

**Module 2**  
**Lesson 3**

**Effective Communications (C202)**

**2-3. Lesson Overview**

**Lesson  
Presentation**

This lesson will teach you how to communicate effectively.

**Lesson Content,  
TLO, ELOs**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Page</b>
TLO: Employ effective communication skills.	NA
Introduction	2-3-2
ELO 1: Identify the elements of the communication process.	2-3-3
ELO 2: Identify elements of verbal and nonverbal communications.	2-3-7
ELO 3: Identify levels of listening.	2-3-9
ELO 4: Identify barriers to effective communication.	2-3-11
ELO 5: Identify communication systems to exchange information.	2-3-14
ELO 6: Identify essential elements of information in oral and written communications.	2-3-22
ELO 7: Identify methods to reduce barriers to communication.	2-3-23
Lesson Review	2-3-28
Check Your Learning	2-3-31
Answer Key and Feedback	2-3-35

## 2-3. Lesson Overview

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### References

The following table lists the references for this lesson.

Number	Title	Date
AR 600-20	Army Command	July 1999
FM 22-100	Army Leadership	Aug 99
	<u>The Dynamics of Human Communication: A Laboratory Approach</u> , Sixth Ed.	Nov 1990.

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**Note:** The material in this lesson explains how to meet the standards of effective communication required in doctrinal publications. It contains paraphrased information from a number of documents to include the publications listed above.

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### 2-3-1. Introduction

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#### Purpose

Control of units depends upon effective communication. Faulty communication causes most unit problems and leads to confusion that can cause a good plan to fail. A squad leader's report may become distorted by the time it reaches the company commander. Leaders may have no idea of the size, strength, location, and intentions of friendly units on their flanks. Supply personnel may not deliver supplies to the right place at the right time because they remain uninformed.

Incidents like these have been happening throughout history. Failure to communicate effectively while solving problems and executing plans is one of the greatest obstacles to success in training and in battle. A leader's communication skills either help or hinder him in the use of all his other skills. Communication is the implementing tool of leadership. Normally,

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## 2-3-1. Introduction, cont

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### Purpose, continued

the more effective you are as a communicator, the more effective you will be as a leader.

This lesson explains the elements of effective communication to include the communication process, verbal and nonverbal communication, different types of listening, barriers to communication, formal and informal communication, essential elements of information, and means to reduce barriers to communication

Note: This prereзидент lesson provides material that is **not** covered in the resident phase of training. **This material is testable.**

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## 2-3-2. Identify the Elements of the Communication Process

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### Introduction

Since leadership is about getting other people to do what you want them to do, it follows that communicating is an important skill that you must master. Communication falls into four broad categories. They are--

- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- Listening

You began practicing speech as early as the age of one by using words to express yourself. The emphasis on reading and writing began formally in school. The fourth category--listening--is the one in which most people receive the least amount of formal training. Yet, for an Army leader, it is very important since listening often comes first. You must listen and understand before you can decide what to say. Then, when you do communicate your ideas to others, you want your communication to be effective.

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### Definition of Communication Terms

Communicating is transmitting information so that it is clearly understood. Communication occurs when others understand exactly what you are trying to tell them, and when you understand precisely what they are trying to tell

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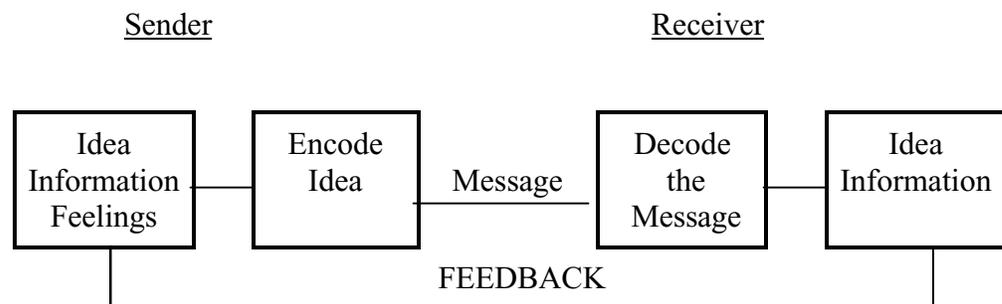
## 2-3-2. Identify the Elements of the Communication Process, cont

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**Definition of Communication Terms** you. It follows that the key to effective communication lies in the ability of the sender to make the receiver understand his message in its intended exact form.

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**The Communication Model** Communication is a process and there is a model that represents that process. The communication model shows how the continuous loop of the communication process ensures a sender and a receiver communicates effectively.



**Figure 2-3-1. The Communication Model**

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**Communication Process** The process of communication involves four elements: sender, message, receiver, and feedback. A sender transmits a message to a receiver who provides feedback. When the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intends to transmit, we have effective communication.

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**The Sender** The sender--

- starts the process by deciding what information to transmit. He first ensures that the information transmitted is correct and objective.
- composes the message in his mind, based on past experience, and organizes it in a logical sequence so the receiver can easily understand it.

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## 2-3-2. Identify the Elements of the Communication Process, cont

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### **The Sender,** continued

- makes an estimate of the knowledge the receiver has of the same information and selects the method to encode the message for transmission.
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### **The Message and the Means of Transmission**

A sender may transmit the message by any of the following means:

- Verbally--through spoken or written words.
- Non-verbally--by "body language," such as gestures, signals, or expressions.
- By a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication.

The means of transmission depend upon the situation. A company commander with a widely dispersed unit will probably communicate in writing. A squad or section leader, who has daily contact with each of his soldiers, will usually communicate orally.

The message, or information exchanged, has three important parts:

- Message--the concept, idea, information, or feelings the sender has in mind.
- Content--the actual words or symbols used to transmit the message.
- Context--the way the sender delivers the message: the sender's tone of voice, the look in the sender's eye, or the sender's state of emotion (anger, fear, uncertainty, or coolness and confidence).

