minutes to create a scenario that illustrates the barrier and how to overcome it. Then ask each group to role-play their situation in front of the class. When each group completes their scenario, the rest of the class can critique all aspects of the communication.
Barrier examples:  
(Note: barriers may be used more than once)  
• The sender is talking around the issue  
• The sender is talking when the listener is distracted  
• The sender's body language says that he or she is annoyed  
• The sender uses the wrong words to describe what he/she means  
• The sender assumes that the receiver will not understand the message  
• The receiver is constantly finishing the sender's sentences  
• The receiver is not using active listening skills  
• The receiver is distracted while the sender is speaking  
• The receiver's body language shows that he/she is not interested  
• The receiver cannot understand the sender over the phone

Communicate Your Message  
Split the class up into six small groups and ask each group to compose a list of “Dos and Don’ts.” Three groups should create a list for senders, and the other three groups should create a list for receivers. (Once the groups have come up with their lists, take a quick look at them to make sure they’re on the right track.) Have each group create a poster of their lists, using things like crayons, colored pencils, or markers. Once they are complete, one person from each group can present each poster to the class. Later, the posters can be mounted in the classroom to remind students how important it is to be an effective communicator.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PROJECTS  
Reality Breakdown  
Take three sheets of paper, and at the top of each page list a breakdown in communication that has recently occurred in your life (try to include one verbal, one written, and one visual communication barrier). Under each breakdown, describe where and how the communication broke down, what problems this caused, and what could have been done differently to improve the communication.

For the Sender’s Sake  
Sender barriers are the most common type of barrier. Using what you’ve learned, write a report describing a specific sender barrier that you created. Include details about your communication mistakes, the problems they caused, and what you could have done differently. Remember, it’s the sender’s responsibility to make sure that his/her message is understood.

INTERNET ACTIVITIES  
E-mail Inquiry  
What are some common communication problems in e-mail correspondences? Make a list of these barriers to avoid. Then pretend that your teacher is a potential employer. Send him/her an e-mail inquiring about a job. Your teacher will provide you with feedback on whether your written correspondence is effective and appropriate for the business world.

Communication Web Design  
Go online and create a webpage that outlines the basics of what you’ve learned. Break the page down into the following four sections:
• Sender barriers  
• Message barriers  
• Receiver barriers  
• Physical barriers
Make sure that the content is geared toward other young people, and publicize your sites to the rest of the schools in your district ... they might just learn something!

**ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

Q: Most sender barriers involve problems with ________________.
A: how the content of the communication is delivered

**Feedback:** If you do not clearly take charge of what, when, and how you communicate, you can easily be misunderstood.

Q: Poor word choice is a ________________ barrier.
A: message

**Feedback:** The wrong words, or using too many words, can cause confusion for the receiver. Even though this is a “message” barrier, it is still the responsibility of the sender to make sure that his or her message is clear.

Q: If you are facing the person you are communicating with and are standing or sitting with both feet on the ground, you are displaying ________________ body language.
A: open

**Feedback:** Open body language typically signals that you are willing and able to accept messages. Closed body language—folded arms, crossed legs, bodies turned away—signals that you are rejecting all or part of the message.

Q: Physical barriers are neutral barriers, which means that they are not initiated by the ______.
A: sender or receiver

**Feedback:** Physical barriers are caused by environmental factors. Although they can really interfere with the effectiveness of any type of communication, they are neutral, meaning that neither the sender nor the receiver is to blame.

Q: If the sender is talking too fast, what will the receiver do?
   (a) Miss the message altogether.
   (b) Not be able to provide feedback.
   (c) Feel hurt.
   (d) Have open body language.
A: (a)

**Feedback:** Talking too fast can cause a receiver to miss important pieces of information contained in the message, or worse yet, miss the message altogether. If you’re the sender, try to monitor yourself as you speak. If you feel your pace picking up or sense that your audience is not able to keep up with your message, take a deep breath and slow yourself down.

Q: When do message barriers arise?
   (a) When the two people communicating are from different cultures.
   (b) When the message covers too many topics.
   (c) If either party makes assumptions.
   (d) All of the above.
A: (d)

**Feedback:** All of these answers are correct. Message barriers involve the content of the communication. If the people communicating are from different cultures there is a risk of cross-cultural misunderstanding, i.e. one culture may not understand the other’s message. If the message covers too many topics, again, there is a problem with the content...there’s too much of it! And finally, if either party involved in the communication makes an assumption, the message will be sent or received with their biases. So answers (a), (b), and (c) can all lead to message barriers.
Q: Receiver barriers include all but which of the following?
   (a) Not reading the entire message.
   (b) Not asking for feedback.
   (c) Not confirming that you understand.
   (d) Not completely listening.
A: (b)
Feedback: It is the sender’s responsibility to ask for feedback since he or she is the one initiating communication, but it is the receiver’s responsibility to ask questions if they are confused. The receiver should also confirm that they understand exactly what the sender means.

