

# Communication

## Verbal Communication

Verbal communication occurs when people use their mouths to speak or make sounds. Verbal communication is unwritten.

Often verbal communication is made up of words, or a mix of words and sounds. However, in some cases, verbal communication may also consist only of sounds. One example is the complex set of sounds that the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert developed to use when hunting. They are able to communicate with each other in tones that do not alert and scare off their prey.

When there is a recognised structure of verbal communication, it is known as 'language'.

Verbal communication is the key-stone to what are known as 'orate' cultures. Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are 'orate' in nature, whereby information is handed down from generation to generation in an oral manner – either by the spoken word or by song. In 'orate' cultures storytelling plays an important role in the passing down of information and messages from older to younger generations.

## Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is often referred to as 'body language'. People are able to convey ideas and feelings by the way they gesture with their hands, the way they look with their eyes and by the posture of their body.

Non-verbal communication plays an important role in our lives. It enhances the messages that are given in spoken language (verbal communication) but also provides another method of communication that doesn't rely on sound.

When there is a recognised structure of non-verbal communication, it is also known as 'language'. For example, sign languages, such as *Auslan*, have been developed to assist people with hearing difficulties to communicate.

Non-verbal communication is often used to silently convey a message (e.g. in a meeting a person may look at a colleague and wrinkle their nose, or raise eyebrows to convey thoughts and feelings of disapproval).

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups developed highly sophisticated forms of communication in a non-verbal manner to utilise mainly when hunting.

## Written Communication

Written communication is when people use writing (recognised letters or symbols) to convey ideas and information.

Written communication may also be made up with images, data or text and often involves many genres, styles and technologies to convey the message.

As with any type of non-verbal communication, if there is a recognised structure to the symbols, letters or images, it is known as 'language'.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups use symbols, drawings of animals, people and the land, in order to communicate their stories and convey messages.

## Metaphysical communication

The word 'metaphysical' can mean a reality that relates to, or is outside of (i.e. transcends), what is noticeable to the senses. This means an existence beyond what we can visibly see in the universe, for example 'supernatural' or 'spiritual'.

Metaphysical communication is used to describe the communication that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with their ancestral spirits. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also connected spiritually to the land. Every element is part of a spiritual and social whole.

*"Through totemism, everything - humans, animals, land, weather (sun, wind, rain), moon, sky, stars - belongs to a conceptual, spiritual and social whole. Thus, it is that Aboriginal societies across Australia have a culture that accords metaphysical primacy to place rather than time. Thus, while Europeans have ignored the Aboriginal notion of being in the world, of connectedness to place, kin, community, all species and the natural world, they have insisted on the perspective of time and history.*

*Stories, songs and ceremonies recreate The Dreaming, explain the laws left for the people by the supreme beings and fulfil sacred obligations to kin, the species and the landscape. The conceptual framework of this philosophy is expressed through ceremonies..."*

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accept this form of communication as the 'norm' and believe it is an important aspect of how they communicate with their ancestral spirits.

There are many debates held around this topic. The commonly accepted features of metaphysical communication relate to intuitive thinking and the ability to transmit ideas by thought or mental processes.

---

<sup>i</sup> *Aboriginal Philosophy* by Vick Grieves, Faculty of Education and Arts, School of Humanities and Social Science, The University of Newcastle: <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/awaba/culture/aboriginal-wisdom-and-philosophy.html>