



Virtual Communication Styles Tool

Overview

Understanding your virtual communication style is useful for improving your interaction outcomes in both professional and personal environments. This tool will not only help you identify your virtual communication style, but it will also help you adapt your communication approach to facilitate clearer exchanges, forge stronger connections in virtual settings, and achieve your communication goals.

Follow the instructions below to gain insight into your virtual communication style. To get the best results, answer each question honestly based on your instincts and typical behavior when engaging in virtual communication.

Step 1: Communication Style Assessment

Instructions: For each question, select a score of 1-5 without overthinking your answer:

- 1= Strongly Disagree
- 2= Disagree
- 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4=Agree
- 5=Strongly Agree

Note: *The term “messages” in the questions below refers broadly to any kind of text-based virtual message (email, instant messages, phone text messages, etc.).*

1. I often choose to temporarily ignore work messages during the workday so I can get my work tasks done.

My score _____

2. I often send a single sentence or few-word response to work emails.

My score _____

3. I ignore any work messages outside of normal work hours.

My score _____

4. I find it more efficient to discuss tasks and issues in real-time meetings with coworkers rather than via email.

My score _____

5. During the workday, I use notifications (e.g., sound or vibrate) on my phone to alert me to incoming messages.

My score _____

6. I regularly send messages that are multiple paragraphs long.

My score _____

7. I find using text-based communication (e.g., email and instant messages) to be much more efficient for handling work matters than meetings.

My score _____

8. I regularly check my work messages outside of normal work hours to see if there is anything I need to deal with.

My score _____

9. I often find it difficult to get my point across via text-based communication (e.g., email and instant messages).

My score _____

10. I only respond to messages in pre-determined, confined time periods during the workday.

My score _____

11. Long messages are a waste of time.

My score _____

12. Any work messages that are sent to me outside of normal work hours can wait until the next workday for me to respond to them.

My score _____

13. During the workday, I frequently check my inbox and/or phone to see what messages have come in.

My score _____

14. When responding to work messages, my goal is to finish them as quickly as possible.

My score _____

15. When I'm focused on a work task, I don't let incoming messages interrupt my focus.

My score _____

16. I'm concerned I'll miss out on important information if I don't check my work messages outside of work hours.

My score _____

17. Real-time meetings almost always feel like a waste of time.

My score _____

18. I believe it's important to be thorough in responding to work messages to make sure I didn't miss anything.

My score _____

19. I set boundaries to ensure my work communication doesn't interrupt my life outside of work.

My score _____

20. During the workday, I aim to be responsive and answer work messages as soon as I get them.

My score _____

21. I have trouble gauging my work colleagues' intended meaning over text-based communication (e.g., email and instant messages).

My score _____

22. It's more important to provide all potentially necessary information in a message rather than keep it brief.

My score _____

23. I often find myself responding to work messages outside of normal work hours.

My score _____

24. I find that nearly anything my coworkers or I need to relay can be done over text-based communication (e.g., email or instant messaging).

My score _____

Step 2: Style Analysis

This tool is intended to help you begin to understand your communication strengths and weaknesses, as well as to help you gain a deeper perspective of how others might approach their virtual communication differently from you. This tool is by no means exhaustive, but it can help you to focus on some of the core differences between virtual communication styles.

Directions: Follow the guidance below to calculate your scores for each of the following:

- ❖ Communication Responders vs. Concentrators
- ❖ Communication Efficients vs. Deep-divers
- ❖ Communication Boundary-drawers vs. Boundary-crossers
- ❖ Communication Talkers vs. Texters

For each category, a score of 0 places you directly in the center of the continuum. The closer to +12 your score is, the more strongly you fit into the right-hand category. The closer your score is to -12, the more strongly you fit into the left-hand category.

Communication Responders vs. Concentrators

1. Add up your scores for Questions #5, 13, and 20: Subtotal #1 _____
2. Add up your scores for Questions #1, 10, and 15: Subtotal #2 _____
3. Subtract Subtotal #2 from Subtotal #1 (Subtotal #1 – Subtotal #2): Final Score _____



Communication Responders

Individuals who are inclined toward the *Communication Responders* category tend to frequently check their messages and send prompt replies. Communication Responders are more likely to have audio or vibration message notifications set on their mobile devices so they are more aware of information as it arrives. Their fast communication style keeps them informed—especially when it comes to time-sensitive information—because they see messages quickly. This approach enables Communication Responders to capitalize on opportunities more often than others, as they can volunteer and/or set the tone of conversation chains before others even realize the potential to do so. Similarly, Communication Responders' rapid responses can help increase their team's overall productivity by pushing tasks forward in a timely manner. However, because Communication Responders regularly interrupt their work tasks to read and respond to messages, it can be challenging for them to find long periods of focus time. This type of multitasking and reduced focus can lead to increased error rates and decreased individual productivity, as frequently switching between tasks can be very mentally taxing. Those who rate high in this category can benefit from setting aside a few blocks of time each day solely for deep work, during which you close out of all your communication tools and turn off all notifications.

