



BCATS

BUILDING, CONSTRUCTION
AND ALLIED TRADE SKILLS

Communication



Unit Standard 24357 (v3), Level 2

Receive instructions and
communicate information in
relation to BCATS projects **4 CREDITS**

BCITO
buildingpeople

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(BCITO)**

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Introduction

This handbook provides an introduction to communication typically required in BCATS environments and in the building and construction industry.

Like any skill, practice and experience improves communication. A qualified trades professional would be expected to have better communication skills than a 16 year old, just as you are a better communicator than someone who is 5.

How you will be assessed

You need to complete BCATS projects where you can demonstrate different ways of communicating effectively. Your teacher will complete an Assessor Observation Sheet to verify they observed you doing so.

You need to show your teacher/tutor that you can:

- read and listen to instructions and ask questions about anything you're not sure of
- use clear and appropriate body language and spoken, written, and drawn communication with three parties* to BCATS projects.
- use appropriate communication methods to receive and pass on information
- ask for information or help when you need it
- record and report information
- exchange information that fits the situation, occasion and people involved.

* 'Parties' refers to a group of people with certain characteristics such as teacher/tutor/employer, project team member, other classmates/colleagues not working on your project, client, supplier, and so on. So, for assessment purposes you need to communicate appropriately with three of these (or other relevant parties), not, for example, three different classmates.

Your teacher/tutor will also give you a Knowledge Assessment Sheet that you need to complete, which they will mark.

Glossary of terms

Term	Meaning
Abbreviations	Shortened versions of words used to identify construction related information and features.
Communication	Communication is a two-way process that involves the exchange of thoughts, messages or information through a common system of speech, signals, writing, graphics or behaviour.
Cutting lists	An itemised list of materials, including the name, size, length and number of items. They are used for pricing and completing a project.
Instructions	Information, directions, or acquired knowledge.
Job specifications	Documented instructions (oral, written, and graphic) that may include any of the following: manufacturer's specifications, recommendations or technical data sheets; material specifications; specifications from a specialist source such as an architect, designer, engineer or a supervisor; site or work specific requirements.
Parties	In this resource, 'parties' refers to groups of people with certain characteristics such as teacher/tutor/employer, project team member, other classmates/colleagues not working on your project, client, supplier.
Production plans	Documented processes that must to be followed in order to produce a finished product. A production plan can be written specifications, oral instructions or graphic representations.
Quality agreement	A detailed and documented interpretation of the customer's requirements. It can be used to set out the standard and quality of work required and may detail the grade of material, standard of finish, quality of hardware and other requirements that will ensure the finished product meets the customer's expectations.
Setting sheets	Specific instructions on how to set up or modify a machine to produce a specialised product. This may include an allocation of time for the operation and can also be used for pricing a project.
Templates, storey rods	Patterns used for the layout and construction of a project where particular accuracy is required.
Terminology	A vocabulary of technical terms appropriate to a particular trade.
Working drawings or plans	Documents containing project details through drawings, dimensions and elevations. A wide range of drawing methods or projections can be used to communicate precise information. These can range from a simple drawing of a single component through to a large number of complicated and detailed drawings for a major construction project.

Communication basics

Communication is the transfer of information between two or more people. It is a process that involves the exchange of thoughts, messages or information through a common system of speech, signals, writing, graphics or behaviour.

Being able to communicate well means that you can:

- receive, interpret, ask questions to check your understanding, and follow instructions correctly
- give clear and easily interpreted instructions
- work well with others
- get the project done the way it needs to be done
- be confident in asking and replying to questions.

Effective communication requires each party to:



- understand the requirements of the other party
- meet the requirements of the other party
- take responsibility for confirming that information has been shared and correctly interpreted.

Poor communication causes:



- mistakes
- poor - and often dangerous - working environments
- breakdowns in relationships with customers, supervisors, and workmates.

Checking understanding

It is good practice to confirm that all instructions have been received and understood. A combination of written and verbal communication normally provides the best results because effective communication is a two-way process that requires all parties to give, receive and interpret information.