The message and the means of transmission are critical to the communication process since the receiver must decode and understand the information.

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### **The Receiver**

The receiver has the responsibility to pay attention to the sender and the message or else he will get the information distorted. The receiver can guard against distorting the message by being objective in his interpretation of it. If the receiver decodes the message and arrives at the same idea, concept, or information that originated in the mind of the sender, effective communication has taken place.

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## 2-3-2. Identify the Elements of the Communication Process, cont

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### Feedback

If the receiver provides feedback to the sender on his or her understanding of the message, that feedback is the beginning of another communication.

Feedback is basically the sender's knowledge of the results or effect of the message on the recipient--in short, feedback is reaction. For example:

- If one soldier tells another about his recent leave, he expects to see some kind of reaction to what he is saying.
- When supervisors direct that you do certain things, they also expect to see the results of their orders.

Many leaders think they have communicated once they tell a subordinate to do something. How many times have you heard, "Well, I told Jones to do that?" If you check with Jones, you find that he totally misunderstood the message. A person cannot be confident that he has communicated with another person until he has feedback that tells him the receiver understands the meaning of the message, its level of importance, and knows what he or she should do with it. Remember, communication is an exchange, like buying and selling. Both parties must participate to complete the information exchange.

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### Communication Results

Communication coordinates and controls all parts of a unit so that they act in harmony to accomplish a mission. When you coordinate and supervise, you help each part of your team to reinforce the efforts of the other parts. You can only do this through a flow of accurate, timely information. Such information flows from person to person--through the bonds of trust, respect, confidence, and understanding--that connect people in a cohesive, coordinated unit.

If the unit is to function effectively, the information must flow quickly, must be accurate, and must get to all parts of the unit. If the information flow up, down, and laterally is not continuous, accurate, and timely, the unit cannot coordinate its activities.

As a leader, you will communicate a great deal to seniors, subordinates, and peers. Without skillful communication, it is likely that the receiver will misunderstand the message. You must develop your skill to communicate the meaning, content, and tone of your messages clearly and persuasively.

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### 2-3-3. Identify Elements of Verbal and Nonverbal Communications

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#### **Means of Transmission**

The sender starts the communication process by deciding what information to transmit. He encodes the message and chooses the means to communicate the message. The means can be by verbal communication, nonverbal communication, or a combination of both.

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#### **Verbal Communication**

Verbal communication involves the use of spoken or written words. The words and phrases of our language derive their meaning from agreement on that meaning between people--not the words and phrases themselves.

- When the receiver does not get a clear, precise meaning or image, he tends to interpret the words in terms of his own thoughts and experiences.
- A word may have different meanings to different people. For example, the word "secure" has a common meaning of "to make safe." But to many people, to "secure" something means to lock it up. To others, it means to take possession of something. In other words, it could be vitally important for a leader to make his meaning perfectly understood. Note the following example--

A wounded platoon sergeant tells one of his squad leaders to "take care of those prisoners." The squad leader, under the stress of combat, interprets this to mean, "get rid of them." The platoon sergeant quickly realizes that what he said could have two meanings, so he changed his words to a direct command to "protect those prisoners."

The point of this example is that communications are subject to misunderstanding. This is serious because precise and clear communications are essential for effective leadership.

The problem for the communicator, or sender, is to make sure that he chooses words and phrases that match his own meaning and which evoke the desired meaning in the receiver. In choosing his words, the sender must be careful to avoid the problem of double meanings.

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#### **Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication is communication through other than written or spoken words. It involves not only all of the signals you send with your facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language but also symbolic

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### 2-3-3. Identify Elements of Verbal and Nonverbal Communications, cont.

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#### **Nonverbal Communication, continued**

communication such as the information conveyed by a soldier's insignia of rank, brass, unit crests, and ribbons.

A person spends approximately 75 percent of his waking hours communicating in some way or another. Much of that communication is nonverbal, as opposed to oral or written forms. Nonverbal communications include gestures, facial expressions, signals, the way a person wears his clothes, and even silence. For example:

- If we say "Good Morning" to someone and he does not respond, he is communicating something. If someone fails to answer a question, he communicates.
- In counseling a soldier about a problem, the supervisor's words may be wise and soothing, but his facial expressions and actions may be "telling" the soldier that he doesn't really care. Effective leaders must be aware that communication includes both verbal and nonverbal cues.

To improve his method of communicating, the supervisor may have to examine his methods to ensure that his nonverbal actions are not contradicting his words. To put it another way, the communicator has to look and act the part of the message he wants to send and the meaning he wants received.

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#### **Situation Determines Message Transmission**

The means of transmitting the message will often depend upon the situation.

- A company commander with a widely dispersed unit would probably communicate in writing (verbal communication).
  - A squad or section leader in daily contact with his soldiers would communicate by speaking directly to them (verbal communication).
  - A squad or section leader giving a class to a slightly unruly group of soldiers may use silence and glare at these soldiers until they quiet down (nonverbal communication).
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### 2-3-3. Identify Elements of Verbal and Nonverbal Communications, cont

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#### **Distortion of Messages**

You must keep in mind that when a leader passes information to his soldiers, frequently it becomes distorted or changed in transmission. Leaders at each level may add details or refine the information. Additionally, when the receiver does not get a clear precise meaning, he tends to interpret the communication in terms of his own experiences.

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### 2-3-4. Identify Levels of Listening

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#### **Effective Listening**

Probably the most important way to improve our communication skills is to work at becoming an active listener. This means more than concentrating on what the other person is saying. It includes letting the other person know we have heard him. As leaders, we have an obligation to be good listeners. Since soldiers listen to leaders who listen to them, you must work hard at understanding exactly what your soldiers are saying to you.

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#### **Deterrents to Effective Listening**

Most of us do not listen with true effectiveness. We lose 50 percent of what we hear immediately after we hear it. We can never recall half of what we hear. We then lose an additional 25 percent within 48 hours. So, after two days, we can recall only 25 percent of what we heard.

