# Effective Communication Between Supervisors and Apprentices

Good communication is one of the most important skills a supervisor can have. It builds trust, prevents mistakes, and helps apprentices feel supported and confident. When communication is clear and respectful, apprentices are more likely to stay engaged, learn faster, and enjoy their work.

Apprentices are often new to the workplace and may not yet understand technical terms, expectations, or the best way to ask for help. Supervisors play a key role in setting the tone - leading by example, listening actively, and creating a space where apprentices feel comfortable to speak up and learn.

## 1. Communicating Clearly and Effectively

The simplest way to improve communication is to make it clear, direct, and easy to follow. Supervisors don’t need to overcomplicate instructions - what matters most is that the apprentice understands what to do, how to do it, and why it needs to be done in a certain way.

* **Keep it simple:** Use short, direct instructions such as, “Measure from this edge to 600mm and mark it,” rather than vague directions like, “Line it up somewhere here.” Avoid jargon unless you explain it, and give a quick reason behind each task, apprentices learn faster when they understand why.
* **Check for understanding:** Instead of asking, “Do you understand?”, say, “Show me how you’d set this up.” This helps you see what they’ve understood and correct mistakes before they happen.
* **Be patient:** Apprentices learn through repetition, and it’s normal for them to forget details early on. Stay calm and explain again if needed - frustration only makes them hesitate to ask questions in future.
* **Use positive body language:** Face them when you speak, make eye contact, and show that you’re listening. A respectful tone and calm body language goes a long way in building trust and confidence.

## 2. Listening and Encouraging Two-Way Communication

Communication isn’t just about talking - it’s about listening. Active listening means stopping what you’re doing for a moment when an apprentice asks a question, making eye contact, and showing genuine interest in what they’re saying.

**Encourage questions:**

Let apprentices know it’s okay to ask for help: “If something doesn’t make sense, just ask - I’d rather explain twice than fix it later.” Give them time to think before responding - silence usually means they’re processing information, not ignoring you.

**Create regular check-ins:**

Short 5-minute chats at the end of the day or week can make a big difference. Ask: “What went well today?” “What was challenging?” or “What would you like to focus on next week?” These conversations show you care about their progress and give them space to raise small issues before they grow into big ones.

## 3. Understanding Different Communication Styles

Everyone communicates differently. Some people like lots of details, others just want the main point. As a supervisor, learning to adapt to your style helps avoid misunderstandings and builds stronger working relationships.

* **Direct communicators** prefer short, clear instructions - avoid over explaining
* **Detailed communicators** like step-by-step guidance and understanding why something is done
* **Supportive communicators** respond best to calm, encouraging feedback
* **Expressive communicators** enjoy conversation, enthusiasm, and sharing ideas.

***Tip:*** *Many workplaces use tools like DISC profiling to understand different communication styles for each of their employees. It helps teams recognise how they and others prefer to communicate - reducing frustration and improving teamwork*

## 4. Building Rapport and Trust

Strong communication starts with a good relationship. Apprentices are more likely to listen, learn, and stay with your business when they feel respected and included.

Ask about their background, interests, or what part of the trade they enjoy most. Share a story from your own apprenticeship - it helps them relate and shows you understand the learning journey.

Recognise effort, not just results. A simple, “You handled that really well today,” can make a big difference in confidence. Always be fair and consistent - apprentices notice when expectations change or when others are treated differently.

When apprentices trust their supervisor, they’re more willing to ask questions, admit mistakes, and take on new challenges.

## 5. Giving Feedback the Right Way

Feedback is one of the most powerful learning tools a supervisor has - but only if it’s given the right way.

**Act quickly:** Don’t wait until later - give feedback while the task is still fresh in their mind.

**Balance the message:** Start with something positive: “You did a great job checking your measurements today.” Then address the improvement: “Next time, double check the alignment before cutting.” End with encouragement: “You’re getting the hang of it - keep going.”

This is often called a “feedback sandwich” - positive, constructive, encouraging.

**Be specific and fair:** Avoid vague comments like “Good work.” Instead, describe exactly what they did well or what needs improvement. Focus on the behaviour, not the person: “The joint was slightly uneven - let’s look at how to fix that,” instead of “You’re not careful enough.”

**Encourage self-assessment:** Ask questions like: “How do you think that went?” or “What would you do differently next time?” This helps apprentices take ownership of their learning.

## 6. Preparing Supervisors for Success

Employers play an important role in setting supervisors up for success. Good communication doesn’t just happen - it’s a skill that can be developed and strengthened.

* Provide mentoring and communication training. Short workshops or online courses can improve how supervisors manage and motivate apprentices
* Invest in DISC or communication training. Understanding communication styles helps teams work better together and reduces conflict
* Set clear expectations. Supervisors should know they’re responsible for regular check-ins, fair feedback, and supporting apprentice wellbeing
* Encourage reflection. Ask supervisors to review their own communication and look for areas to improve
* Promote teamwork. Encourage experienced staff to share mentoring and communication tips with newer supervisors.

## Key Message

Apprentices learn not just from what you say but how you say it. A calm, respectful approach builds confidence, encourages questions, and helps create tradespeople who take pride in their work and stay in the industry for the long term.