**ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FOR TASK 4. I-MESSAGEs**

For better understanding and passing training follow links about I messages (I-statements).

<https://www.gordontraining.com/leadership/what-are-the-essential-components-of-an-i-message/>

<https://www.gordontraining.com/free-workplace-articles/working-together-with-i-messages/>

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/i-message>

**I-MESSAGE GUIDELINES**

Widely recognized as a pioneer in teaching communication skills and conflict resolution methods to parents, teachers, youth, organization managers and employees, Dr. Thomas Gordon was the founder of Gordon Training International. His Gordon Model concepts are now known world-wide.

In interpersonal communication, an **I-message** or **I-statement** is an assertion about the feelings, beliefs, values, etc. of the person speaking, generally expressed as a sentence beginning with the word "I", and is contrasted with a "**you-message**" or "**you-statement**", which often begins with the word "you" and focuses on the person spoken to. [Thomas Gordon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Gordon_(psychologist)) coined the term "I message" in the 1960s while doing play therapy with children. He added the concept to his book for parents, *P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training* (1970).

I-messages are often used with the intent to be assertive without putting the listener on the defensive by avoiding accusations. They are also used to take ownership for one's feelings rather than implying that they are caused by another person. An example of this would be to say: "I really am getting backed up on my work since I don't have the financial report yet", rather than: "you didn't finish the financial report on time!" (The latter is an example of a "you-statement").

I-messages or I-statements can also be used in constructive criticism. For instance, one might say, "I had to read that section of your paper three times before I understood it", rather than, "This section is worded in a really confusing way", or "You need to learn how to word a paper more clearly." The former comment leaves open the possibility that the fault lies with the giver of the criticism. According to the Conflict Resolution Network, I-statements are a dispute resolution conversation opener that can be used to state how one sees things and how one would like things to be, without using inflaming language

## I-message construction

While the underlying rationale and approach to I-messages is similar in various systems, there are both three-part and four-part models for constructing I-messages.

The simplest form, as frequently taught, is a single two-part sentence:

1. When you...(objective event; 1st event),
2. I feel...(subjective feeling; 2nd event).

It should be cautioned that "when you..." should be based on an objective event and avoid claims regarding intent. "When you said my birthday was in the wrong month, I felt like you don't care about me," is preferred over, "When you act like you don't care about me and my birthday..." This allows people talking to focus on events and feelings as separate events, which both allows people to express their feelings more clearly and helps clarify the initial event and reach agreement between parties.

A three-part model is proposed by the University of Tennessee Family & Consumer Sciences for improving communication with children:

1. I feel... (Insert feeling word)
2. when... (tell what caused the feeling).
3. I would like... (tell what you want to happen instead).[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I-message#cite_note-5)

According to Hope E. Morrow, a common pitfall in I-statement construction is using phrases like "I feel that..." or "I like that..." which typically express an opinion or judgment. Morrow favors following "I feel..." with a feeling such as "sad", "angry", etc.

Gordon advises that to use an I-message successfully, there should be congruence between the words one is using and one's [affect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affect_(psychology)), [tone of voice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tone_of_voice), facial expression and body language. Gordon also describes a 3-part I-message, called a "confrontive" I-message, with the following parts:

* non-blameful description of the listener's behavior
* the effect of that behavior on the speaker
* the speaker's feelings about that effect

He describes the I-message as an appeal for help from the other person, and states that the other person is more likely to respond positively when the message is presented in that way.

### Conflict resolution

If an "I" message contains "you-messages", it can be problematic in conflict situations. For example: "I feel..., when you..., and I want you to..." This can put the receiver of the statement on the defensive. In a dispute, use of a phrase that begins with "I want" may encourage the parties to engage in positional problem solving. This may make conflicts more difficult to resolve. An "interest-based" approach to conflict resolution suggests using statements that reflect why the individual wants something.