Communication Concentrators

Those who are predisposed to the *Communication Concentrators* category tend to intentionally and temporarily ignore messages during certain periods of the workday so they can more fully focus on other tasks. They set aside specific blocks of time to read and respond to communication, and beyond those times, they limit the degree to which they attend to incoming messages. Concentrators excel in maintaining greater focus, both on their non-communication-related work tasks and their communication itself, by limiting communication multitasking. By minimizing distractions and maintaining their attention on key tasks, Communication Concentrators are more likely to produce high-quality work with fewer mistakes. Further, Communication Concentrators can be more individually productive, as they spend less time needing to catch back up on where they left off on work tasks after responding to messages. However, while immersed in their work, Concentrators may miss out on spontaneous opportunities or time-sensitive requests that require immediate attention, potentially impacting team collaboration and their longer-term goals. Those who rate high in this category can benefit from briefly connecting with colleagues to set expectations about when messages will be read and responded to, and how others can get in touch with you for time sensitive issues.

Communication Efficients vs. Deep-divers

1. Add up your scores for Questions #2, 11, and 14: Subtotal #1 _____
2. Add up your scores for Questions #6, 18, and 22: Subtotal #2 _____
3. Subtract Subtotal #2 from Subtotal #1 (Subtotal #1 – Subtotal #2): Final Score _____



Communication Efficients

Individuals who are inclined toward the *Communication Efficients* category tend to provide very brief and concise responses to work communication. Their goal is to be as succinct with their communication as possible to save time for themselves and others, and avoid feeling “buried” by their inboxes. This approach can minimize communication burnout. Their efficiency also gives them more time to advance other work tasks rather than dedicating a significant portion of their day to their messages. Communication Efficients can face challenges when it comes to the apparent brevity of their communication style; while some people will appreciate not receiving overly-long messages, others will view these abrupt responses as a signal that the message-sender doesn’t care. Efficients excel at identifying core communication points, but they can sometimes unintentionally miss responding to message components that their communication-recipient deemed important. Further, the lack of detail Efficients provide in their responses can sometimes result in misinterpretations. Those who rate high in this category can benefit from inviting follow-up questions to their messages to address any potential gaps in understanding and prevent them from appearing abrupt.

Communication Deep-divers

Individuals who are predisposed to the *Communication Deep-divers* category take a comprehensive, detailed approach to all work communication. They respond to each point of a colleague’s message, prioritizing the completeness of their communication over saving time. Communication Deep-divers excel at conveying engagement and interest in their work through their communication practices. By taking the time to send lengthier, well-crafted messages, they demonstrate conscientiousness and ensure message-receivers feel like they were truly “heard.” Additionally, this thorough approach to communication can have the added benefit of reducing misunderstandings. However, Communication Deep-divers can struggle to get through all of their messages in a timely fashion due to the amount of time and energy they dedicate to each one. Without a strict means of prioritizing, all communication becomes important, which results in less time for completing non-communication-related work tasks and can lead to communication burnout. Deep-divers’ detailed messages can sometimes frustrate Communication Efficients and also put added pressure on others to respond with a similarly lengthy response. Those who rank high in this category can benefit by leading their longer communications with bullet points or summaries to focus on key points and practice conciseness.

Communication Boundary-drawers vs. Boundary-crossers

1. Add up your scores for Questions #3, 12, and 19: Subtotal #1 _____
2. Add up your scores for Questions #8, 16, and 23: Subtotal #2 _____
3. Subtract Subtotal #2 from Subtotal #1 (Subtotal #1 – Subtotal #2): Final Score _____



Communication Boundary-drawers

Individuals who are inclined toward the *Communication Boundary-drawers* category adeptly differentiate between their professional communication during work hours and personal communication during leisure time. They tend to protect their “off the clock” time with tactics such as shutting off their work devices, ignoring incoming work messages, and being fully mentally engaged when they’re not at work. Communication Boundary-drawers are often skilled at disconnecting and taking advantage of their time away from the office. As a result, they return to work the next day (or following a weekend) feeling more refreshed and rejuvenated, which can lead to better work output and reduced risk of burnout. Conversely, boundary-drawers can miss out on relational opportunities, such as communicating with their coworkers and supervisors in less formal message contexts outside of normal work hours. Their clear boundaries can make them seem less engaged and dedicated to their work compared to those who respond to messages more frequently outside of work hours. Those who rank high in this category can benefit from making a greater effort to engage in strengthening work relationships and being communicative during the workday to help offset any negative impressions stemming from being unavailable after work hours.