There are many deterrents to effective listening, both in person-to-person communication and in public speeches. Some of those deterrents are:

- We value talking as having more potential power than listening.
  - Technology has increased noise levels.
  - We try to listen to too much at one time. (In a technological world, multitudes of messages compete for our mental attention).
  - We fantasize through the day, and though the ability to fantasize is necessary to our creative efforts, it can at times block true listening.
  - We often form responses while the other person is still talking.
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## 2-3-4. Identify Levels of Listening, cont

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### Deterrents to Effective Listening, continued

- We allow ourselves to become distracted because we are angry, we have a problem with the speaker, or we have other things we need to be thinking about.
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### Levels of Listening

There are three levels of listening:

- **Not hearing at all**, characterized by blank stares, silence, and no physical reactions. At this listening level the message does not get through.
  - **Passive listening**, where one listens only to the words without much response and without processing the whole message (i.e., the emotional tone, the nonverbal aspect of the message). Examples are when the Sergeant of the Guard gives you your guard relief briefing and you have been on guard more days than he has in the unit. Or, during the last formation of the day on a Friday, the platoon sergeant tells you the upcoming events for next week.
  - **Active listening**, where one takes in the total picture of the message and responds with head nodding, facial expressions, body movement, and verbal feedback. The listener not only truly hears the message accurately, but demonstrates to the speaker that he really understand the message. He sends signals to the speaker that say: "I'm paying attention," (nodding head every once in a while) and "I agree with what you say," (using an occasional "uh-huh"). The active listener gives the speaker his full attention, looks directly at the speaker, and also avoids interrupting the speaker. Interrupting the speaker is the cardinal sin of active listening.
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### Listening Technique

There is a useful technique that you can practice in discussions with a group or with a subordinate. It is to listen to the speaker and, before you respond, summarize to the speaker the correct meaning of his message by clarifying and confirming what the speaker has said. We call this technique "paraphrasing" or "reflective listening." It helps you check your understanding by using a verbal response that consists of a question or a statement that summarizes, interprets, or clarifies the message. This is a conscious use of feedback to ensure understanding.

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## 2-3-4. Identify Levels of Listening, cont

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### Listening Techniques, continued

Note the following dialogue:

(PVT): "Sergeant, can I talk to you a minute?"

(SGT): "Sure, PVT Jones. Sit down."

(PVT): "Thanks, I'm really worried about that job you gave me yesterday."

(SGT): "It's got you concerned, huh?"

(PVT): "Yes it has. To finish it, I need input from SGT Wilson and he is on leave until next Monday. I'm afraid I won't be able to get the job in on time."

(SGT): "So you're going to miss your suspense unless you get what you need from SGT Wilson."

In the preceding dialogue, the sergeant's second and third responses are examples of reflective listening or paraphrasing.

Effective and productive listening is an essential quality of any supervisor or leader. If you cannot listen to what your subordinates are saying, you cannot react to their needs. If you do not meet their needs, motivation decreases and affects unit efficiency and readiness. Through discipline, concentration, patience, comprehension, and participation in listening, the good listener can develop much more efficiency in mission accomplishment.

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## 2-3-5. Identify Barriers to Effective Communication

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### Barriers to Communication

There are many barriers to effective communication. Some barriers are present in both the sender and the receiver. Other barriers are factors outside the sender and the receiver. Anything that prevents understanding of the exact concept of information intended by the sender is a "barrier" to communication.

Many physical and psychological barriers to communication exist. You must understand them to overcome them.

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## 2-3-5. Identify Barriers to Effective Communication, cont

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### Physical Barriers

Physical factors in a situation may surround and block communication. The noises of battle, distance, and any other physical factors that distract the attention of the sender or receiver are physical barriers to communication. Other physical barriers are hard-to-read messages, incorrect use of words or abbreviations, failure to pronounce words correctly, and oral or written messages that are unclear or too long.

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### Psychological Barriers

A person's beliefs, values, character, needs, experience, education and goals combine to form a frame of reference. This frame of reference acts as a filter through which he sees and hears. Since we all have unique combinations of these factors, our filters cause us to see and hear the same situation differently. With this awareness of each person's unique frame of reference, let us discuss several factors that may cause a breakdown or distortion in communication.

- **Differences in rank or echelon** can block effective communication between people. Because of conflicting interests or values, even a husband or wife, or two brothers, can see the same situation differently. They can hear the same words and interpret their meaning differently.

If the frames of reference of husbands and wives or two brothers can differ so greatly, think of the potential for difference in the way captains and privates hear an announcement or see a situation. For example:

A nervous private on an outpost may hear a few rounds of rifle fire and report that he is under "heavy fire." The company commander hearing the report would think that an enemy platoon or company was firing on the outpost. If the captain knew that the enemy fired only a few rounds, he could more accurately assess the situation.

Even people at the same level in a unit do not see and hear things the same way. These differences in the way people see and hear things tends to increase as the rank between them increases. Also, a sergeant or officer on the front line of battle may see a situation far differently than a sergeant or officer of the same rank at a higher headquarters. The further apart they are, the greater the chance for two people to see and hear things differently.

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## 2-3-5. Identify Barriers to Effective Communication, cont

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### **Psychological Barriers,** continued

To ensure that differences in rank and echelon are not barriers to communication, leaders have an obligation to communicate clearly their frames of reference to subordinates. A person's frame of reference governs the way he thinks, plans, and acts.

Subordinates need to know the values, goals, intent, and way of thinking of the leader so that they can plan accordingly and use their initiative when out of contact with the leader. By informing subordinates of a decision--and, as much as possible, the reason for it--leaders show subordinates they are important members of the team. This knowledge also helps subordinates determine what information the leader wants and needs. Likewise, leaders must also learn the frames of reference of their subordinates.

