

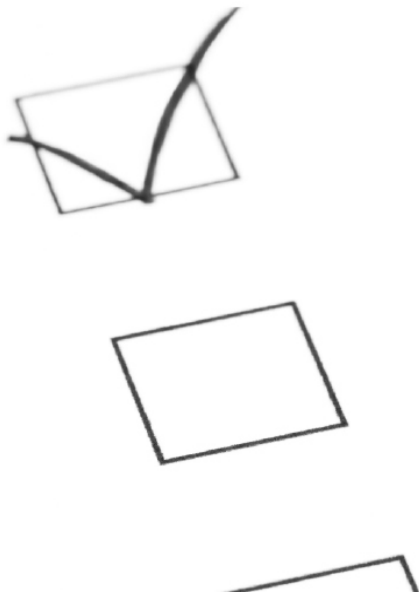
2011 CALA BIENNIAL ASSESSOR TRAINING

Assessor Communication Skills

Session 13

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Building Laboratory
Excellence

Vers l'excellence
dans les laboratoires



Agenda

- Scenarios
- Communication skills
 - General guidelines
 - Listening skills
 - Open/closed questions
 - Body language

Scenario #1

You are scheduled to interview the analyst for BOD at 10 a.m. You arrive at the bench and recognize the analyst – they’re also a CALA assessor. “Great!” you think – this person knows what it’s like to be an assessor and understands the requirements. You start the interview, and the exact opposite occurs. The analyst openly challenges any finding you raise.

Scenario #1 - Strategies

- Approach the assessment the same as you would for any other analyst. You should be the one guiding the interview. Don't abdicate the control of the assessment to the analyst.
- Self check - are you validating against the standard or personal experience?
- Is the analyst validating against the standard or personal experience?
- Communication style...

Scenario #2

You are a fairly new assessor, and have recently undergone CALA's 5-day Lead Assessor training course. You've been assigned to two other teams, and so far, so good! You're getting more comfortable at assessing and have not had any major issues with the other laboratories or the teams to which you were assigned. As the assessment at this third visit progresses, you feel that the Lead Assessor is pushing issues that are outside the scope of the assessment process. How do you handle this situation?

Scenario #2

- Discuss the situation away from the analysts. (e.g. evening meeting with all assessors)
- Seek understanding – compare what you learned in the assessor training against what is happening in the assessment. Ask for clarification.
- Be open to feedback – you may be the one misinterpreting the situation.
- Document your concerns on the Lead Assessor Evaluation Form at the end of the assessment

Scenario #3

You are assessing a method that does not meet the requirement. The analyst vehemently disagrees and after a heated discussion storms from the room.

What could have caused this assessment to go off track?
What can you do to prevent an escalation?

Scenario #3 - Strategies

- Could you have diffused the situation before it escalated?
- Did you blow past the warning signs?
- Communication style
 - Too assertive?
 - Are you listening to what is being said?
- Did you aid in the escalation?
- Are you assessing against the standard? Are you able to explain what you have observed vs. the requirement? Would rephrasing have helped?
- Did you respond emotionally?
- Take a break. If you need a minute to assess how to respond or how to defuse the situation, call for a break.
- If necessary, engage the lead assessor to help with the situation.

Scenario #4

You notice an older piece of equipment in the area and during the course of the interview with the analyst it becomes apparent that this older piece of equipment is used periodically for the appendix you are assessing. You ask the analyst to turn it on just to verify that it is still operational. The Quality Manager becomes quite defensive. He thinks you are asking the analyst to run an analysis and gets quite upset. He questions whether assessors can even make this request.

Scenario #4 - Strategies

- A06 - 3.2.3 Equipment Requirements

Equipment should be operational at the time of the assessment, and an assessor can ask for the equipment to be turned on and operated, or ask that all or part of a method be demonstrated.

- Could you have diffused the situation? Try to step back and figure out why the person is upset. If they have misunderstood, clarify what you are asking.
- How did you respond to the QM?

Scenario #5

At the end of the day, you are presenting your findings to the supervisor of the area of the lab that you assessed. The supervisor's response to some of the requirements is different from the analyst's.

Scenario #5 - Strategies

- Clarify the issue
- Are the analyst and supervisor referring to the same version of the method?
- Sometimes questioning the QM or lab manager may bring additional information to light that negate the finding.

How well do you listen?

- Take a few minutes to fill out the Listening assessment questionnaire

*** Assess yourself honestly ***

Scoring yourself

- Never = 2
- Sometimes = 1
- Often = 0

Interpreting the results

- 21-24- You are an excellent listener. Keep up the good work!
- 12-20- You have the basics of listening, but there is room for improvement.
- 0-11 – You could benefit from working on your listening skills.

Deterrents to effective listening

- Attempting to focus on two competing conversations or messages
- Preconceived notions
- If you perceive your prestige is threatened
- Focusing on what you want to say next instead of what is being said

Keys to effective listening

- **Focus** – Paying complete attention to the speaker and the message he or she is trying to convey.
- **Feedback** – Actively engaging the speaker through encouraging words and gestures, clarifying questions, and summarizing key points.
- **Filtering** – Creating personal meaning from the speaker’s comments. Putting the speaker’s comments in context with your own experiences, knowledge, and perceptions. Remember when doing an assessment to put the comments in context with the standards.

Focus

- Face the speaker.
- Make eye contact.
- Don't let your brain outrun the conversation.
- Pay attention to physical and verbal cues.
- Take your time in responding.