This can be done by repeating the instructions to the supervisor/customer and using notes and diagrams to support the explanation. It is also good practice to wait for the supervisor/customer to confirm that the interpretation of instructions is accurate or to correct anything that is not right. This ensures that all parties know exactly what is going to be done, how well it is going to be done, and when it needs to be done by.

Job specifications and communication

In BCATS and building and construction contexts, instructions about what the project is, how it is to be done, and what materials, finishes, etc, are needed are in a projects' job specifications.

Almost all trades start their day with 'toolbox' meetings. These supplement the original job specifications. Toolbox meetings are where the day's goals are discussed, the status of any hazards updated, issues raised and resolved, and tasks allocated.

Job specifications can be:

1. drawn
2. written
3. verbal or
4. a combination of ALL of the above.

Drawn information includes	Written information includes
→ detailed plans, drawings and elevations	→ handwritten instructions and explanations
→ quick sketches or diagrams.	→ typed instructions and explanations
	→ faxed or mailed instructions and
	→ cutting lists.

A challenge with delivering instructions in a drawn or written format is that the receiver must be able to read and interpret the information as the writer intended. This is because there are many instances where the writer is not available to answer questions, such as when job specifications are downloaded from the internet.

Verbal instructions can either be given in person or over the phone.

Problems with verbal instructions can include:

- instructions not being clear or specific
- the receiver not listening effectively
- the receiver not taking notes and, therefore, forgetting what they have been told.

Job specifications and communication

Using the job specifications

It is important to:

1. read through the written specifications, preferably with the person providing the information, and clarify what is required
2. check that the working drawings and written specifications provide all the information needed to create the project
3. listen to oral instructions and check that they match the written specifications. (It is a good idea to add notes to the written specifications so you can refer back to them as you do your project.)
4. do a final check with your teacher/tutor to ensure that all the information needed to complete the project is available and you have a common understanding of requirements. This includes checking that:
 - you understand all the instructions and can visualise the finished product
 - you know what materials are needed
 - health and safety requirements are clear
 - equipment needed has been identified
 - you know when any additional help, information or supervision requirements are needed
 - the expected duration of the project and the completion date are clear.



Job specifications being referred to as work progresses on site.

Communicating with different parties

Information and instructions about your BCATS projects will come from and be shared with a variety of parties, such as:

- your teacher/tutor or employer/supervisor
- your client (which in a BCATS environment, could be a family member or the kaumātua of the marae you're making your project for, your school's Principal if your project is for the school, someone from the local council if your project is for the community, etc, etc)
- your classmates or workmates generally
- those you are working with on a project or specific task
- tradespeople and trade suppliers.

The way you relate to each individual or group will be different but you need to establish an effective communication relationship with each.

Some examples of how you may need to adapt communication styles for different parties are below.

COMMUNICATING WITH:	
Another student or a workmate	<p>You can use informal language, 'text speak', and slang.</p> <p>Regardless of how well you know them, try not to swear and never use offensive, racist or sexist language. Even if they say they don't mind, they and others reading or hearing your communications may still be offended. Good communication can't occur if people try to ignore you because of what or how you say it.</p> <p>Don't complain about your teacher, your boss, other students or workmates, or your client. Complaints and bad-mouthing tends to find their way back to who you're being disrespectful about.</p>
Your teacher or employer	<p>Be respectful and polite, no matter how well you know each other or get on.</p>
A client or an end user of your product	<p>Remember that you are the 'face' of your school or business when you're communicating with external people.</p> <p>Be polite and use whole sentences.</p> <p>Don't use text speak or acronyms (eg, LOL, FOTFL, SMH, FOMO) or slang.</p> <p>Ask someone to check your email, text, or order before you send it, especially if spelling and/or formal writing aren't your strengths yet.</p>
A supplier, another tradesperson or other business professional	<p>Be clear, to the point.</p> <p>Use common industry terms and abbreviations.</p>

Communicating with different parties

Trade-specific terminology

Take care when communicating with customers or people who are not familiar with the terminology of the trade or workplace.

There are a lot of unique words or terms used by tradespeople. There are others that have different meanings in a BCATS or building and construction context than in everyday language.

