

Communicating without creating barriers

Jargon is the specialized language of a group of people. It can provide useful shorthand to get across specific meaning quickly.

Jargon becomes a problem when it stops people understanding your message. When you start using it (perhaps unintentionally) with audiences it is not intended for, people will find you very difficult to understand.

Although Jargon may have its uses, even within the group the jargon's meant for, meanings evolve and newcomers misunderstand. And soon jargon can create barriers within groups too.

When jargon creeps in

Every profession, organization and specialized group has some unique vocabulary that can speed communication between group members. This is okay, provided that the meaning is totally clear to everyone who needs to understand.

However jargon is not effective if your intended audience doesn't understand it.

Jargon can get into your speech unintentionally from habit or intentionally when you are seeking to impress, or are uncomfortable or wish to hide or diminish a problem.

Whatever the reason you use jargon, if it's out of place and the audience misunderstands, it can create a two-fold problem. While you fail to convey information to them, you may also succeed in conveying a more subtle, negative message: That you have given little thought to your audience; and perhaps that you are being evasive or arrogant.

Worse, you may never know that your audience has not understood – people often don't say anything.

Jargon traps

Here are some common uses of jargon. Think about which ones you might use.

- **Communicating with others in your field/group**
It's okay, within reason, to use jargon for this, but be sure that everyone really does understand. Use jargon when it helps convey specialist information, and avoid it at other times.
- **Unthinking use**
People often use jargon simply because they are not thinking. Jargon that's

appropriate within your team or specialist group is often unintelligible to outsiders, such as your customers.

- **Trying to impress**
Jargon rarely impresses intelligent people. You are more likely to create the impression of “trying to impress” than “being impressive”. Others may see it as insincere or irritating.
- **Distracting from facts or knowledge**
Some people drop into jargon when they want to hide the truth, lessen the magnitude of something, or make it sound more impressive.
- **Distracting from lack of knowledge**
Sometimes it's unintentional but when you're unsure or under pressure, you might give a jargon-filled answer rather than a straight one.
- **Trying to fit**
Using the same language as others is natural when you're trying to build rapport, so jargon may have a place here if it is understood by yourself and everyone in your audience.

How to avoid unwanted jargon

The first step to avoiding unnecessary jargon is to be aware of when you use it.

Think about the things you actually say. What specialist words, phrases and abbreviations do you commonly use? When talking to others about our business group I am often asked what BNI is – not the whole concept, just the letters – what do they stand for - Business Networking International. Lots of businesses use a shortened form of their whole name so this is not unusual. Still, it begins to create a lack of clarity concerning who we are. Within the BNI organization there are some obvious barriers to communication. The term “BBI” or the mercifully abandoned term “Dance card” are meaningless and exclusionary to our guests. Are we really so rushed we can't take the time to say “business building interview” or “one on one meeting”.

When it comes to communicating effectively, jargon often gets in the way. It creates barriers that stop people understanding you clearly and completely.

By learning to use simple, everyday language instead, your communication will be more effective and more thoughtful towards your audience.

The simple rule is: It is always better to be clear than to be brief or 'clever'.

By communicating without jargon, not only will you be better understood, you will come across as more sincere, trustworthy and in tune with your audience.