- **Selective Perception** is one of the biggest barriers to effective communication. This simply means that a person sees only what he wants to see, hears only what he wants to hear, and ignores or distorts those things which do not conform to his preconceived ideas or experience.
- **Selective exposure** is an additional obstacle to effective communication. It describes the fact that people tend to expose themselves only to information, situations, and associates that support their own ideas, attitudes, and concepts.

Example: The person who has just bought a certain make of car will not notice a magazine's ad for another model even though it may be a two-page multi-color spread. He does this unconsciously, first, to reinforce the rightness of his own choice, and, secondly, to prevent disagreeable ideas from affecting him.

- **Failure to Listen** is another communication problem arises when people do not listen to one another. Their concerns about their own ideas and emotions and what they want to say may prevent them from "listening" to what the other person is saying.
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## 2-3-5. Identify Barriers to Effective Communication, cont

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### Psychological Barriers, continued

- **Tendency to Smother Information.** Most trainers take for granted that the normally intelligent combat soldier will disseminate useful information. Nothing could be further from the fact! S. L. A. Marshall wrote: "The tendency is ever to smother information in combat, to keep what one knows to one's self, to dismiss the idea that it will have any value to a comrade or to higher authority, to argue that what might be gained would not justify the effort, to conclude that the special facts must already be known to all concerned, or if none of these things, then simply to fail to recognize information at its face value."

It is a common tendency to smother information in war and peace. Recognize it. Train to overcome it. Teach your soldiers the importance of communication and how to communicate when under stress.

- **Lack of trust, respect, and confidence.** When two people do not understand each other, they lose mutual respect, trust, and confidence. Trust and respect are fundamental to candid, open communication. An individual will tend to guard himself against another individual he mistrusts. You gain the trust of your subordinates by demonstrating leadership. If you are competent, and if you show your subordinates that you sincerely care about them, they will trust you. You lose trust when your subordinates perceive that you are selfish and not truly concerned with the mission, with the unit, and with their well-being as individuals.
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### Summary

When you are trying to be a good leader and an effective communicator, you must break down any barriers or filters that hinder you as a sender or a receiver. Trust and respect are fundamental to open communication. Overcoming barriers, in part, means being aware that they exist and then checking them out. Use feedback to see if any barriers caused a misunderstanding of the message you were trying to convey.

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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information

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### Communicating with Others

Through communication with others, the leader employs his command and issues decisions for action. Without the ability to convey instructions to

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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

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**Communicating with Others, continued** subordinates clearly, the leader may as well operate in a vacuum, completely detached from his unit. A good plan is worthless unless every soldier in the unit understands all parts of the plan.

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**Communication Systems** There are two primary types of communication systems in the military:

- formal communication systems.
- informal communication systems.

An understanding of the purposes of these communication systems and what may happen to information processing through them is the first step toward achieving effective communication between seniors and subordinates.

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**Chain of Command**

The chain of command is the Army's formal communication system. The chain of command passes information and messages up and down within the organization. The chain of command extends from the commander-in-chief down through the various command levels until it reaches the individual soldier. Through the chain of command, the leader issues orders and instructions for the performance of unit tasks and conveys his policies and standards to members of the unit. Leaders at all levels use the chain of command--their subordinate leaders--to keep their people informed and render assistance.

The chain of command is a two-way communication system that carries information from the leader to all or any part of the unit and carries information from within the unit back up to the leader. This information or feedback includes: how things are going, what the problems are, requests for clarification, and requests for assistance. Additionally, soldiers use the chain of command when communicating issues and problems to their leaders and commanders.

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**NCO Support Channel**

Although there is only one chain of command in the U.S. Army, there is another formal communication system within its structure. It is the NCO support channel. Prior to 1977, the NCO support channel was an informal communication channel. However, a 20 December 1976 change to AR 600-20 formalized the NCO support channel and expanded its functions.

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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

### NCO Support Channel, continued

The NCO support channel parallels and reinforces the chain of command. For the chain of command to work efficiently, the NCO support channel must operate effectively. NCOs use this support channel to pass information to their soldiers.

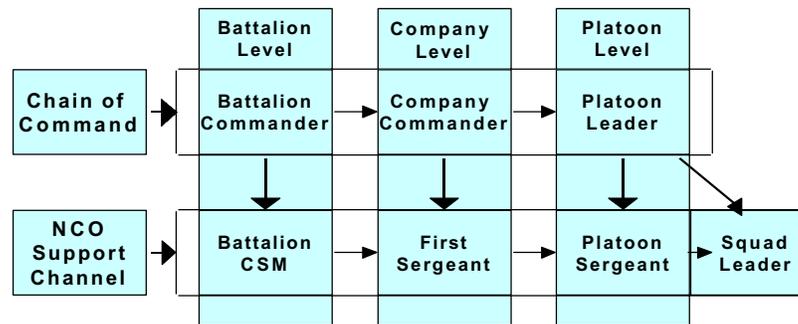


Figure 2-3-2. Chain of Command and NCO Support Channel

The NCO support channel begins with the command sergeant major and ends with the section chief, squad leader, or the team leader. Between these points are intermediate levels such as the first sergeant and the platoon sergeants. Although the first sergeant and command sergeant major are not part of the formal chain of command, leaders consult them on all individual soldier matters.

NCOs use the support channel to pass information, to issue orders and effectively implementing instructions, and to accomplish routine missions. Most often, they use it to put policies and procedures into effect and to enforce standards of performance, training, appearance, and conduct.

The authority of the NCO support channel rests with the chain of command. It does not circumvent or replace the chain of command. It frees the chain of command from transmitting routine, detailed, policy-based instructions and information. Therefore, it is the duty of the NCO to ensure that he keeps the

## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

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### **NCO Support Channel, continued**

chain of command informed of actions implemented through the NCO support channel. This will eliminate the possibility of the NCO support channel operating outside of command policy and directives.