Communication Boundary-crossers

Individuals who tend toward the *Communication Boundary-crossers* category often find themselves blurring the lines between work and home by responding to work-related communication outside of normal work hours. Boundary-crossers are often perceived as dedicated, critical team members because of their willingness to stay “plugged in” outside of the traditional workday. They can develop stronger relationships with supervisors and team members because of their engagement in work communication outside of their contracted hours. Another benefit of being one of the first to respond to after-hours communication is that, in certain contexts, Communication Boundary-crossers are able to set the tone and proactively direct conversations. Because of their lack of clear lines between work and their lives outside of work, however, Boundary-crossers can often feel an inability to escape from work. Their time off can be less rejuvenating because they are either engaging in—or thinking about—their work communication. This constant connectivity can be distracting during time off, making it more difficult to fully recharge, and can potentially lead to burnout. Those who rank high in this category can benefit from setting aside time after work purely for rejuvenation, during which work devices and notifications are turned off.

Communication Talkers vs. Texters

1. Add up your scores for Questions #4, 9, and 21: Subtotal # 1_____
2. Add up your scores for Questions #7, 17, and 24: Subtotal #2_____
3. Subtract Subtotal #2 from Subtotal #1 (Subtotal #1 – Subtotal #2): Final Score _____



Communication Talkers

Individuals who are inclined toward the *Communication Talkers* category tend to prefer conversations that are held in real time and face to face (either in person or via video calls), and they find that text-based communication can often be limiting and frustrating. They find it more effective to see and hear the person (or people) they're communicating with, as doing so can strengthen relationships and expedite certain communication by eliminating the time lags that occur with text-based communication, such as email. When complicated information is involved in an interaction, Talkers are less likely to overlook important details because of their ability to ask follow-up questions and better gauge nonverbal behavior due to interacting synchronously. They can face challenges due to feeling a need to constantly be "on" and self-monitor during their interactions, as their communication partner(s) can see their body language and hear any mistakes in real time. As a result, Talkers can become fatigued because of their communication practices. Talkers can also face slower work progress due to time spent engaging in "small talk" and scheduling difficulties that arise when trying to coordinate synchronous meetings. Those who rank high in this category can benefit from more regularly leveraging text-based communication (e.g., email, instant message, and texting) rather than video or in-person meetings to reduce the number of time- and socially-intensive interactions for themselves (and their collaborators).

Communication Texters

Individuals who are predisposed to the *Communication Texters* category feel that real-time meetings are generally a poor use of time, and that most interactions can be dealt with more effectively via text-based communication (e.g., email or instant messaging). Texters benefit from being able to communicate at their own pace and in a format that doesn't require them to monitor their physical presence (e.g., facial expressions, video backgrounds, and clothing). They are more often able to avoid the hassle and time commitment of needing to schedule synchronous meetings—and sometimes avoid meetings altogether—which can give them more time to complete non-communication work tasks sooner. Texters also benefit from the "delayed" nature of text-based communication whereby they can plan out what they intend to relay and avoid being caught off guard by an unexpected question or comment. Texters can face challenges because their preference for text-based communication can reduce their efficiency when many back-and-forth messages are required to complete a task or project. Further, Texters' propensity to avoid richer interactions can lead to more misinterpretations during interactions due to a lack of nonverbal behavior (tone of voice, facial expressions, etc.). Texters may have reduced opportunities for building trust and increasing relational strength with the people they are interacting with, especially with colleagues who prefer to connect face to face. Those who rank high in this category can

benefit from more regularly incorporating phone, video, or in-person meetings to strengthen their connections with others and better show their “effort”.

Further Reading

To learn more about communication best practices, strategies for specific business scenarios, and the research behind these tools, get your copy of [*PING: The Secrets of Successful Virtual Communication*](#) (by Professor Andrew Brodsky). Written by the PING Group CEO and research world expert on virtual interactions, this book provides a definitive guide to navigating the complexities of workplace interactions in a technology-centered world. Available wherever books are sold.