

Chapter 4: Effective Communication

The success and overall safety of a team is more associated with the quality of its leadership, teamwork and communication than it is with its overall skill level. Teams don't magically happen. They are consciously built by the actions of both leaders and participants. Before any risky situations arise, it's important to develop and practice good teamwork and communication within your teacher/leader team and student/research group.

As a leader/teacher, you have enormous influence over how well (and how safely) your team will perform. Below are several key communication actions you can employ to help you more effectively steer your group in a safe positive direction. Details about each of these topics begin on the next page.

- **Establish and maintain clear goals, roles, expectations, and behavioral norms at the very beginning**
- **Brief your team often to keep them aware of the plan**
- **Practice active listening**
- **Address issues that come up**

Establish and maintain clear goals, roles, expectations, and behavioral norms at the very beginning.

As a leader of your group, you have the most influence over creating a culture of safety within your group. By far, the most leverage you have is at the beginning of your class/trip. All of your group's future endeavors are made easier or more challenging by the effectiveness of these first interactions. Two important meetings should occur at this early stage:

- **Meet with your leader team prior to the beginning of your class/trip** to discuss your leadership roles as well as personal and course objectives.
 - See Sample Pre-trip Leader team meeting agenda below

- **Facilitate an orientation meeting with your whole group as early as possible** to establish clear goals, roles, expectations, and behavioral norms.
 - See Sample Orientation Meeting Agenda below
 - See Establishing Appropriate Behavioral Norms below
 - See more on Alcohol and Drugs below

A Sample Pre-trip Leader Team Meeting Agenda

Before any trip, make time for a discussion with your leader team to plan, organize, and team-build. Consider including the following during a pre-trip meeting:

- Take time for everyone to briefly introduce themselves to each other
- Discuss strengths and weaknesses. What support do your co-leaders need?
- Discuss (and even write down) everyone's personal and professional goals. What are your goals as a leader team? Incorporate any feedback received from previous courses or trips.
- How will you communicate as an instructor team? Will you check-in at least once a day? every few days?
- Be open to giving and receiving feedback: how, when, being timely, tactful, and honest. Start giving each other feedback now. How will you resolve conflict should it come up?
- Plan out the first few days of the course, including the Student Orientation Meeting
- Delegate logistical and curricular tasks.
- What are the anticipated challenges and hazards of this class/trip? What are your plans in case of an emergency?

A Sample Orientation Meeting Agenda (with notes on appropriate behavioral norms, and drugs/alcohol)

In the beginning of a class or research trip, make time for an orientation meeting that sets clear goals, responsibilities of teachers and students, and expectations for appropriate/safe behavior. This meeting might be very short or you may need to follow up with further discussions in the beginning of a trip. In any case, it is still vital to establish a clear base line at the beginning that you can return to if someone is not meeting your expectations.

Here is a sample agenda to follow:

- Introduction
 - Welcome! Be enthusiastic and really be welcoming.
 - Give a brief overview of what you're going to cover at the meeting
 - Do a name game or some other activity to build connections/ have fun
 - Introduce leader team members (who you are and your background)
 - Introduction of participants (who are you? why are you here? What's your background/ interests?)

- Logistics
 - Paint a brief picture of the course in order to build understanding and excitement
 - Where you are going (show maps etc.)?
 - What is this course all about (consider going over syllabus)
 - What will we be doing on the course (talk about typical day)
 - Share the flow of the trip. Go over a calendar or schedule

- Goals
 - Goals of the trip (leader perspective)
 - Participant goals: you might want to take some time to have students share some of their own personal goals. This might also be appropriate later on in the course.

- Roles and Expectations (see separate page on Establishing Behavioral Norms)
 - Roles of the leaders (what the students can expect from the instructors).
 - Expectations (what the leaders expect from the students)
 - Specific issues to address (alcohol and drugs, emotional safety, sexual harassment, etc.)

- Closing Activities
 - Next steps; give the "to do" list and when and where we will meet next
 - Make time for questions
 - Final fun teambuilding activity. Maybe its just sharing an inspiring quote or doing something more involved such as a group brainstorm about how

to build a group culture that support everyone in having an amazing experience.