Many products and processes also have abbreviations that make little sense to the general public. For example, 1.200mm x 0.200m x 25mm Rad, Fact, D4S should make perfect sense to a carpenter but is not likely to make sense to your client or a trade that doesn't use timber.



Taumarunui High School Trade Academy students working together to turn job specifications into a finished community playground.

Communication methods

Verbal communication

Verbal or oral communication uses spoken words to pass on information or ask questions. Good verbal communication requires skills in

- speaking
- listening
- using silence
- asking questions
- adapting speech according to different situations and people.

Speaking

When speaking, keep what you are saying:

- relevant to the context and other person's needs
- straight to the point – clear and concise
- structured – presented in a logical sequence.

When you have finished speaking, allow time for the person you're talking with to think about what you've said and ask questions about anything they don't understand or to check they've understood what you've said correctly. If you are the person listening, listen carefully, ask questions, and reword key information and repeat back to the speaker to confirm you've understood correctly.

You will feel confident the correct messages were heard if you also use open-ended questions to check that they have correctly interpreted what you said.

Listening

Verbal communication doesn't work without good speaking and good listening. Listening is a learned skill – hearing is not the same as listening!

Being able to listen effectively will help you to follow instructions or directions and make connections. This will ultimately improve the quality of any work you produce.

Listening to others allows you to benefit from other people's knowledge and expertise and to be sure of the project's goals and each step to achieving them.

A good way to improve listening skills is to practice a technique called 'active' listening. Active listening requires you, as a listener, to focus on what is being said and then paraphrase (say in your own words) what you have understood so that you can be sure you are on the right track and the person who is speaking can be sure you have 'got it'.

Communication methods

An example of active listening

A co-worker, teacher or employer might say:

“(your name), can you please go to the van, grab my cell phone and call the office. Tell Laura that we’ll be on our way to Mungavin Street in 20 minutes”

Using the skill of active listening, you would reply something like:

“Sure, get your phone from the van and tell Laura that we’ll be heading to Mungavin Street in 20?”

Wait to make sure they confirm, and then go and do the task you’ve been asked to complete.

Using silence

Silence can be a powerful tool when you’re communicating, especially when you’re asking questions.

Using silence isn’t the same as ‘opting out’ or not contributing to a conversation. You should always speak up when you’re asked to, ask the questions you need to ask, and volunteer information that will help achieve the project’s goal. However, silence – or pauses – can:

- emphasise the point you’re making
- give people time to absorb information
- give people a chance to organise their thoughts before they answer.

It’s easier for you and the people around you to listen and to concentrate when silence is used well.

How does silence work?

An effective silence (or pause) is about 3 seconds. It works in three ways:

- a pause before a question shows that what you’re going to ask is important and requires attention from the listener
- a pause directly after a question leaves space for the listener to respond and gives them a chance to ask questions themselves
- pausing again after an initial response encourages the listener to continue talking and give you more information.

Communication methods

Silence gives you the opportunity to:



Slow down



Process



Think

"Silence is the sound of people thinking."

Asking questions

Sometimes instructions that seem clear to the person delivering them can be confusing to the receiver. This often occurs because assumptions are made about the knowledge the information's recipient has to correctly interpret a brief or vague statement. Asking questions is the best way to check there is a common understanding.

Asking questions is a big part of how humans learn. Most of us have been asking 'why' since we learned to talk.

'Why' questions help us make sense of the world around us and help us to learn more effectively and at a faster rate. There's even research that shows that the more intelligent you are, the more curious you are, and the more questions you ask. Targeted, constructive questions are key to learning.

Asking questions is the best way to get information about a person, a project, a product or an event and it's definitely one of the best ways to learn new skills.

However, how a question is asked influences learning and relationships.

There's a big difference between:



and



"what's the point of this?"

"when will I ever need to know this?"

"why do I have to do this?"

"what can I do to help?"

"where did you learn how to do that?"

"what comes next?"

Closed and open questions

Questions are used in both verbal and written communication. Closed and open questions are used for different reasons. As a rule of thumb, closed questions require a quick answer and open questions start or continue a conversation.

