

Gender Communications Quiz

How much do you know about how men and women communicate? If you think a statement is an accurate description of communication patterns, mark it true. If you think it isn't, mark it false.

1. Men talk more than women.
2. Men are more likely to interrupt women than to interrupt other men.
3. During conversations, women spend more time looking at their partner than men do.
4. Nonverbal messages carry more weight than verbal messages.
5. Female managers communicate with more emotional openness and drama than male managers.
6. Men not only control the content of conversations, they also work harder in keeping conversations going.
7. When people hear generic words, such as "mankind" and "he," they respond inclusively, indicating that the terms apply to both sexes.
8. In classroom communications, male students receive more reprimands and criticism.
9. Women are more likely than men to disclose information about intimate personal concerns.
10. Female speakers are more animated in their style than are males.
11. Women use less personal space than men.
12. When a male speaks, he is listened to more carefully than a female speaker, even when she makes the identical presentation.
13. In general, women speak in a more tentative style than do men.
14. Women are more likely to answer questions that are not addressed to them.
15. There is widespread gender segregation in schools, and it hinders effective classroom communication.
16. Female managers are seen by both male and female subordinates as better communicators than male managers.
17. In classroom communications, teachers are more likely to give verbal praise to female than to male students.
18. In general, men smile more often than women.

Explanations of the Answers

1. **True.** Despite the stereotype, the research is consistent and clear. In classrooms, in offices, in group discussions, in two-person conversations, men talk more than their fair share of the time. For example, in one experiment male and female subjects were asked to verbally describe pictures and engravings. The women's average description was approximately three minutes. For a man, the average time was 13 minutes.
2. **True.** When women talk with other women, interruptions are evenly distributed. When men talk with other men, interruptions are evenly distributed. However, when men and women talk with one another, almost all interruptions are by male speakers.

Sociologists Candace West and Donald Zimmerman analyzed conversations in university settings, both on and off campus. They found that males interrupt females much more often than they interrupt other males and more often than females interrupt either males or females. These sociologists think that interrupting is a way of exercising power. They say, "Here we are dealing with a class of speakers, females, whose right to speak appears to be casually infringed upon by males."

3. **True.** Many studies-with subjects ranging from infants to the elderly-have shown that women are more likely than men to look at their partner. One reason may be that men talk more and women listen more. Research shows that a listener of either sex looks more at a speaker than the speaker looks at the listener. Another possible reason why women look more frequently at a partner may be their need for and expertise in decoding nonverbal cues. In a direct staring confrontation, however, women will be more likely to avert their eyes, especially when stared at by men. Frequently, a woman will tilt her head back rather than look directly at a man. Researchers call this a presenting gesture that reflects friendliness and submission.
4. **True.** Nonverbal messages carry over four times the weight of verbal messages. Other research shows that in most two-person conversations, nonverbal messages convey more than 65 percent of the meaning. Women seem to communicate more effectively on this nonverbal channel. They are better than men at decoding nonverbal cues. They are also more likely to reflect their feelings through facial expressions.
5. **False.** Research conducted at a Midwest hospital and in the clerical departments and production lines of manufacturing firms show that both female and male managers score higher than the general population in communicating friendliness and approval to subordinates. Further, women managers are no more emotionally open or dramatic than their male counterparts. Both sexes appear to feel that managers should not demonstrate these characteristics. However, there were some communication differences. Male managers were more dominant in style and more likely to direct the content and flow of the conversation.
6. **False.** While men do exert power and authority in controlling the course of conversations, women exert more effort in maintaining communication. Sociologist Pamela Fishman placed tape recorders in homes of couples who described themselves as free of traditional sex role stereotypes. Fishman recorded over 50 hours of conversations that occurred naturally. Over 96 percent of the topics men introduced were developed into conversations.

Only 36 percent of the topics women introduced were similarly developed. Women asked more questions and were more willing to develop a topic introduced by men. In contrast, men "killed" conversational topics that women introduced by giving a minimal response, such as "um," and failing to ask questions or make more extended comments about the topic. In studies of mock jury deliberations, it has been found that women are more likely to make understanding and supportive comments.