Q: Listeners are usually the ones to find a solution for physical communication barriers because:
   (a) Receivers are usually smarter.
   (b) Physical barriers are neutral.
   (c) It’s hard for them to understand the message.
   (d) None of the above.
A: (c)
Feedback: Listeners are usually the ones to initiate a way to overcome physical barriers because they are the ones having a hard time understanding the sender’s message. Whether it’s verbal, written, or mental, the receiver will usually be the first to notice the problem and offer a solution.

Q: Explain the difference between being a good sender and a good receiver.
Feedback: As a good sender it is your responsibility to make sure that your message is effectively delivered and understood. If you don’t, your message may become a barrier to effective communication. Most sender barriers involve problems with how the content of a message is being delivered, so good senders pay extra attention to the way they send their message, and they make sure that it’s appropriate for their audience.

Most receiver barriers are mental barriers—the receiver is not in the mindset to process the sender’s message. Good receivers pay attention to their own attentiveness. They make sure that they are able to accept the sender’s message, and if they’re not ... they admit it, and ask the sender to repeat him/herself or to clarify his/her position.

Q: Explain why effective communication skills are important both personally and professionally.
Feedback: Being able to communicate effectively is directly related to your ability to succeed in all aspects of your life. If, as a sender, you cannot get your point across to your intended audience you may not get the reaction you expect. And if, as a receiver, you are not prepared to obtain information and actively respond to the sender you may miss—or misinterpret—important messages directed at you. No matter with whom you are trying to connect—your parents, your teachers, your friends, your co-workers, or your boss—and no matter what type of message you are trying to send or receive, good communication skills will provide you with a strong foundation for success.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Websites
Boston Museum of Science Online Exhibit: Messages
http://aries.mos.org

Reaching Out: The Evolution of Communication
http://library.thinkquest.org/26451
Books


Other Products
Business Communication Series, VHS/DVD, Meridian Education
Solid communication skills are keys to a smooth transition from school to work. Using engaging scenarios to dramatize real-world communication breakdowns and demonstrate how employees overcome them, this four-part series addresses the cornerstones of communication: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The series includes Business Communication: Listening; Business Communication: Speaking; Business Communication: Writing; Business Communication: Reading

Back to the Basics: Communication Skills, VHS/DVD, Cambridge Educational
Presentations, reports, video conferences, e-mail, telephone calls—more than ever, excellent communication skills are a prerequisite for entry into all sorts of careers. This program provides insights into enhancing both verbal and nonverbal communication. The importance of carefully targeting the message to be conveyed, minimizing outside distractions, listening attentively, and developing awareness of body language are stressed.

Constructive Communications: Talking Your Way to Success, VHS/DVD, Cambridge Educational
This program guides viewers through an E.A.S.Y. communication process. Students learn constructive communications by identifying the Effect they hope to achieve; understanding the knowledge and attitude of their Audience; explaining the Subject with specific and organized information; and seeing the positive effects of knowing and understanding Yourself.
**Writing for Results: The Winning Written Report**, VHS/DVD, Cambridge Educational
This program stresses that good writing skills are critical to job success and that employers seek job applicants who have these skills. Learn how to produce a winning written report by analyzing the reader; determining the purpose; selecting and narrowing topics; gathering, recording, and filing information; and organizing the paper. Learn the benefits of concrete and specific supporting material, proofreading and revising, and a well-polished final product. Gain valuable skills for future success while acquiring the ability and confidence to put thoughts in writing.

**Effective Listening Skills: Listening to What You Hear**, VHS/DVD, Cambridge Educational
This important lesson discusses habits and traits that keep us from being good listeners and teaches improved listening skills with the D.R.I.V.E. process. Students learn the benefits of listening and master the skill by Deciding to listen, Reading all stimuli, Investing spare time wisely, Verifying what they hear, and Expending energy. Teach your students how to process the information that goes in one ear, and that information won’t have a chance to escape through the other!

**Communicate! Skills for School, Business, and Everyday Life**, CD-ROM, Cambridge Educational
This program examines communication elements (Oral Communications, Written Communications, Using Images in Communications, and Reading and Responding) and shows you how to improve your communication skills. Oral Communications teaches the benefits of identifying your personal communication style. Written Communications demonstrates the importance of understanding the purpose of the material you are writing and its intended audience. Users learn about the effects of moving and still pictures, charts, tables, cartoons, signs, and other types of visuals in Using Images in Communications. This comprehensive CD-ROM tracks your progress so you can complete the program at your leisure and return to reference specific topics and information.