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### **Downward Communication**

A common assumption about the downward flow of information is that when the leader wants to pass information to the soldiers in the unit, the leader merely inserts the information into the chain of command, and it transmits throughout the unit. It does not usually work that well. Frequently, information becomes distorted, diluted, changed, or stopped before it reaches the receiver.

Usually as information travels down the chain of command, it becomes more specific because leaders at each level refine it and add details. A simple statement made by a commander could become a major project by the time it reaches lower levels. For example, the division commander may tell his G3, "I plan to visit the river-crossing exercise that A Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, will conduct on Monday. Tell the CO I will be there around 1000 hours." By the time this information reaches the company commander, it may be an order to conduct a river-crossing demonstration at 1000 hours, Monday, for the division commander, and it may require rehearsals for the battalion and brigade commanders.

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To further illustrate this point, note the following extreme example:

- Colonel to executive officer: "Tomorrow evening at approximately 2000 hours, Haley's Comet will be visible in this area, an event which occurs only once every 75 years. Have the enlisted personnel (EP) fall out in the battalion area in battle dress uniform, and I will explain this rare phenomenon to them. In case of rain, we will not be able to see anything, so assemble the men in the theater and I will show films of it."
  - Executive officer to company commander: "By order of the colonel, tomorrow at 2000 hours, Haley's Comet will appear above the battalion area. If it rains, fall the EP out in battle dress uniform; then march to the theater where the rare phenomenon will take place, something which occurs every 75 years."
  - Company commander to lieutenant: "By order of the colonel in battle dress uniform, at 2000 hours tomorrow evening, the phenomenal Haley's Comet will appear in the theater. In case of rain in the battalion area, the colonel will give another order, something which occurs once every 75 years."
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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

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### **Downward Communication,** continued

- Lieutenant to sergeant: "Tomorrow at 2000 hours, the colonel will appear in the theater with Haley's Comet, something which happens every 75 years. If it rains, the colonel, in battle dress uniform, will order the Comet into the battalion area."
- Sergeant to squad: "When it rains tomorrow at 2000 hours, the phenomenal 75-year-old General Haley, accompanied by the colonel, will drive his Comet through the battalion theater in his battle dress uniform."

Processing information at various levels slows its flow and adds distortion. The information goes through personal filters at various levels where each person makes additions and deletions based on interpretation. Some common filters applied to downward communication are:

- What the leader believes he "heard."
- What the leader believes the soldiers should know.
- What the leader believes the soldiers want to know.
- What the leader believes the boss wants passed along.
- What the leader believes he should "tone down" or "build up."
- What the leader's beliefs and values are to the information.
- What stress, if any, the leader is operating under.
- What importance the leader attaches to the information.
- What the leader, who is passing the information, feels at the moment.

When we consider the filters that information must pass through at each level, it is understandable that distortion, dilution, or total loss of information occurs. Do not misunderstand these remarks. After all, it is the leader's job to filter messages in order to clarify them or add to them when required. The leader, however, should not allow personal values, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings to filter communications inappropriately.

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### **Upward Communication**

Upward communication or feedback is also vitally important. Leaders need upward communication to help them make and evaluate decisions, policies, and to foresee problems that they can plan to avoid. A downward communication has your supervisor's seal of approval behind it. A kind of

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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

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### Upward Communication, continued

gravity flow exists. On the other hand, feedback must go upstream all the way; the "people filters" are more severe and cutting than those applied to downward communication. So it is more difficult to develop feedback. Some common filters that people apply to upward communication are:

- The notion that any opinion in opposition to a superior's idea is "negative thinking" and therefore bad.
- The notion that soldiers always gripe and you should only worry when they don't.
- The belief that the information is unimportant and that the originator does not have the "big picture" in mind.
- The belief that superiors are not interested in the information.
- The belief that you will get into trouble for passing along this type of information.
- The belief that the information will reflect adversely on you, your ability, or your unit.
- The belief that your superiors only want to be told the good things and not the bad things.

Do not think that all filters are bad. Some serve a useful purpose. You should try to solve problems, take the required action, and pass on upward only significant information. You must determine what is significant and what is not. The acid test is to ask yourself whether you would need or like to have this information if you were the next leader up in the organization. If the answer is yes, pass it up the chain of command.

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### Lateral System

The lateral system is another communication system. Mission accomplishment not only depends on information passing accurately to and from subordinates and leaders, up and down the chain of command and NCO support channel, but also laterally among adjacent organizations or activities.

This is the exchange of information between leaders or staff members of equal levels in the organization. For instance, the platoon leaders inform each other of what they are doing and pass on to each other information they get from the company commander and other sources. For example, while leaders go to their own unit maintenance officers to get technical help

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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

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**Lateral System,**  
continued in maintaining their equipment, they may also go directly to adjacent units or to direct support units to get help.

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**Informal Communication System** In addition to the Army's formal communication system, there are a couple of informal ones. These informal systems of exchanging information can exert either a helpful or a disruptive force within a unit.

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**Social Communication System** The social communication system is one of the informal communication systems. Membership in this system depends on one's social position within the unit. People group together to drink coffee, eat lunch, bowl, go out on the town, and have other social contacts outside working hours. This grouping depends on such things as skill or ability, job assignments, ethnic background, or taste and values. These groups, and there may be any number of them in a unit, have significant influence on the unit since they discuss what goes on in the unit.

By standing together, members of a group can influence the commander's actions in regard to policy, regulation, or procedure. When the command releases a new policy, the group discusses it and inevitably makes judgments concerning it. Each member of the group knows what the others' feelings are on the new policy. They usually all react to it in the same way. The reactions of these groups can give the leader valuable information on how the unit views his policies.

Social communication systems usually control the actions of their member. For example, the clerks in a finance section know what they consider a fair day's work. If a new clerk violates the standards of the group, the group can bring the new clerk in line by refusing to associate with him. Both on and off duty, the group excludes him from their trips to the movie and snack bar and from their nights out on the town. When his supervisor overloads him with work, no one offers to help. The group can quickly force him to meet their standards or make his life so dissatisfying that he will seek a transfer to a new unit.