Establishing Appropriate Behavioral Norms AKA a Safe Learning Environment

The following is a suggested format and prose you could use for a discussion about creating a safe learning environment for undergraduates participating in a multi-day field class. This discussion should happen as early on in the course as possible. This can easily be modified or shortened for less-involved field experiences. Regardless, this discussion is one of the key leverage points that leaders have over the general trajectory that their group will follow during their time together. Don't skip it.

- Introduction: Living and studying outside will pose significant challenges for all of us. A big part of this challenge is how we work together as a group – how we communicate, cooperate, problem-solve, and support one another. This course is different (and much more) than a regular academic experience - we learn together but we also live together and can't get away from each other when we're in the field. We have the responsibility both before and during the course to co-create a safe, positive learning environment. The rewards of building and maintaining a safe, supportive community are huge. Your own learning goals will be magnified when we actively work to support each other.

- Explicitly State Leader Expectations: With this in mind, it is important to specify and build consensus around what it takes to maintain a safe positive learning environment. Let's spend time now as a group discussing this and getting everyone's input. For now, consider the following general aspects that we as the leaders of this course have found useful in creating a safe positive learning environment:
 - You can expect us (your leaders) to instruct this course! But you can also expect us to respect you for who you are, to support you both physically and emotionally, to give and receive constructive feedback, and ultimately to provide a safe learning environment for you and the group as a whole.
 - We will expect all of you:
 - to respect one another
 - to practice proactive self-care; check in with us about medical concerns and other concerns you may have
 - to follow our lead & follow the rules - which we'll discuss more in a moment
 - to participate fully (be on time, get out of bed!, speak up in discussions, take part in activities)
 - to teach and learn from one another (take pride in what you bring to the group and support others in what they bring too.)
 - to be open minded and ready to learn (all the time, even when you're tired, when you're in the van, when we're at one of those fun spots, in the evening)
 - to take initiative to try new things (peer leadership)
 - to work together as a team (you don't have to love everyone, but you do have to work together effectively. Sometime this means taking a

leadership role, sometimes it means supporting one of your peers who takes a leadership role.)

- o to be willing to sacrifice some personal goals for the sake of the group (you may need to speed up/slow down, turn around on a hike, speak up more, listen more, modify your level of sarcasm/joking to fit with the norms of the group, etc.)
 - o to give and receive constructive feedback
 - o to provide a safe learning environment for everyone.
 - o to, as the Hokey Pokey tells us, ‘put your whole self in’ to the experience
- Get input from your group: Take a some time to discuss in smaller groups anything else the student group thinks is important to maintaining a safe learning environment. Then discuss as a whole group, letting as many participants share what they talked about. Acknowledge everyone for listening and sharing. Wrap this up by saying something about being inspired by your peers: for instance, you might say, “We all bring unique gifts to this group and our experience. Be inspired by these gifts, not intimidated.”
 - Explicitly go over the important rules. Here are some common rules/issues that you might consider specifically addressing.
 - Personal physical safety- no hiking alone, no rock-climbing, swimming guidelines, etc. You must wear your seatbelt in the van whenever we’re driving. See Competency section for more detail on many of these guidelines. You don’t have time to discuss all of these right at the beginning, but introducing them right at the beginning lets your group know that you think they’re important. You can say that you will come to these in more detail once out in the field.
 - Emotional safety
 - o Sexual harassment: Harassment can include “sexual harassment” or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person’s sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general. The university tolerates zero harassment and as employees, and we are mandated reporters.
 - o Avoid jokes, sarcasm, or insulting remarks: about individuals or groups of people, whether or not they are represented on this course
 - o Aggression: Avoid either verbal threats or motion to harm others in the present or future
 - o Language: keep the course relatively free of bad language
 - Alcohol and other Drugs This can clearly be a difficult “rule” to establish. Consider bringing up four things with the students: safety, legality, learning, and group cohesion.
 - Safety: Clearly drugs and alcohol can compromise safety, which is especially concerning in remote field contexts.