Leading questions suggest the answer or contain the information that the questioner is looking for. They should be avoided because they can prevent the person answering from saying what they actually want to say. An example of a leading question is: "I have done that wrong, haven't I?"

Closed questions

Closed questions are questions that can either be answered by a single word or a short phrase. They are useful when clarifying a single piece of information. You might know them as yes/no questions but a lot of the time closed questions can't be answered with just a 'yes' or a 'no'.

They often – but don't always – start with 'is', 'will', 'do', 'have', 'can', or 'are'. Examples of closed questions are: "Is this the right timber for the project?" and "When does this project need to be completed by?"

Closed questions:

- give you facts
- are quick to answer
- give the questioner control of the conversation.

People use closed questions to:

- get specific information
- get an answer quickly
- get clarification
- limit talk time
- lead the conversation.

Open questions

Although any question can receive a long answer, open questions deliberately seek longer answers, and are the opposite of closed questions. They can never be answered with a simple yes or no so they help to draw out additional information.

Open questions often – but don't always – start with 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why', 'how' or 'who'. Examples of open questions are: "What do I need to do with these materials?" and "How do I set up and use this compound saw correctly?"

Communication methods

Open questions:

- ask the person being questioned to think or reflect
- ask for opinions and feelings
- give the person being questioned control of the conversation.

People use open questions to:

- start a conversation
- build relationships
- get open and honest feedback
- encourage sharing – skills, information, ideas, concerns
- create a positive learning environment
- find out what makes people 'tick' – what's important to them.

CLOSED VERSUS OPEN QUESTIONS	
Closed question	Open question
Is your project finished?	What does your project involve?
Do you have your learner's license?	How did you prepare to sit your license?
Is Alien Weaponry your favorite band?	What kinds of music do you like?
Do you like our school?	Why is our school great?



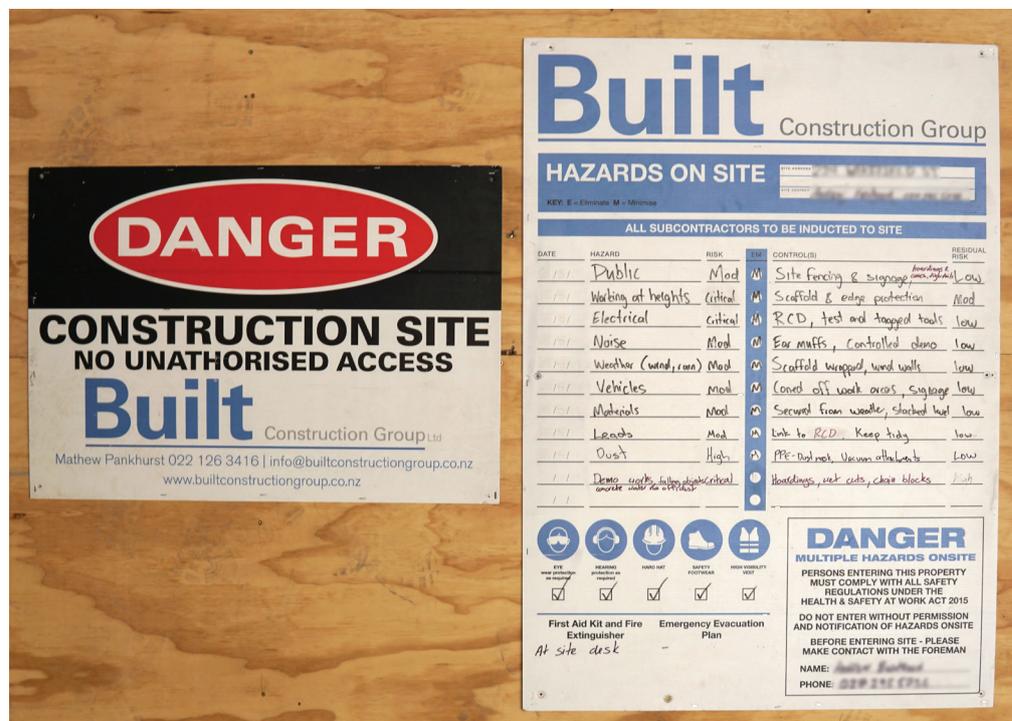
Think:
What open and closed questions do you think these Kaiapoi High School students may have needed to ask each other as they planned for and made pavers to use for their Level 2 paving project?

