



North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency

Helpful hints for cross-cultural communication in the Top End



1. Use active voice, avoid passives

Change a passive voice statement to an active statement by supplying an actor (the doer). If the actor is unclear use 'they' or 'somebody'.

2. Avoid abstract nouns

Replace abstract nouns with verbs (doing words) or adjectives (describing words).

An abstract noun is something that is intangible, like an idea or feeling, and cannot be detected with the senses.

Instead of saying

"He *was arrested*."

"If you tease the dog you *will be bitten*"

"You *will be paid* extra for overtime work"

"He broke the law so he *was jailed*."

"His money *was stolen*."

"It has no *strength*"

"That was due to his good *management*."

"His *patience* has run out."

"His *anger* caused him to be violent."

Say

"The *police arrested* him."

"If you tease the dog *he will bite* you."

"If you work overtime *they will pay* you more money."

"He broke the law so *they put* him in jail."

"*Somebody stole* his money."

"It is not *strong*" (adjective used)

"That happened because he *managed* things properly." (verb used)

"He will not be *patient* any more."
(adjective used)

"He was violent because he was *angry*." (adjective used)

Instead of saying

Say

3. Avoid using negative questions

"Isn't he the boss?"

"Is he the boss?"

"You *never did* that before, did you?"

"Have you done that before?"

4. Avoid the auxiliary verbs 'to be' or 'to have'

Replace auxiliary verbs with a simple verb.

"I *have been* looking for you."

"I *looked* for you."

"You *have done* a good job."

"You *did* a good job"

"When he *had finished* work he felt hungry."

"He *finished* work *then* he felt hungry."

"I *am* telling the truth."

"What I *say now* is true."

5. Define words that are not familiar to the audience

Use the word, then attach a short descriptive statement.

"This is crown land."

"This is crown land, which is land that the Government owns."

"You have been given bail."

"The police gave you bail, which means you promised to come back to court next time."

6. Avoid multiple clauses in a sentence

Break into several sentences.

"Early resolution of disputes, including through mediation, that contribute to building safer community environments, is encouraged."

"The government wants to make communities safer places. This can happen if people resolve disputes quickly. Mediation is one way to resolve disputes."