The leader's job in dealing with social groups is to see that they have ample and correct information, to understand their viewpoints, to transmit pertinent reactions upward through formal channels, and to be available to the groups

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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

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### **Social Communication System, continued**

as needed. The leader does this by knowing who the groups' leaders are and by informally talking to them. In this way, the leader can get a feel for the social groups' reactions to the unit's activities. The leader can listen for useful ideas and ensure that the social group is correctly informed. In short, the leader becomes the communications center for their messages.

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### **Grapevine Communication System**

The grapevine is another informal communication system within the organization. It differs from other systems in that it uses the others in combination to pass on information.

Everyone likes the information they hear to make good sense. If it does not make good sense, people sometimes invent additional information or interpret the fragmentary information received so that it does make sense, at least to them. This is the effect that the grapevine has on partial information, and on complete information which does not make sense. You may understand a situation while your soldiers may not. Therefore, to avoid distortion of information in the grapevine system, make sure that enough information is available that provides a reasonable explanation for the situation at hand. If you receive information that you do not understand, you should ask for clarification before passing the information on to your soldiers. There may be occasions, however, when this is not possible. In such cases, pass on the information you have and explain that you are trying to get it clarified.

Do not view the grapevine system as harmful. By evaluating the information carried by the grapevine, you can learn more about what is going on within the unit. You may also use the grapevine to help identify problems within your unit or to determine how your soldiers accept new policies.

If the information passed in the grapevine is wrong or is a rumor that can injure the unit, you should act at once to bring out the facts concerning the subject of the rumor. As soon as you hear a rumor, determine the facts, gather the personnel concerned, and state: "So and so is a rumor, the facts are\_\_\_\_\_."

For example, a common rumor in a combat zone is that the troops will be home for Christmas. Often this type of rumor starts due to newspaper or

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## 2-3-6. Identify Communication Systems to Exchange Information, cont

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### **Grapevine Communication System, continued**

magazine articles stating, "X number of troops will be home for Christmas." The soldiers may interpret the article as referring to their particular unit.

In this case, it is up to the leader to explain that although some troops will go home early, he does not know which units. He should further state that as soon as factual information is available, he will forward it. Once the soldiers accept a rumor, it is difficult to get them to accept the facts. In some instances they may distort later news to make it coincide with the initial rumor.

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## 2-3-7. Identify Essential Elements of Information in Oral and Written Communication

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### **Cataloging Information**

Accuracy is the essence of effective communication. Over the years, the military evolved a systematic way of cataloging information for transmission which ensures a great degree of accuracy in both oral and written communications. This system involves breaking information down into six essential elements. To ensure proper organization of all pertinent data concerning a situation, test it for six essential elements of information. These are:

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- How
- Why

The order of these elements of information is not important. What is important is that you are aware of them and use them to analyze information for completeness and accuracy. Look at the following order and pick out its essential elements of information.

“Tomorrow evening at approximately 2000 hours, Haley’s Comet will be visible in this area, an event which occurs only once every 75 years. Have

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## 2-3-7. Identify Essential Elements of Information in Oral and Written Communication, cont

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### Cataloging Information, continued

the enlisted personnel fall out in the battalion area in battle dress uniform, and I will explain this rare phenomenon to them. In case of rain, we will not be able to see anything, so assemble the men in the theatre and I will show films of it.”

The essential elements of information are:

- Who: Enlisted personnel.
- What: Are to fallout or assemble.
- Where: In the battalion area, or the theater if it rains.
- When: Tomorrow evening at approximately 2000 hours.
- How: In battle dress uniform.
- Why: The battalion commander wants to explain an event which occurs once every 75 years. Haley's Comet will be visible in the area. In case of rain, the colonel will show films of the comet in the theater.

The essential elements of information allow you to determine Who will do What, When, Where, How and Why. Not every situation, however, will include all six elements. In many directives, the "why" is often missing, and in the case of routine tasks, the "how" is often left up to you.

As stated earlier "Every soldier must have a notebook and a pen to write down messages and information and pass them on accurately to appropriate people." Do not totally trust your ability to remember. When you receive instructions from your superiors, take notes as you receive them. If this is not possible at the time, write down the instructions you received as soon as you get the chance. Check what you have written for the essential elements of information.

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## 2-3-8. Identify Methods to Reduce Barriers to Communication

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### Methods to Avoid Barriers to Communication

By being aware of the barriers of communication, you can decide which communication system to use and the way to reduce the effects of the communication barriers. There are several methods you can use to avoid barriers to communication. They are:

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## 2-3-8. Identify Methods to Reduce Barriers to Communication, cont

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### Methods to Avoid Barriers to Communication

- Sense what seniors, subordinates, and peers need to know.
  - Know how stress affects communication.
  - Teach and demand accurate reporting.
  - Aim your message at your target.
  - Use several channels of communication.
  - Ensure soldiers have complete information.
- 

### Sense What Seniors, Subordinates, and Peers Need to Know

Leaders at all levels must put themselves in the shoes and situation of other soldiers. They need to see the battle or the training from the eyes of their seniors, their subordinates, peers on their flanks, and support personnel. A lieutenant or NCO who has this ability will immediately sense the information that the company commander must have to direct all parts of the company. He will also be sensitive to the information squad leaders and fellow platoon leaders must have to achieve platoon and company missions. And, he will sense the information that the supply, intelligence, and personnel people need.

Battalion headquarters must have accurate information on each company's situation to assist and coordinate the actions of all the companies. They should not divert a leader's attention from mission accomplishment, however, by nagging them for information.

On the other hand, subordinate unit leaders must provide timely, accurate information so that their higher headquarters can coordinate the overall unit activities.

