

**Purpose:** Use this sample for a better understanding of what is present in a high quality Final Paper: Letter of Advice. We've included these elements of constructive criticism to demonstrate that even "A" quality work still receives comments to improve the student's thinking and writing on the topic.

Hover over the information symbol ( ) or select the numbers within the text to read about what the student has done well in this assignment and also some areas for improvement.

Letter of Advice

Student's Full Name

COM 200: Interpersonal Communications

Instructor:<sup>1</sup>

Use Full Date – September 24, 2015

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<sup>1</sup> Please use your instructor's full name.

Dear Cassy and Jeremy,

Congratulations on your recent engagement. It's such a great time in your life. My wife and I have been married almost 8 years. I also just took a class on interpersonal communications and would love to share with you some of what I learned in addition to some personal experiences.<sup>2</sup> Knowing how your partner communicates and uses verbal and non-verbal communication is important in a relationship and will help in reducing miscommunications. Know going in to your marriage that there will be conflict but learning how to manage or resolve those conflicts will help in a successful marriage. I know you both love each other very much and that will help get you through those difficult times.<sup>3</sup>

### **Interpersonal Relationships<sup>4</sup>**

Interpersonal relationships are part of our everyday life. Getting married forms one of the most important interpersonal relationships you will ever have. But with any relationship there are barriers to effectively maintain those interactions. Our self-concept is developed through our interpersonal relationships and changes over time. Emotional intelligence also has a great impact on how effective a relationship will be. The amount an individual discloses of themselves in a relationship can vary depending on the type of relationship and can have both negative and positive effects. Interpersonal conflict is probably one of the most challenging aspects of a relationship and managing these conflicts effectively is important to the relationship's wellbeing.

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<sup>2</sup> While we usually discourage people from using the first person, this essay asks that the student write a personal letter, so it is okay to be more casual here

<sup>3</sup> This is a good introduction. It would be even stronger with a more definitive thesis statement. The Writing Center has a great "Thesis Generator" tool to help students write a thesis: <https://awc.ashford.edu/writing-tools-thesis-generator.html>

<sup>4</sup> This segment is not required, but it was a nice addition.

Interpersonal relationships have many pieces. Imagine a clock, there are many pieces that make up a clock and each one has to be working properly for it to run smoothly. With my relationship we have set times we sit and talk to each other about anything that is bothering us. Just like with the clock sometimes you must work on that clock and even make repairs. If you work to maintain your relationship just like you do with that clock it will run much smoother.<sup>5</sup>

### **Barriers to Effective Interpersonal Interaction<sup>6</sup>**

Interpersonal communication is something we all participate in everyday and though it is very beneficial most of the time there are sometimes barriers that make the interaction not as effective. “Along with the many beneficial functions of interpersonal communication come a number of challenges” (Bevan, 2014).<sup>7</sup> Three of these challenges are misperceptions, long distance relationships, and intergenerational relationships.<sup>8</sup>

### **Misperceptions, Long Distance and Intergenerational Relationships<sup>9</sup>**

Though interpersonal communications are an important part of any relationship sometimes there are barriers that make the interaction not as effective. First is the misperceptions that<sup>10</sup> occur and most of the time the cause of this is noise that affects how effective the communication is between individuals. For example sometimes work or children will keep you

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<sup>5</sup> Interesting analogy. The student has also introduced the central themes that will be covered in the paper, previewing what's to come. Overall, this is a solid introduction.

<sup>6</sup> - The learning objectives have changed slightly. Please use the current learning objectives listed in the assignment instructions.

<sup>7</sup> The student does not list both authors here and this quote is free-standing. Please be sure to introduce all quotes by either explaining who is speaking (e.g. According to Bevan and Sole) or starting the sentence.

<sup>8</sup> Introducing what is to come is a great way to highlight that the student is addressing three different barriers to healthy relationships.

<sup>9</sup> Good. Because this is a subsection of the header above, the first one should be centered and then this is justified left. See <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/16/> for more information on levels of headings.

