

# NEXT ENGINEERS

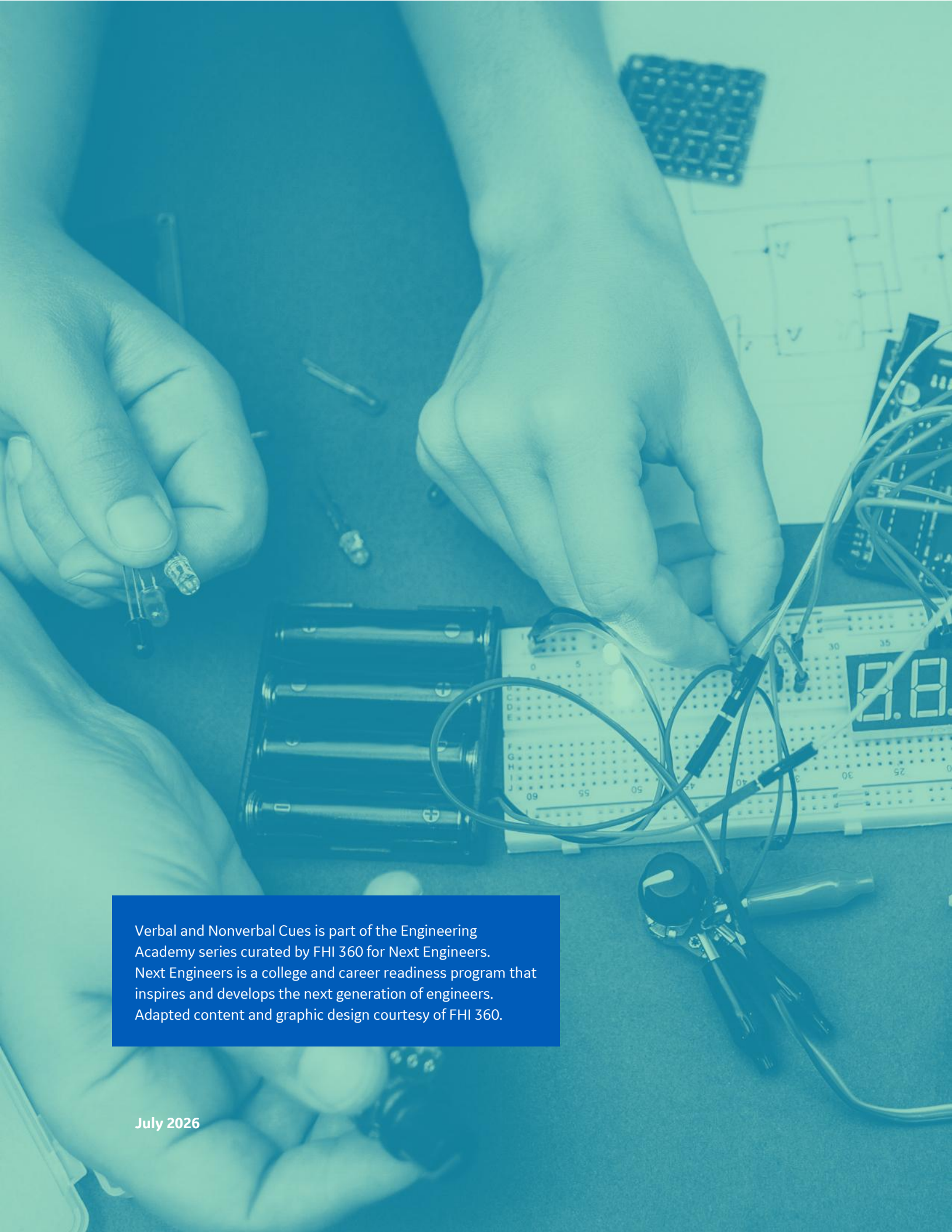


ENGINEERING ACADEMY

Verbal and  
Nonverbal Cues



NEXT ENGINEERS



Verbal and Nonverbal Cues is part of the Engineering Academy series curated by FHI 360 for Next Engineers. Next Engineers is a college and career readiness program that inspires and develops the next generation of engineers. Adapted content and graphic design courtesy of FHI 360.

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## Verbal and Nonverbal Cues

Time	Ages	Cost	Group size
60 minutes	15 to 18	Low	3 to 5 students per group

### Overview

Students will participate in two activities that demonstrate the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and how these skills relate to following directions and having successful working relationships.

### Learning outcomes

As a result of this activity, students will be able to:

- Understand the role of verbal and nonverbal cues in effective communication.
- Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate verbal and nonverbal cues in various situations.