Headquarters in turn must communicate necessary information to subordinates. By sharing information and keeping individuals, teams, and organizations informed, leaders establish a climate of trust, encourage team building, and allow units and subordinate leaders to determine what they need to do to accomplish the mission when circumstances arise. Communication ensures that an individual makes decisions from knowledge of the situation rather than from a void. Accurate information also relieves unnecessary stress and keeps rumors under control.

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## 2-3-8. Identify Methods to Reduce Barriers to Communication, cont

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### **Know How Stress Affects Communication**

You need to understand clearly the human tendencies under stress that create communication problems. Be aware that different people do not see the same reality when they look at a situation or read a message. Our psychological frames of reference--our beliefs, values, character, knowledge, past experience, goals, and fears--influence what each of us sees at a given moment.

People do not always "see" reality. They see what they "perceive" to be reality. Unfortunately, people's perceptions, especially under stress, are often far from reality. Stress is pressure or tension. It is any real or perceived demand on the mind, emotions, spirit, or body. Under stress, people tend to see the situation as worse than it is. In battle, soldiers tend to use words like "heavy shelling," "intense fire," or "strong resistance." But these terms mean different things to different people.

Soldiers at all levels need to be clear and concise in their communication. Prepare your soldiers to deal with stress and its effect on communication through tough, realistic training. Familiarize them with the sights and sounds of battle through training. Teach them how to perform effectively both as individuals and as a team under the hardships they will face in war. They will learn to react in true proportion to the situation.

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### **Teach and Demand Accurate Reporting**

You have to be aware of the human tendencies that distort reality. You must cut through them and get correct information which corresponds with reality. If you do not know something is a fact, do not report it as a fact. Report it as whatever it is--a perception, belief, opinion, or assumption. Teach your soldiers to report matters exactly as they know them based on what they see and hear. If they do not follow this principle closely, disaster can occur.

During the Ardennes fighting in WWII, the lead forces of the German 2d Panzer Division reported meeting "intense fire" and "strong resistance" at a bridgehead, when in fact they met 12 nervous infantry soldiers. Luckily for the 12 soldiers and the American Army, this miscommunication caused a German division commander to make a serious error.

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## 2-3-8. Identify Methods to Reduce Barriers to Communication, cont

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### **Teach and Demand Accurate Reporting,** continued

No matter how great the pressure from a senior for progress in a situation, it is better to say, "I don't know," "I believe," or "I'll check and get back to you," than to report as "fact" something you are not certain is a fact--just to get the "higher" off your back. The leader of the level above you "must" be aware of what is "fact" and what is "assumption" if he is to make good decisions. By the same token, those below you and at your level in the unit need to know what is fact and what is assumption. Stress the difference between them.

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### **Aim at Your Target Before You Shoot Your Message**

The success or failure of any communication is the responsibility of the leader. You want the target of your communication to receive and understand your message. Therefore, take a moment to "aim" at your target. Put yourself in his shoes, frame of reference, and situation. Then you can better form the content and tone of the message so that it hits the target.

People tend to make the mistake of communicating from their own situations and not considering the framework of the target person. Before communicating, take a moment to think. How would you interpret the message and how would it make you feel? This is an important, often neglected step to good communication. Ask someone else to put himself in the situation of the target person. See how he understands and feels about the message.

When circumstances permit, write out a message to prevent a change in its content or meaning. Writing forces you to complete your thoughts and to express them accurately. And you know that all receivers on the way up, down, or laterally are getting the same content.

It helps to write out plans, orders, and messages, even if you are going to communicate them orally. Writing allows you to "see" your communication. It gives you a chance to analyze your message to ensure that you are communicating exactly what you want the other person to receive and understand.

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### **Use Several Channels of Communication**

Since information easily becomes filtered or blocked, you must use several channels to relay it. Repeat important communications to ensure the information gets to all parts of the unit. The following are channels of communication:

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## 2-3-8. Identify Methods to Reduce Barriers to Communication, cont

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### Use Several Channels of Communication, continued

- **Announcements** are easy, quick, and reach a large group at once. However, they are not always reliable and should not be the sole channel for communications. Some troops will not be present, some might not listen, and some may not understand. Also, you have limited feedback on whether or not they understand the message when they are in formation. Announcements are best for short, easy-to-understand messages.
  - **Chain of Command.** The leaders in the chain of command must be a cohesive, harmonized team if the chain is to communicate clear messages. Strong bonds of trust, confidence, respect, and understanding among all leaders in the unit lead to an effective command channel. The officers and NCOs in the unit make up the leadership team which is the nerve center of a unit. The leadership team must prevent change in the meaning, content, and importance of messages on the way up or down the chain or laterally. The leadership team of a unit consists of people. No matter how good each person on the team is, each has his own unique framework for seeing and hearing. Therefore, the potential for blocking and distorting communications is always present. You must know this and continually check to ensure that accurate information is flowing through the leadership team to the troops.
  - **Informal groups** shape morale and influence values. People in informal groups link themselves together by the bonds of friendship. Their communication net operates quickly and directly. If informal groups support the chain of command, they can promote effective communication and control the ill effects of rumors.
  - **Meetings.** As a leader, you must get things done through your subordinates. Thus, meetings with your subordinates for coordination, problem solving, and giving out information are an important means of keeping your subordinates informed. Too many meetings, however, can disrupt the operation of a unit. The first thing to consider in planning a meeting is to decide if in fact you need to have a meeting at all.
  - **Written communications.** Use written communications when the information you have to pass out is very complex, very important, or needs recording.
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## 2-3-8. Identify Methods to Reduce Barriers to Communication, cont

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### **Ensure that All Soldiers Have Complete Information About the Mission**

The likely nature of modern war will cause mass casualties, small groups of soldiers isolated from friendly units, great stress from continuous day and night operations, and confused engagements with enemy forces. These conditions make it essential for leaders to communicate the overall purpose of the mission and the commander's intent to subordinates so they have the basic information they need to carry on.

More than ever, success on the battlefield will depend on the creative thinking, problem-solving ability, and character strength of all soldiers. We must teach our soldiers how to think and solve problems while under stress. If they are to think creatively on the battlefield, they must have a clear concept of the mission.