The goals of an "I" message in an interest-based approach:

* to avoid using "you" statements that will escalate the conflict
* to respond in a way that will de-escalate the conflict
* to identify feelings
* to identify behaviors that are causing the conflict
* to help individuals resolve the present conflict and/or prevent future conflicts.

The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management summarized this approach as follows: "A sender of a message can use a statement that begins with 'I' and expresses the sender's feelings, identifies the unwanted behavior, and indicates a willingness to resolve the dispute, without using 'you' statements or engaging in positional problem solving.

The Commission proposed a four-part I-message:

1. "I feel like\_\_\_ (taking responsibility for one's own feelings)
2. "I don't like it when\_\_ " (stating the behavior that is a problem)
3. "because\_\_\_\_" (what it is about the behavior or its consequences that one objects to)
4. "Can we work this out together?" (be open to working on the problem together).

Marital stability and relationship analysis researcher [John Gottman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Gottman) notes that although I-statements are less likely than You-statements to be critical and to make the listener defensive, "you can also buck this general rule and come up with 'I' statements like 'I think you are selfish' that are hardly gentle. So the point is not to start talking to your spouse in some stilted psychobabble. Just keep in mind that if your words focus on how *you're* feeling rather than on accusing your spouse, your discussion will be far more successful."

An extremely effective approach to try when another's behavior is upsetting me, or interfering with my needs, is to respectfully tell the other person how his/her behavior is affecting me and give him/her the opportunity to voluntarily choose an alternative behavior that would help me out and also be acceptable to him/her.

If I sent such a message to you, it would be about me, not about you, and therefore would be an "I" message.

Messages about ourselves rather than about the other person tell others what is happening with us. They reveal who and what we are feeling. They are "self-disclosing" messages.

When we send I-Messages, we take responsibility for our unmet need; we are proactive.

Well constructed I-Messages are very effective at influencing people to consider changing their behavior to help us out. Such messages strengthen working relationships.

Ready to confront? Got all three parts? Ask yourself, where's the BEF?

* The Behavior-a non-blameful description of what the Other did or said (or didn't say or do) that was unacceptable. (Give examples.)
* The concrete, tangible Effect-how the behavior interfered with my needs, or threatened to; what it has or will cost me. (Give examples.)
* Feeling-the emotion(s) I feel in response to the behavior's effects on me. (Give examples.)
* Have you ever had people confront you by telling you only how they felt—nothing more—such as:
* • “I’m upset with you.”  
  • “I’m really disappointed.”  
  • “I am worried.”  
  • “I am unhappy with you.”

Such messages can leave anyone puzzled and bewildered. If you were the receiver of such statements your first response was probably to ask “why” the confronter was upset, disappointed, worried or unhappy. Or perhaps you responded with, “What did I do?” The point is that telling a person only how you feel is an incomplete confrontation—it contains only one of the three components of an I-Message.\* The three components are:

1. A brief, non-blameful description of the BEHAVIOR you find unacceptable.  
2. Your FEELINGS.  
3. The tangible and concrete EFFECT of the behavior on you.

#### Here are some examples of Confrontive I-Messages:

1. To receptionist: “I feel very upset when you’re not here at 8:30 a.m. to answer the phone because that means I have to leave my work to cover for you.”

2. To colleague: “When you went to Sandy about issues you have with me, and then I hear about it from Sandy, I feel hurt and resentful because it erodes the trust I have in our relationship and I don’t get the information I need to address the issues.”

3. To manager: “I want to be valued for my talent and capabilities in the decisions I make and the work I do and when you make decisions that impact me without discussion or consultation, I feel discouraged and demotivated.”

During the initial phase of learning to send [Confrontive I-Messages](http://gordontraining.wpengine.com/leadership-training/the-dos-and-donts-of-i-messages/), you will undoubtedly feel self-conscious and a bit mechanical. Gradually, with practice, they will come much more naturally and require less deliberate thought.