Feedback -- Verbal

- Ask clarifying questions.
- Re-state or paraphrase comments.
- Use listening comments such as, “I see,” “uh huh,” or “oh really.”
- Summarize facts, feelings conveyed, or other key points.
- Don’t interrupt the speaker to make listening comments, paraphrases, or summaries.

Feedback – Non-verbal

- Face the speaker.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Adopt a listening posture.
- Change your body posture if you find yourself drifting.
- Keep arms at your side or hands in your lap.

Filtering

- Concentrate on what the speaker is trying to say.
 - Don't mentally argue or judge comments prematurely.
- Avoid emotional reactions until the conversation is complete.
 - Try to remain objective and open-minded.
- Be judicious in anticipating statements

The power of silence

- Silence can be a powerful tool to elicit information.
- Silence during a conversation is uncomfortable and people feel compelled to break it.
- Be silent, but engaged (maintain eye contact and listening posture) and the other person will usually volunteer more information on whatever topic is being addressed.

Open ended and closed ended questions

- Closed ended questions – can be answered with one or two words. Useful for clarifying details.
- Open ended questions – require a longer answer. Useful to getting more details, or opinions.
- Can I help you? vs What can I do to help you?

Open or closed?

- Can I help you?
- What do you mean by [topic]
- Can you give me more information?
- What other information do you have on this?
- Has the report been signed?
- Do you have any questions?

Rephrasing for clarity

- Lab may use different terminology. Adapt to their terminology for your explanations.
- Watch for visual signals that the other person did not grasp what you said – rephrase.
- Did you pack too much into what you said? Break it down.
- Think of a different way to restate what you said.

Nine body language dos and don'ts

- Words are only a small part of communication
- Most influential parts of communication are your non-verbals
- Learning to master non-verbals will increase your ability to influence others and get them to really listen to you

Source: Sharon Sayler, *What Your Body Says (and How to Master the Message): Inspire, Influence, Build Trust, and Create Lasting Business Relationships*

Don't fill the air with um, ah, oh, and you know

- Verbal pauses are distracting and muddle what you are trying to say
- Meaningless extra syllables or words make you look less intelligent
- Your message will be more effective once you eliminate them - though it takes practice!
- If you say a word and hang onto it before you actually know what you're going to say next, it becomes a bridge word. The ums and ahs are a warning sign that you need to breathe.

Don't use the fig-leaf pose

- By placing your hands to cover the groin region you're making yourself look visually smaller.
- Body posture says "I'm harmless" or "I'm afraid" - does not convey a level of confidence
- Practice letting your arms hang naturally at your sides

Do use hand gestures systematically

- Gestures help with understanding when used meaningfully
- Visual reminder helps the listener with accurate recall, especially when giving directions on how to do something

Don't put your hands in your pockets

- Thumbs hanging off the pockets and hands deep in both pockets say, “Geez, I hope you like me”
- If you also jingle change in your pockets the message is either “Geez, I’m nervous and hope you like me,” or “Geez, I’m so bored. Is this ever going to be over?”
- Thumbs tucked in the waistband usually say, “I’m staking my territory” which is a gesture of power, not influence
- Thumbs displayed while the hands are tucked in the pockets say “I know I am superior and I believe I have dominance”
- Pockets and waistbands are not a good place to rest your hands in business situations. You want to convey to those you work with that you are confident in yourself and those around you.

Don't hide your hands behind your back

- Depending on the situation, grasping your hands behind your back can be interpreted as meaning “Geez, I hope you like me,” or “You better fear me.”
- Avoid this position. Again - it will take practice. People often don't know what to do with their hands.
- Practice being comfortable with your hands straight down by your sides.
- Take notice when you put your hands behind your back. Once you know what kind of situation elicits this motion you can begin to consciously break yourself of the habit.

Don't cross your arms

- Frequently misunderstood
- Often interpreted as “I am not open to discussion,” or “I am annoyed”
- Hard to break this habit. Many people habitually cross their arms over their chest when listening or waiting.
- It can also just mean a person is cold.

Do know when to put your hands on your hips

- A ready-to-take action gesture
- It makes people appear bigger, because they are actually taking up more space.
- Negative connotations – you are annoyed, closed, or won't listen
- If you put your hands on your hips during a difficult meeting, you will look annoyed
- In a different context, it can look like you are ready for the challenges ahead

Do remember the eyes have it

- Little or no eye contact is often thought to be associated with lying, however experienced liars will look you right in the eye every time.
- Lack of eye contact may indicate lack of self-esteem or interest
- To use direct eye contact, position your eyes between the listener's eyes or just a bit higher. Imagine a triangle with the base below the listener's eyes and the peak of the triangle at his mid-forehead. Keep your eyes in the middle of the triangle to maintain a professional contact.
- Gauge how much or how long to hold eye contact by taking cues from the other person. If he likes a lot of eye contact, do the same. If the listener breaks eye contact on occasion, it is acceptable to break contact to the same degree.

Do stop fidgeting

- Unintentional gestures are emotional reactions or the result of the body's desire for physical comfort
- They may calm us, but they can annoy others
- When you are aware that you are fidgeting, try to control your breathing. Breathe with low, full abdominal breaths. This will help to calm you and can replace the 'fidgets'

NOTES

- Be cognizant of opinion vs. requirements; something may be meeting the requirement, and just not done the same way at your own lab!
- Assessors need to identify non-conformances, and not tell labs how to “fix” the non-conformances
- At the same time, a strength of the peer-to-peer assessment process is that there is opportunity to share experiences; if someone asks you how you would deal with a non-conformance, it’s okay to tell them. Just don’t give the impression that your way is the right way or the only way.
- Telling people they can dispute should be a last resort.