- Legality: Drugs are illegal and using alcohol if you're under 21 is illegal. Getting caught condoning illegal activities in a university-sponsored field class could cost any leader their job as well as jeopardize the future of the course.
- Learning: Drugs and alcohol can interfere with your ability to learn the material we cover in this course.
- Group cohesion: The use of drugs and alcohol can often undermine community building within a group. Often, a smaller subset of a group is most comfortable drinking (or perhaps sneaking off and using drugs) and this leads to cliques and dis-unity.
- After going over these concerns, you might consider two different rules to establish and maintain:
 - No use of drugs or alcohol.
 - Moderate consumption of alcohol only by those of age and only "outside of class time". By moderate is meant no hard alcohol, only beer/wine, and only 1 or 2 glasses at any one sitting. By "outside of class time" is meant after dinner if no other classes are planned in the evening.
- Consequences: What if they break the rules? Consider saying something like this: "While I am not the police (and have no intentions to bust you), I am ultimately responsible for maintaining a safe learning environment for everyone out here. If your actions aren't supporting that ultimate goal, I will request that you change your behavior. I can also separate you from this course."
- Don't be afraid to assert yourself if you have opinions about this issue. I have often been known to say things like:
 - "Please don't think you can hide your marijuana joint from me and the other leaders. We're living together all the time. Please be respectful of us and don't put us in the position of having to confront you about it."
 - "I refuse to spend the next ten weeks hanging out with a bunch of drunk people. I had to turn down many students who wanted to enroll in this course. It is a privilege to be out here, so please don't squander the opportunity that this experience presents."
 - "Using alcohol in moderation is a vital skill/discipline to develop as a young adult. If I see you going too far, I will be happy to confront you on it."
- Final advice: If you set and maintain clear expectations, constantly build rapport and connection with your students, facilitate awesome experiences (without drugs/alcohol), and set a good example yourself, you won't have trouble with this issue.
- Smoking: follow the law/rules (ie. no smoking on the UCSC campus); in a place where smoking is permissible, smoke outside away from others and throw your butts away (they are not biodegradable). Consider quitting now.
- Exclusive relationships (including romantic ones) - You might say, "get out of your bubble and be inclusive of everyone; it takes explicit deliberate action to

be inclusive of everyone - make it a goal to sit some place different tomorrow, strike up a conversation with someone else; the whole experience will be much more meaningful if we come together as a whole group. Also, please refrain from sexual intimacy with someone else until our time off in between trips.”

- Cell phones - “Either put your cell phone in airplane mode or turn it off completely during the day. If there are some apps you’re using for class that’s fine. If you want to make brief phone calls outside of our class time (like after dinner), that’s fine. What we want to avoid is checking out of the present moment and not interacting with the people who are physically present.”
- Music - no boomboxes; music in the van is at the driver’s discretion (all passengers must support the driver). Beware listening too much to music using earbuds: it can lead to checking out too much from the group.
- Removing someone from the course: you might want to give an example of the rare occurrence where someone might separate from the course. Consider saying:
 - If something inappropriate comes up about someone, we will first and foremost talk with that person or people involved.
 - Our goal would be to build understanding, provide additional support and clarification to everyone involved.
 - However, if the inappropriate behavior continues, we could decide to separate a person from the course.
- Finally, explicitly ask for everyone to follow these guidelines in order to create a safe learning environment. You might say, “Does all this sound good? Can I get a yes or a nod from everyone? If any of this concerns you, please feel free to come to talk with one or all of us after this meeting.”

Brief your team often to keep them aware of the plan

Groups operate more safely when they are frequently briefed on what to expect. Brief at the start of the day or activity. Brief when your plans change. Excellent leaders articulate and explain goals as often as necessary. Strive to incorporate these core ingredients into your briefings:

- What are we doing? (What are the goals?)
- How are we doing it? (What's the plan?)
- When are we doing it? (What's the timetable?)
- Who is doing it? (What are our roles?)
- What hazards can we anticipate?
- How will we manage those hazards? (What are the contingency plans?)
- What gear do we need?
- How and when will we make decisions?
- How is everyone doing? What concerns do you have?
- What is our plan if someone becomes ill or injured or lost?
- Have I been understood? (If necessary, ask your group to repeat back the information you just gave them.)

Practice active listening

The practice of active listening can help you build a healthy group learning community but also can significantly reduce the likelihood of accidents. When you are actively listening to someone, you are supporting people to think out loud. This builds trust, group intelligence, and greater awareness of a situation or issue. It also helps leaders (and their groups) make safer decisions.

Active listening requires that you:

- be present with your speaker
- do much more listening than speaking.
- make eye contact and use positive body language.
- focus on understanding what someone is saying, not on mentally preparing a response.
- avoid interrupting, debating, and quick, preconceived responses.

The two cornerstone skills of active listening are Paraphrasing and Drawing People Out.