One way to do this is to use “I” messages because they communicate statements about how you feel instead of accusing other individuals of doing something wrong. However, there are four types of “I” messages that you need to be aware of in order to use these types of statements correctly.

According to Robert Najemy’s article (2004), Effective Communication – I Messages, there are four types of “I” messages that help us communicate with others and while in groups.  It may sometimes be hard to know exactly how to use “I” messages, especially when you may want to use accusatory “you” statements, so we’ve broken down the 4 types of “I” messages (declarative, responsive, preventive, and confrontive) to explain how and when they should be used.

### 1. Declarative “I” Messages

Declarative “I” messages should be used when you want to express a need, desire, opinion, or thought (Najemy, 2004). An example of this type of statement would be – “I need to receive recognition and encouragement for the effort and hard work that I put into the group in order to feel needed and secure.” Using this type of “I” message will help you communicate your feelings without causing group tension or starting a conflict.

Use declarative "I" messages to make your needs, thoughts, and opinions known within your group.

Declarative messages also help you release tension since these types of statements prevent you from suppressing things or blaming other people. It is important to use declarative statements to let other people know how you feel or what you want during a group experience – laying things out on the table will aid the group in preventing uncomfortable situations as the group work progresses.

### 2. Responsive “I” Messages

Responsive “I” messages can be used when someone asks you to do something for them or with them. An example of this statement would be – “I would really love to help you on the project, but unfortunately I am already working on another important assignment and won’t have the time to put in the effort that you’re requesting.” You must first decide very clearly how you want to respond. This type of statement should be used when someone asks a favor of you (i.e. to lend something, to help them out, to go out to dinner, to talk to someone for some time on the telephone, to take a position in an organization, or to donate money).

Using responsive “I” messages help you practice saying “no” instead of always saying “yes” to favors. This can be especially helpful to women who, many times, feel they cannot say “no” when asked to do something. These statements also aid in lowering stress levels on the job and also prevent someone from taking advantage of you on the job (Najemy, 2004).

### 3. Preventive “I” Messages

Preventive “I” messages can be used when you have observed that a problem has developed in the past and you want to avoid the same problem or something worse from happening in the future (Najemy, 2004). An example of a preventive “I” message would be – “I realize that we all had trouble meeting set deadlines on our work the last time we worked on a project. I’m worried it may happen again, so I think we all need to formulate a task schedule and designate a team motivator in order to stay on top of everything this time around.” To use these types of messages, make sure to:

1)      Take responsibility for what you are feeling

 2)      Identify your emotions

3)      Identify what created those emotions

4)      Identify the behavior of the other person that stimulates those emotions

 Don't let a problem that hindered your group in the past make a repeat appearance - use preventive statements to prevent the problem from surfacing again.

### 4. Confrontive “I” Messages

 Have you ever been in a situation where someone or something caused negative feelings and, even after a civil confrontation, a change in behavior still hadn’t occurred? If you’re saying “yes,” then this is a time when the confrontive “I” message should be used. Since it’s called the confrontive “I” message, many people think of it as a negative thing; however, using this type of statement can be very helpful – it just depends on how you communicate your feelings.

When a situation is continually causing strong negative emotions and tension within the group (i.e. someone is constantly negative or verbally abusive with criticism), you need to use a confrontive “I” message (Najemy, 2004). An example of a confrontive “I” message would be – “I understand that you have thoughts and opinions, but the verbal abuse needs to stop immediately or consequences are going to be put into use.” This type of message is more assertive than the other types, but is most similar to the preventive message. For it to be affective, you need to understand how you feel, what is making you feel that way, and why and how the statement should be expressed.

**Use the Power of the “I”**

As we stated before, the “I” message is helpful in maintaining good communication within your group, as well as diffusing negative situations that may arise. Knowing the four styles of “I” messages can help you learn how to state your feelings, how to say “no,” how to prevent problems, and how to confront problems in your group in a positive, effective way. Have any of you readers ever used any of the above listed types of “I” messages? If yes, which ones?