They must have all the accurate information that headquarters--platoon, company, battalion, and above--can supply about the enemy and other factors that affect the mission. This way, when communication with the headquarters becomes temporarily cut off, lower-level units and soldiers can use their initiative to accomplish the mission without instruction from higher headquarters. Keeping your soldiers informed helps them make decisions and execute plans within your intent, encourages initiative, improves teamwork, and enhances moral.

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## 2-3-9. Lesson Review

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### **Summary**

Good leadership improves with effective communication. If you remember the communication process that shows the sender sending the message to the receiver who provides feedback to the sender, you will be off to a good start. However, you must keep in mind the differences between verbal and nonverbal communication so you can totally communicate messages to your soldiers.

By understanding the three levels of listening, you can monitor your own level and be aware of the level your soldiers are on. To be a smart leader, you should not let physical and psychological barriers interfere with your communication.

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## 2-3-9. Lesson Review, cont

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### Summary, continued

As a noncommissioned officer in a squad/section leader position, you will be a part of the formal communications system. Because you are a squad/section leader, you will be in the chain of command. Additionally, because you are an NCO, you will be in the NCO support channel. As a soldier and a person, you will also be in the informal communication system.

The six elements of information are important for complete and accurate communication. They allow you to determine Who will do What, When, Where, How, and Why. Not every situation, however, will include all of the six elements.

By understanding the barriers to communication, you can determine means to reduce these effects on communication. By listening, understanding, and effectively communicating, you can have an extremely favorable influence on the overall attitude of the soldiers you lead. Remember, communication is a necessary skill of leadership.

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## 2-3-10. Check Your Learning

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**Directions** This is a self-graded exercise. Circle the letter of the correct response or fill in the blank with the correct response. Upon completion, compare your responses to the correct responses in the answer key and feedback sheet.

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**Question 1** The four elements of the communication process are: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Question 2** You can transmit messages many different ways. The three means of communication which cover all or the different ways to transmit messages are: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Question 3** CPL James talks to his team about the recent field exercise. What means of communication is CPL James using to communicate with his soldiers?

- a. Verbal
  - b. Nonverbal
  - c. Formal
  - d. Informal
- 

**Question 4** While counseling one of his soldiers, CPL Nelson notices the soldier's facial expression changes each time he mentions PLDC attendance. What means of communication is the soldier using to communicate this to CPL Nelson?

- a. Verbal
  - b. Nonverbal
  - c. Formal
  - d. Informal
-

**2-3-10. Check Your Learning, cont**

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**Question 5** SGT White, while talking to her squad, notices one of her soldiers looking at her with a blank stare. At what level is the soldier listening to SGT White?

- a. Not hearing at all
  - b. Active
  - c. Passive
  - d. Reflective
- 

**Question 6** SGT Keller, while briefing his squad, notices that the squad members are responding with head nodding and verbal feedback. At what level are the squad members listening?

- a. Not hearing at all
  - b. Active
  - c. Passive
  - d. Reflective
- 

**Question 7** PVT Foote tells his squad leader that he does not understand sections of the commander's message. He wants to know the meaning of some of the abbreviations since he feels that some may not be correct. What type of communication barrier is this?

- a. Psychological
  - b. Physical
  - c. Emotional
  - d. Reflective
- 

**Question 8** What type of communication barrier is the unique combination of factors that can cause a group of people to see and hear the same situation differently?

- a. Psychological
  - b. Physical
  - c. Emotional
  - d. Reflective
-

**2-3-10. Check Your Learning, cont**

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**Question 9** The unit commander issues instructions for the performance of unit tasks and conveys his policies and standards to unit members. What type of communication system does the commander use?

- a. Lateral
  - b. NCO support
  - c. Social communication
  - d. Chain of command
- 

**Question 10** Platoon leaders must inform each other of what they are doing and pass on to each other information they get from the company commander. What communication system must they use?

- a. Lateral
  - b. NCO support
  - c. Social communication
  - d. Chain of command
- 

**Question 11** “Tomorrow at 1800 hours,” is an example of which of the six essential elements of information:

- a. Who
  - b. What
  - c. When
  - d. Where
- 

**Question 12** SGT Young has very complex and important information to pass out. To reduce the possibility of the information becoming filtered or blocked, what is the primary channel of communication that he should use?

- a. Written
  - b. Chain of command
  - c. Informal group
  - d. Meetings
-

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## 2-3-11. Lesson 3-Answer Key and Feedback

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- Question 1** Correct responses are: sender, message, receiver, and feedback, Ref: page 2-3-4, para Communication process.
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- Question 2** Correct responses are: verbal, nonverbal, and combination, Ref: page 2-3-5, para The message and the means of transmission.
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- Question 3** Correct response is: a. Verbal, Ref: page 2-3-7, para Verbal communication.
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- Question 4** Correct response is: b. Nonverbal, Ref: pages 2-3-7 and 2-3-8, para Nonverbal communication.
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- Question 5** Correct response is: a. Not hearing at all, Ref: page 2-3-10, para Levels of listening.
- 
- Question 6** Correct response is: b. Active, Ref: page 2-3-10, para Levels of listening.
- 
- Question 7** Correct response is: b. Physical, Ref: page 2-3-12, para Physical barriers.
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- Question 8** Correct response is: a. Psychological, Ref: page 2-3-12, para Psychological barriers.
- 
- Question 9** Correct response is: d. Chain of command, Ref: page 2-3-15, para Chain of command.
- 
- Question 10** Correct response is: a. Lateral system, Ref: page 2-3-19, para Lateral system.
-

**2-3-11. Lesson 3-Answer Key and Feedback, cont**

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**Question 11** Correct response is: c. When, Ref: page 2-3-23, para Cataloging information.

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**Question 12** Correct response is: a. Written, Ref: page 2-3-27, para Use several channels of communication..

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