<sup>10</sup> There is a missing word here. I believe the word should have been “can.”

from answering a call or text from your significant other and they<sup>11</sup> may take the no response as being ignored. This is a misperception caused by noise (too much going on).<sup>12</sup> Second<sup>13</sup> is when you're having a long distance relationship which can cause money issues because of travel, lack of comfort, and tension and stress along with several other challenges (Good point. Again, Bevan & Sole address long distance relationship. Cite sources whenever ideas are influenced by them). Hopefully this will not occur in your relationship but sometimes traveling for work can cause these issues in a relationship. This occurred in my relationship with a deployment and doing your best to communicate as often is possible worked best for us, even if it is with emails. Sometimes it would be a short email maybe one sentence because things were very busy, just something to let her know I was thinking of her. Letting your significant other know that you there for them with calls and emails as much as possible will keep your partner and you happy with your relationship. As Bevan and Sole suggest, these types of distant relationships can have both challenges and opportunity (Bevan, 2014).<sup>14</sup> And third<sup>15</sup> is when there is an intergenerational relationship which can cause issues because of being in a different stage of life which changes communication styles, different economic states, and age related stereotypes.<sup>16</sup> I know this does not relate to your relationship but it is important to remember that both of you have different interests and entertaining both of your interests is important to keeping you both happy. It can also provide new and different insights<sup>17</sup> into the world around you (Bevan, 2014). You will learn to work together to get passed the obstacles you encounter. Though all these

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<sup>11</sup> Be clear about the referent. It's not clear if the author's use of the term "they" is in reference to the children or if it is other individuals.

<sup>12</sup> Good. In Section 1.2 of Bevan and Sole, they address noise and this was an opportunity to reference them and give them credit and get credit for using a class resource.

<sup>13</sup> A new topic means a new paragraph is necessary.

<sup>14</sup> The student did not include both authors here either. The year only has to be listed in the first reference.

<sup>15</sup> Again, this should be a new paragraph.

<sup>16</sup> This is an interesting point, but could be developed a bit more to be more meaningful

<sup>17</sup> This was an opportunity for the student to explain a few of them.

barriers could have negative effects on your interpersonal interaction they are barriers that can be worked through.

### **Self-Concept<sup>18</sup>**

Self-concept will not only have effects on your identity and the way you perceive yourself but will also affect the relationships you form and the way you communicate in those relationships.<sup>19</sup>

“Researchers believe that self-concept is a complex mix of how we see ourselves, what others have told us about ourselves, and what society says we should be” (Bevan,2014).<sup>20</sup> “Though self-concept is an internal process, it is learned, maintained, and can change through interpersonal communication”<sup>21</sup> (Bevan, 2014). Our<sup>22</sup> self-concept is developed through the interpersonal relationships we have through the years and can go through changes as we get older. You can let what others say define you or you can change your self-concept through your interpersonal communications. Having a positive self-concept will likely help in a successful relationship. If others say negative things about you and you begin to believe these things it will likely affect your relationship. This could lead to a bad self-concept and letting this affect you in a negative way it could have negative effects on your current interpersonal relationships.<sup>23</sup> “A person with high self-concept clarity should experience greater relationship satisfaction and commitment, in part, because of inclusion of other in the self” (Lewandowski, 2010). If you

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<sup>18</sup> Please center the text here as this is a new section of the paper. And remember, the learning objectives have changed. Use the ones listed in the final paper instructions – “Analyze the role of communication in developing and maintaining one’s self-concept, self-image, and self-esteem.”

<sup>19</sup> Excellent point. This is the gist of the importance of self-concept and how it relates to communication and relationships.

<sup>20</sup> Per APA style, all quotes need a page or section number

<sup>21</sup> This is another free standing quote. Please start the sentence with something like: The authors continue by saying

....  
<sup>22</sup> Once again, a new point means a new paragraph is needed.

<sup>23</sup> Good point. It would be nice to see the student connect this point to the couple as well

yourself are more stable than<sup>24</sup> you are more attractive to your partner and can contribute more of a positive light in the relationship. Cassy and Jeremy it is important to try and work on your self-concept because this could greatly affect your relationship in either a negative or positive way.<sup>25</sup>

### **Emotional Intelligence and Effective Interpersonal Relationships<sup>26</sup>**

Being emotionally intelligent is a very important aspect of any relationship. It is important to not only understand your feelings but also the person you are having a relationship with.<sup>27</sup> According to Michelle Pence and Andrea Vickery (2012), “being able to listen in an active-empathic way is positively related to having emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to monitor, regulate, and discriminate among your own and your partner's feelings in order to guide your thoughts and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) (Bevan, 2014).<sup>28</sup> In an article by the *American Journal of Family Therapy*, they describe<sup>29</sup> emotional intelligence as being able to recognize emotions in the self and others (Malouff, 2014).<sup>30</sup> Being empathetic with what your partner has to say is also an important element to your relationship. “One of the primary benefits of relational partners sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other is that doing so helps each partner understand the emotions of the other person. It is for this reason that researchers call empathy “a central and crucial” component of healthy romantic couple functioning” (Bevan, 2014). In any relationship especially a romantic one being an active and

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<sup>24</sup> “Than” is used for comparisons, such as “This is ‘more than’ enough food.” If you start a sentence with “if, which happens here, use “then.”

