D. Specific to What, When and Whom is involved

Often we are tempted to exaggerate into generalizations because of our built-up frustrations, sense of overwhelm, or uncertainties about what might happen if we were to be more specific. We inaccurately use words like everyone, everything, no one, nothing, always, and never.

As a listener, consider the relative usefulness of the A and B comments. Why does one seem more useful or helpful than another?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generalizations</th>
<th>Specific as to What, When, Whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Everything is always late around here!</td>
<td>• I notice that the last two months’ budget reports were late arriving from Tom and Katy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We never get our projects done within budget.</td>
<td>• We’ve exceeded our budget on our previous two projects, and I don’t know if we’re on track with this one. I’m concerned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They all think their department is the most important one.</td>
<td>• Janice and Ed spoke up strongly about what their department needed in the meeting today. I’m worried that our department’s needs on this project will be overlooked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Second shift can’t ever do things right.</td>
<td>• The scrap rate on the second shift trimming operation is 10% higher than the day shift. What could be causing the difference?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which is easier to hear? If you were the speaker having to report information about such problems, which do you think would produce a more constructive response from your audience?
C. Ownership or “I” Language

We speak with specificity about our internal experience by using “Ownership” language to report our thoughts, feelings and wants about a situation. In doing so, we are claiming our own experience as being unique and distinct from events or others’ intentions. Speaking from this “I” position helps prevent defensive debates about the others’ intentions, and helps keep us in touch with our own experience of life. Who is the main character of each of my life, anyway? “It?” “We?” “You?” “They?” No! I am!

Generalizations or Inferences

• Your reports are always late.
• No one listens around here.
• The instructions are right here. Why didn’t you do it right?
• It went great this morning!
• You need to contribute more to our meetings.
• It made me happy today when the installation went smoothly.
• You know, you try so hard, but sometimes you still can’t get through to her.

Ownership or “I” statements

• When I get your reports later than 3:00 on Tuesdays, I feel irritated because I have to stay late to review them.
• I believe I’m not being heard, and I feel anxious and a little hurt about that.
• I put a lot of work into these instructions, and I want them to be valuable and useful. I am afraid that they might not be clear, and I may need to take time to revise them.
• I believe we made a great presentation, and I’m proud to be part of this team.
• When you don’t speak in meetings, I worry that you’re bored. I believe you have valuable ideas that would help the entire group, and I want us to have the chance to discuss them.
• I am happy the installation went smoothly today.
• I have tried many ways to communicate with her, but sometimes she still doesn’t seem to understand, and I’m frustrated about that.
Feelings Description Examples

### Feelings implied
- Quiet! Not another word out of you!
- Quit complaining all the time!
- If things don't improve around here, I'll look for a new job.
- Did you ever see such a lousy place to work?
- You're a wonderful person.
- I feel like you know everything about this subject.
- Can't you hear I'm not finished? Don't you have ears?
- You have no consideration for anybody else's feelings.
- You're completely selfish.
- I can't do everything at once, you know!
- I feel like everyone dumps on me at the last minute.
- We all feel you're a wonderful person. Everybody likes you.
- This has been an awful day. Nothing ever goes right for me around here.
- This is a very poor exercise.
- I am inadequate to contribute anything in this group.
- For all the attention anybody pays to what I say, I might as well not be in my group.
- I feel that nobody in my group cares whether I'm there or not.
- I am a failure; I'll never amount to anything. That teacher is awful, he didn't teach me anything.

### Feelings described
- Your words sound harsh to me, and I'm feeling annoyed.
- I'm afraid to admit that I need help with my work.
- I really respect your opinion. You seem to be so well-read.
- You've spoken before I've finished twice now, and I'm beginning to feel resentful.
- I'm worried that I can't get everything done, and I'm afraid my boss will think I'm not doing a good job.
- I feel comfortable and free to be myself when I'm around you.
- I feel discouraged because of some things that happened today.
- I'm a little anxious about this exercise because I don't get the point.
- I'm feeling tired, and I'm struggling to pay attention to this exercise.
- I feel inadequate to contribute anything in this group.
- I feel lonely and isolated in my group.
- I'm disappointed because I did so poorly on that test.
B. Feelings Description by John Wallen

Any spoken statement can convey feelings. Even the factual report, "It's three o'clock" can be said so that it expresses anger or disappointment. However, it’s not the words that convey the feelings. Whether the statement is perceived as a factual report or as a message of anger or disappointment is determined by the speaker's tone, emphasis, gestures, posture, and facial expression.

This exercise does not deal with the non-verbal ways we convey feelings. It focuses on the kinds of verbal statements we use to communicate feelings.

We convey feeling by:

- **Commands**: "Get out!" "Shut up!"
- **Questions**: "Is it safe to drive this fast?"
- **Accusations**: "You only think about yourself!"
- **Judgments**: "You're a wonderful person." "You're too bossy -"

Notice that, although each of the examples conveys strong feeling, the statement does not say what the feeling is. In fact, none of the sentences even refers to the speaker or what he or she is feeling.

By contrast, the emotional state of the speaker is the content of some sentences. Such sentences will be called "descriptions of feeling." They convey feeling by naming or identifying what the speaker feels:

- "I am disappointed."
- "I am furiously angry!"
- "I'm afraid going this fast."
- "I feel discouraged."

The goal is to help you recognize when you are describing your feelings and when you are conveying feelings without describing them. Trying to describe what you are feeling is a helpful way to become more aware of what it is that you do feel.

A description of feelings conveys maximum information about what you feel in a way that will probably be less hurtful than commands, questions, accusations, and judgments. Thus, when you want to communicate your feelings more accurately you will be able to do so.

**NOTE:**

Beware of the common speech pattern of “I feel that [you]…” and “I feel like [she]…” What follows this pattern is typically a judgment, not a feeling statement, although there are often feelings implied. Watch for this speech pattern in yourself, and take care to separate and identify the judgments from the feelings as a way to practice specificity.