### Materials

- Laptop or computer with Internet access and projector
- PowerPoint Presentation: Verbal and Nonverbal Cues
- Student Handout: Verbal and Nonverbal Cues, *1 per student*
- Sheet of paper, *1 per student*
- Pencil or pen, *1 per student*

### Preparation

1. Print copies of the student handout for each student or share a digital version.
2. Preview resources to ensure they are appropriate for your students:
  - **How miscommunication happens (and how to avoid it) - Katherine Hampsten**  
<https://youtu.be/gCfzeONu3Mo>
  - **TED-Ed Lesson Plan: How miscommunication happens (and how to avoid it) - Katherine Hampsten**  
<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-to-avoid-miscommunication-katherine-hampsten>
3. Before the session begins, review a list of scenarios for students to use in Activity 2 (below). You may add scenarios to this list or create your own. The scenarios should be situations where students would likely use different types of verbal and nonverbal communication with different people (such as a friend, parent, or teacher).

### EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

These are the sets of skills necessary for students to succeed in postsecondary education and work settings as determined by universities and employers.

The employability skills addressed by this activity:

- Communication skills
- People skills





## What to do

### Activity 1 (25 minutes)

- **Slide 1:** Welcome students and instruct them that in this first activity, they will need to carefully listen and follow instructions. Give each student a sheet of paper and ask them to close their eyes (students should not be able to see each other's paper).
- **Slide 2:** Give these verbal instructions, one at a time. You will also perform the actions at the same time as the students (with your eyes open).
  1. Fold your sheet of paper in half.
  2. Tear off the upper right-hand corner.
  3. Fold the paper in half again.
  4. Tear off the upper left-hand corner.
  5. Fold it in half one more time.
  6. Tear off the lower right-hand corner.
  7. Open your eyes and unfold the paper.
- **Slide 3:** Students should compare their paper with those around them, and to the facilitator's paper. Discuss as a group what they observe:
  - Did everyone's paper look the same? If not, why?
  - What was it like to only listen to verbal instructions?
  - How might the outcome be different if the instructions were written? If the instructions were a diagram?
- **Slides 4-5:** Show the 5-minute video [How Miscommunication Happens and How to Avoid It](#). Debrief as a full group using the prompts on the student handout:
  - Why is communication often more difficult with a large group than a single individual?
  - How might a person's age influence the way they receive and interpret messages? How might this affect the way people communicate at work?
  - Noise can be defined as any interference that disrupts or distorts communication. What are some examples of noise? What sources of noise do you struggle with most?

### Activity 2 (25 minutes)

- **Slide 6:** Organize students into groups of 3 to 5 each. There should be an even number of groups. Assign each group a scenario from the following list, or you may create scenarios of your own:
  - Asking for help in class
  - Calling on the telephone with surprise news
  - Texting to decline an invitation
  - E-mailing that you made a mistake
- Each group will have 10 minutes to discuss and prepare two short scenes where they will roleplay how they would communicate in their scenario to different people. Students can use the student handout to plan out the roleplays.
  - For example, if Group A was assigned the scenario of 'asking for help in class', they should prepare two scenes, one as if asking a teacher, and one if they were asking a classmate. The group should consider what verbal and nonverbal cues would be the same (i.e., saying please and thank you) or different (i.e., raising your hand for the teacher but tapping a classmate on the shoulder).



#### KEY VOCABULARY

**Cue:** A signal, such as a word, phrase, or gesture, which indicates a meaning or feeling.

**Nonverbal communication:** Gestures, facial expressions, and nonverbal aspects of speech such as accent, tone of voice, and speed of speaking.



- After each group has prepared their scenes, pair up two groups (Group A and Group B) who will then take turns as actors and watchers. While Group A is acting out their scenes, Group B should watch and take note of the differences in communication. Group B will share what differences they observed, and then the groups will switch places. After Group B finishes acting out their scenes, Group A will share what they observed.
- Allow about 15 minutes for all groups to have the opportunity to act out their scenarios and observe. Bring the entire class back together for discussion.

### Conclusion (10 minutes)

- **Slide 7:** Use the reflection questions below to wrap up the lesson. Call on a few students to share their responses:
  - Why do we change our verbal and nonverbal cues when interacting with different people?
  - Do some cues seem more appropriate in some scenarios than others? Why?
  - What happens if we use the wrong cues for the wrong audience?
- **Slide 8:** Answer any questions students may have as time permits.

### Extension

An alternative for Activity 1 is to have students instruct the facilitator on how to make a sandwich (or another simple task). Have students work in small groups to write out a list of instructions and then follow the instructions from each group. Bring all the necessary supplies and construct the sandwich according to their directions, being very precise to follow their exact words. If the instructions are “get a piece of bread from the bag”, you might tear open the bag.

This activity is based on **Skills that Pay the Bills: Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues** created by **Workforce Solutions**. Learn more at <https://www.wrksolutions.com/for-individuals/career-exploration/when-i-grow-up/high-school-grades-9-12>.