Paraphrasing

When you paraphrase someone, you say back to the speaker what you think the speaker said in your own words. This is the most straightforward way to demonstrate to a speaker that his or her thoughts were heard and understood. Though simple, paraphrasing is powerful! When done well, it is non-judgmental and enables people to feel that their ideas are respected.

To strengthen a speaker's trust that you really "got" what they were saying, consider prefacing any paraphrasing with comments like:

- "It sounds like you're saying....."
- "Let me see if I'm understanding you...."
- "Is this what you mean?."

When you have finished any paraphrasing, check with your speaker. You might say, "Did I get it?" or look for other verbal or non-verbal clues that indicate they feel understood. If they don't, ask for more clarification until you understand what they are saying.

Drawing People Out

When drawing someone out, ask open-ended non-directive questions. This helps the speaker clarify and refine their thoughts. Here are some common ways to draw someone out:

- "Can you say more about that?"
- "Tell me more"
- "What's coming up for you now?"
- "Can you give me an example?"
- "How so?"
- "What matters to you about that?"

Setting a tone that invites good listening reduces the probability of accidents

A good leader sets a tone in which participants and co-leaders feel they can speak up, question and share observations without fear of reprisal. Do this by frequently checking in with your instructor team and student group. Strive to follow these guidelines:

- Give adequate time for discussions to avoid giving the impression that your group has nothing to contribute.
- Make eye contact.
- Listen to your team member's responses without interrupting or "talking over" them.
- Ask: "Are you getting enough direction from me about what you need to be doing?"
- Say "If anyone disagrees, please speak up."
- Beware giving the impression that you're really not looking for input. Instead of saying, "Okay - you've all done this before. Ready to go?", ask "Hey is anyone not ready?"
- Be aware that silence can be mistaken for agreement. Take the time and create the space for everyone to express their concerns.

Address issues that come up

The potential for conflict is natural among people and is an inherent part of any group's development into a safe high functioning team. Rather than avoid conflict, effective teams manage conflict productively. While conflicts are okay, unresolved conflicts are not. They impede communication and cooperation, and they can lead to incidents. Conflict often arises when expectations, roles and responsibilities are unclear. Participants may be missing information or lack a sense of the big picture. It's the leader's job to clarify this for your group. When conflict arises, you should see it as a sign that your team may be unraveling. As a leader, you may need to step in, acknowledge the issue and set aside time to work through the conflict. Do this by listening to the different perspectives and opinions, restating or revising roles & expectations and committing to moving forward productively.

A Recipe for Resolving Conflict or Addressing Concerns/Problems with a student

- Approach your student or co-instructor with warmth and respect (think connection before correction).
 - Greet them normally: "Hey, how's it going..."
- Identify what you are noticing or wanting to talk with them about
 - "I have been noticing.... and I was hoping to talk to you about it."
 - "I noticed.... and I was hoping we could check in and see how things are going for you..."
- Invite them to talk with you at a time that works for both of you
 - "Could we take a little time to meet right after dinner tonight? ."
- At your meeting, state your goal/purpose in talking with them right away
 - "Thanks for meeting with me."
 - "I wanted to bring 'this' up to make sure:
 - you are getting what you need to feel good about this class"
 - you, the other students, and the purpose of this course are all supported."
 - ...from experience, I know little things have the tendency to become big things, so I wanted to talk with you before that happens"
- Take the time to listen, listen, and listen some more. Draw them out and be open to their feedback.
 - "How is this course going for you?"
 - "Do you have any thoughts about what is going on?"
 - "Is there anything that would be helpful for me to know?"
 - "What feedback do you have for me or the instructor team?"
- Take one or several of the following actions:

- Make a request: (ie. ask them to refrain from _____ while on the course)
 - Clarify your expectations and/or goals for the course. If they are not meeting your expectations or hindering your goals, specify which one(s) they aren't meeting. Suggest ways they could meet your expectations the next time this situation arises. Don't be afraid to say: "We need everyone to follow these expectations in order to create a safe learning environment for everyone"
 - Educate your students about the ramifications of their actions, etc.
 - Engage in collaborative problem solving with your student(s).
 - Agree to meet again and discuss the issue more.
- When wrapping up your conversation,
 - Make a plan for checking in again.
 - Let them know that you are here for them.
 - Appreciate them and thank them for talking with you.