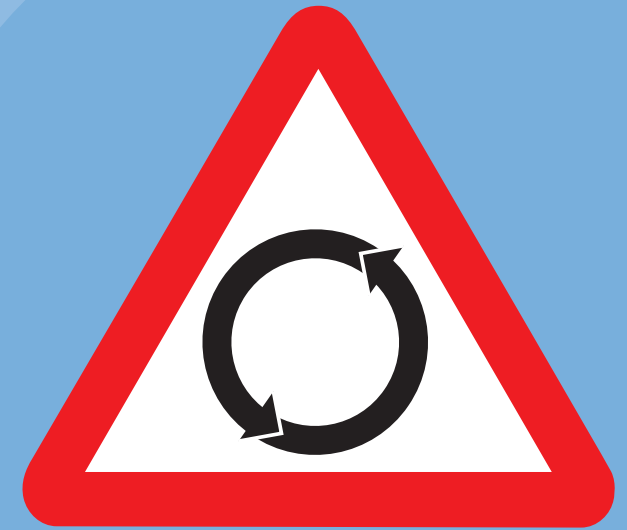




For more information on these and other services CITB-ConstructionSkills has to offer construction companies, call us on **01485 577577** and ask for the number of your local Area Office.

CIM0403 07/04



TWO WAY CONVERSATION

A simple guide to clearer communication

The construction industry is facing a labour shortage in many areas. To ease this shortfall, more and more foreign workers are being recruited – chances are you've already worked on projects with overseas workers. If so, you'll know that this can cause language difficulties on site.

The good news is that CITB-ConstructionSkills can help.

This leaflet explains why clear communication is so important within the construction industry. It offers some basic hints and tips on how to improve both written and spoken communication with workers whose first language isn't English. And, at the end of this leaflet, you'll find details on who you can contact should you need any further assistance.



PRODUCTIVITY UP

Why clear communications is so important.

Good communication is essential in any job. It's even more important in construction, where health and safety is a major issue. For example, workers need to understand safety instructions and signage around sites, as well as be able to communicate with their colleagues.

When workers communicate better, it builds stronger team bonds and better morale. All of this can be good for business, with jobs getting done faster, to a higher standard and with fewer mistakes.

Here are some examples of when clear communication is particularly important:

- At job interview – to check candidates have the appropriate construction skills. This is also your chance to check that they have sufficient English to function and be safe on site
- At induction and health and safety briefings
- When giving instructions about work
- When explaining risk assessments



Twelve Top Tips for clearer verbal communication

If you want to get your message across, speaking clearly is best rather than shouting. Here's some advice on how you can communicate effectively on site with people who aren't fluent in English:

1. Use short, simple sentences and speak clearly and not too fast. Use simple words where possible – for example, 'cut' rather than 'laceration'.
2. If a worker doesn't understand, repeat your sentence using the same words. If this doesn't work, re-phrase.
3. Give instructions in the right order. For example: 'First bring up the boards, then close the door.' not 'Before you close the door, bring up the boards'.
4. Use technical terms commonly used in the building trade (eg. 'toe board' or 'crank bar'), but remember you may need to explain them.
5. Explain commonly used slang words, e.g. guy, gear, dodgy – but avoid using complicated slang phrases.
6. Avoid irony and jokes which may be hard to understand or taken the wrong way. (eg. "I wasn't born yesterday")
7. Use 'active' language such as 'You must wear a hard hat' rather than 'Hard hats must be worn' – in the second example it is not clear who should carry out the action.
8. Always check that you've been understood. Ask open questions like 'So how many doors do you need to hang today?' If you ask a closed question (which can only have a 'yes' or 'no' answer), such as 'Do you understand?' operatives may answer 'Yes' when in fact they have not understood.
9. Be aware that workers may be embarrassed or afraid to tell you that they have not understood what you said. Encourage them to ask questions and to tell you when they have not understood.
10. Pair a newcomer who speaks little English with someone who speaks the same first language, but better English.
11. Make sure everyone understands the common shouts used to warn of danger, e.g. Look out! Below! Duck!
12. Remember, Health & Safety procedures vary from country to country, meaning that foreign workers may be less familiar with them and might require more explanation.

Four pointers for when you're putting it on paper

Here are some tips for writing notices or instructions:

1. Follow the same rules as with spoken instructions, using plain English wherever you can.
2. Give operatives only those parts of method statements and risk assessments which apply to them, not the full document.
3. Try to give instructions the day before, orally and in writing, so that the workers have time to work out what needs to be done.
4. Use diagrams to illustrate instructions. For example, show a picture of a hard hat on 'hard hats must be worn' signs.

Communication – the good and the bad

Below are some typical phrases you might hear or read on site. Underneath each one are some suggestions on how they might be made clearer.

- X** 'Everybody should have been familiarised who is using the cradles'.
- ✓ It would have been better to say: 'You must know how to use the cradles before you use them.'

- X** The use of mobile phones is strictly prohibited in this vicinity.
- ✓ Again, 'You can't use your mobile phone here' is simpler – with appropriate gestures if necessary. If a written instruction, you could show a picture of a mobile with a red line through it.

- X** Unprotected exposure to the inhalation of hardwood has been known to cause nasal cancer.
- ✓ The statement is true enough, but the words are very complicated. Try getting straight to the point: 'Protect yourself - always wear a mask'.

- X** Secure the panelling, but make sure you've got a full deck of 6cm masonry nails.
- ✓ Put the instructions in the right order and try to make them clearer: "Make sure you have enough 6 centimetre masonry nails, then nail down the panelling."

- X** Got that? Good.
- ✓ Workers may be reluctant to acknowledge that they haven't understood. Ask them to repeat exactly what they have to do. For example, 'Where will you put the joists?'

- X** GIVE WAY TO ONCOMING TRAFFIC WHEN LEAVING SITE.
- ✓ A notice like this would be easier to read if it wasn't all in capital letters: "Give way to oncoming traffic when leaving site."

Further sources of help and information

BLIS Services is a one-stop shop for businesses who want to benefit from improved language and cultural skills.

Visit www.blis.org.uk for the whole range of services including local directories of:

- Translators and interpreters
- Cultural consultants
- Language trainers and courses
- Language-related facilities

BLIS Services is maintained by CILT, the National Centre for Languages. www.cilt.org.uk

Call your local Further Education college to find out what courses they offer.

CITB-ConstructionSkills provides a host of services to construction employers, including some related to foreign languages:

- Our training division, National Construction College, can offer many of its courses in a foreign language. To find out more, visit www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk/ncc or call **08457 336666**
- CITB-ConstructionSkills produces the most comprehensive range of publications for health and safety including the Health and Safety Test question book in some foreign languages. We also offer a basic induction leaflet, available in 16 languages. Visit our online shop at www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk/publications or call **01485 577800** to order your copy.
- To prove they're safe on site, operatives need to pass the Health and Safety Test. It's also required to qualify for one of the major card schemes. CITB-ConstructionSkills can help by offering interpreters for non-English speakers sitting the test. Call **01485 577885** or visit www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk/hstest to find out more.