Communication methods

Written communication

When you write information of any sort, make sure it is:

- legible – easily read
- accurate (check that it also contains all the information the reader needs to know)
- appropriate for the audience (for example, a client can't be expected to know abbreviations used for timber involved in a project but you'd expect suppliers and colleagues/classmates to).



An example of a hazard board, which is important for everyone to read and understand before going on site. (Note that it would also normally include dates – these and contact details were erased for the purpose of this photo.)

Communication methods

Tips for writing good emails

- When writing emails, remember that they can end up being forwarded to many people.
- Always start your email with a proper greeting. This could be 'Dear [their name]', 'Tēnā koe xxx', or 'To whom it may concern' if it is a stranger or someone more senior than you. If it is someone you know well, you could instead write 'Hello [their name]', 'Hi xxx, or 'Kia ora xxx'.
- Keep it to the point and use formal language. Do not use slang. Do not use contractions (eg don't, won't, can't).
- Restrict abbreviations to those typical for the topic you're writing about (such as grades of timber). Do not use even these abbreviations if your audience (such as a client) wouldn't be expected to immediately understand them.
- The final sentence of your email is ideally an invitation to communicate more, such as "Please feel welcome to call me on [your phone number] if you have any questions or would like to discuss."
- End your email with a sign off, such as 'Yours faithfully' or 'Nāku, nā' or – if you know them well – 'Kind regards/Best wishes/Ngā mihi'.
- Always read it through before you press send. This is to double-check your meaning is clear and that there are no spelling or grammatical errors. If in doubt, ask someone else to check it before you send it.
- Do a final check – have you spelt their name correctly?

Reading

A good BCATS student can get information needed from written documents. Aside from job specifications and your student resources, these could include signs, order forms, cutting lists, manufacturer's instructions, Safety Data Sheets documents, emergency procedures...and the list could go on.

You use reading skills to make sense of text from lots of different sources, so that you can figure out what you need to know to get the job done. Practicing good reading habits while you're a student will help when you are working and getting a qualification in your chosen trade.

GOOD READING HABIT TIPS

Scanning

If you are looking for a specific piece of information you can scan a document instead of reading it in full. You scan when you are looking to see if your favourite food is on a menu, finding the relevant section in a resource like this one, checking the weather or scores, and looking to see if your name is on a list.

When you scan, you need to be clear about what information you are looking for so you can stop reading when you have found out what you need to know.

Skimming

Skimming is another type of quick reading. You scan when looking for a specific piece of information or an answer to a question. Skim read when you need to get an idea of the main points of a bigger section of text.

Reading for detail

We read for detail when we need to get a full understanding of a document or piece of text. Once you have skimmed a document to get a feel for it, take time to read it fully.

It's slower than scanning or skimming because you need to start at the beginning of the document and read it all the way to the end. You will need to read documents such as job specifications and manufacturer's instructions fully. Aside from getting a good understanding of requirements, once you've read properly it is even faster to scan documents to find specific information

Non-verbal communication

About 80% of human communication relies on visual appearance, body language, positioning, status and facial expression.

Appearance

A person who is well presented and tidily dressed will create a more favourable impression of themselves and the likely quality of their work

Body language

A person who stands straight, maintains good posture, smiles, communicates with their hands and maintains eye contact tends to come across as confident and relaxed.



Negative body language – no communication here.



Positive body language. Eye contact, open gestures, standing straight.

Positioning

As a general rule, people who know each other well can stand closer without feeling uncomfortable. If you are meeting someone for the first time in a BCATS environment, it is best to maintain a professional physical distance. (Considerations such as gender, culture, and status will influence what this distance is.)

Hand signals

People in the construction industry frequently rely on hand signals for relaying information about basic tasks when they can see but not hear each other. However, it is critical that both parties (the signaller and the receiver) have the same understanding of what each signal means. A quick check before using them generally prevents misunderstandings.

Always keep a clear line of sight between the signaller and the receiver.