7. **False.** Terms such as "mankind," "man," and "he" are supposed to be generic and are presumed to include both men and women. Research shows that this isn't really the case. People are more literal in their thinking. Studies with elementary, secondary, and college students show that when the supposed generic term "man" is used, people envision males, even when the content implies both men and women. In another study, students illustrated supposedly generic references (e.g., urban man) with males pictures more than they did when references were neutral (e.g., urban life). Other researchers found that when male generic nouns and pronouns were used to describe the job of psychologists, females students described the job as less attractive to them than when sex-neutral terms were used. Women who were exposed to the feminine generic ("she" to include everybody) reported feelings of pride, importance, and power. Yet another researcher reports that when an applicant for an executive position was described as a "girl," subjects rated her as less "tough," "mature," "brilliant," and "dignified," and they gave her approximately 6 percent less in salary than when the word "woman" was used.
8. **True.** The research is very consistent on this issue. From preschool through high school, male students are more likely than female students to be reprimanded for misbehavior. Some studies say they are eight to ten times as likely to be scolded. Sometimes they get reprimanded more because they are misbehaving more. But other studies show that when females and males are misbehaving equally, the males are still more likely to get scolded and receive harsher penalties.
9. **True.** There is some inconsistency in the research here, but most studies show that women are more likely to reveal personal information about themselves. This pattern may reflect differences in power or status between males and females. For example, in work situations subordinates tend to reveal more personal information about themselves than their superiors reveal to them. The more power a person has, the more personal information he or she is likely to receive.
10. **True.** Female speakers display more animated behavior, including amount and intensity of eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and body movement. Further, they are more likely to use a wider range of pitch and more variable intonations than male speakers. However, men appear to be more dramatic in their verbal behavior. They are more likely to tell anecdotes and jokes.
11. **True.** Women's space is far more likely to be intruded on by others. Women are approached more closely than men by both women and men. When women and men approach each other on the street, women are more likely to walk around men or move out of their way. In homes men are more likely to have their room, study, or den-an inviolate area where nothing is to be touched. Women also use space in a more confining way. While men are more likely to sit with arms and legs apart, women cross legs at ankles and sit with hands in their laps, taking up far less space. This reduced control of space or territory is characteristic of those with less power and status.
12. **True.** Both female and male members of audiences pay more attention to male speakers than female speakers. Audience members recall more information from presentations given by males. This appears to occur whether the information is stereotyped as appropriate for males or stereotyped as associated with females. And it occurs even when male and female speakers make an identical presentation.
13. **True.** According to linguist Robin Lakoff, "women's language" is characterized by certain patterns:
 - Making statements that end in a questioning intonation or putting tag questions at the end of declarative sentences (This is a good movie, isn't it?).
 - Using qualifiers such as "kind of" or "I guess."
 - Use of "empty adjectives" (divine or lovely) and use of "so" with adjectives (so thoughtful).

While not all studies support Lakoff's notion of women's speech, several show that women do express themselves with more diffidence and less assertion than men. Many researchers claim

that tentative speech patterns do not characterize the speech of women so much as they characterize the speech of those who lack power. For example, one group of researchers analyzed communication in a police station. They found that both male and female clients who came to the station were more likely to use "women's language" than were either male or female police personnel. There are consequences to using "women's language." Both men and women who speak in a tentative, nonassertive style are less likely to be believed by a jury. In fact, only recently has the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) allowed women to read the news over the air because they were perceived to lack credibility or authority.,

14. **False.** Men manage to capture more than their fair share of talk time. Sometimes women actually help men gain this advantage because they are more likely to ask questions while men are more likely to give answers. However, men often take this advantage for themselves by interrupting women and by answering questions that are not addressed to them.
15. **True.** When people hear the word "segregation," they usually think about racial discrimination. Gender segregation may occur in more subtle ways, but it is widespread. Teachers, or students themselves, frequently form separate boy and girl lines, seating arrangements, work groups, play areas, and even science lab work teams. Even college classrooms display gender segregation in student seating arrangements. Children cross racial lines more often than gender lines in classroom communication. Some researchers have found that students are often unwilling to work together on science projects. However, teachers can encourage boys and girls to play and work together simply by praising children engaged in cross-gender interaction. An important implication of the research is that when girls and boys work and play together, they are less likely to hold stereotyped attitudes.
16. **True.** Despite the stereotypes, when employees work for a female supervisor, they vote their approval. Female managers are seen as giving more attention to subordinates, as more open to new ideas, and as more supportive of worker effort than male managers. Both female and male subordinates report that morale and job satisfaction are higher when supervised by women. Others report that women are more dependable, show greater concern, and pay better attention to detail. Research on female managers in the business world is related to research in elementary schools. Studies on elementary schools with female principals show that these schools are warmer, more democratic, and are characterized by higher student achievement and higher pupil and parental satisfaction.
17. **False.** Although girls get better grades than boys, they receive less verbal praise from teachers. When girls do get praise from teachers, it is likely to be for neatness and appearance. ("That's an attractive paper." "You have very neat handwriting.") In contrast, when boys get praise, it is more likely to be for the intellectual quality of their ideas. Not only do teachers praise boys more, but they also criticize them more, ask them more questions, and give them more attention in general.
18. **False.** Women are far more likely to smile than men. They do this in many different social situations, even though they are not necessarily happy or amused. In one field study, researchers smiled at approximately 150 males and 150 females in public. In general, women returned the smiles more often than men. Women returned the smiles to men 93 percent of the time and to other women 86 percent of the time. Males smiled back at women 67 percent of the time, and they returned smiles to men 58 percent of the time.

From Myra Sadker and Joyce Kaser, **The Communications Gender Gap**, Mid-Atlantic Center for Sex Equity, 5010 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Suite 308, Washington, D.C. 20016, 1984.