<sup>25</sup> Explain how and why by using a specific scenario. Also, whenever possible, try to create some transitions between sections.

<sup>26</sup> Please note that the learning objective now also covers self-disclosure.

<sup>27</sup> Great point. Having an emotional connection is a crucial part of bonding with others.

<sup>28</sup> When using a source that is cited in a source you read, use this citation: (as cited in Bevan & Sole, 2014, Section 8.3).

<sup>29</sup> Avoid using “they” and instead be precise and list the authors. The journal didn’t describe emotional intelligence, the authors did.

<sup>30</sup> Use all of the authors’ names.

empathic listener is important and that is highly related to being emotionally intelligent. If your significant other is talking to you, stop and listen to what they have to say, be active in the conversation and show empathy.<sup>31</sup> This shows your partner that you care about what they have to say, and that is extremely important in a healthy relationship. Put your cell phone down, turn the television off, plan 10 minutes a day to sit and talk with your partner, it will make all the difference. If you do not have good communication with your partner there will likely be many issues in the relationship.

### **Listening<sup>32</sup>**

As I mentioned earlier listening is another key factor in a healthy relationship. “Listening skills are some of the most important ways in which you express consideration for other people—by making good eye contact, appropriately smiling, being engaged with the other person, and responding with meaningful questions and comments”(Bevan, 2014). When you make your partner feel important and loved it builds a stronger bond. “If you do not listen during an interaction, then you cannot understand others, respond appropriately to what they say, or provide helpful feedback” (Bevan, 2014). Listening leads to better more comprehensive conversations between the two of you. Cassy and Jeremy make an effort to analyze your listening skills, and work to improve them.<sup>33</sup>

### **Self-disclosure<sup>34</sup>**

Everyone has the desire to feel close to others and share stories of their life, but how much of this self-disclosure should be shared and how soon? When in a new relationship

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<sup>31</sup> Excellent advice based directly on what the student learned in class. This is how a student can show they are “applying” knowledge from the course

<sup>32</sup> This works for a discussion about empathy as long as the student clearly discusses empathic listening.

<sup>33</sup> While this is an important point, this advice would be even stronger if specific strategies listed above are reiterated for the couple and maybe even an example of when this might come up.

<sup>34</sup> Again, remember that the learning objectives have changed. You must now also “Analyze the impact of gender and culture on interpersonal communications.”

whether it be an online one or face to face sharing too much personal information too soon can leave the individual vulnerable. “Sharing very personal or revealing information may create a vulnerability that threatens the person’s position in the relationship” (Murstein & Adler, 1995; Terzino, 2009).<sup>35</sup> Giving too much information too early on could lead to being emotionally hurt. But once in a serious committed relationship it is important to disclose more, but how much is always a question. Obviously you two are at a point in your relationship where sharing is extremely important. Knowing who you are marrying, being best friends with each other is extremely important. Self-disclosure in a marriage is paramount in order to grow trust with one another.<sup>36</sup> Sharing your inner thoughts and feelings will constantly change how you see your partner and will help your relationship grow over the years. I know that you two love each other very much and this should not be a difficult task at first. But once you have been married awhile and life begins to get in the way, for instance children and career demands it can become a more challenge task.<sup>37</sup> In an article titled “Can We Talk?” the author talks about the quality of the communication over the quantity. Obviously you will talk daily but will you talk about feelings and dreams or just about what’s for dinner and what laundry needs to be put away? I will admit that this happens with me and my wife, you get busy and your communication becomes mundane. You do not grow as a couple from these mundane conversations, you grow and are happier when you communicate how you feel and the dreams you have for your family and yourself.<sup>38</sup> “Quality communication is defined somewhat differently from study to study, but research consistently has shown a link between happy marriages and "self-disclosure," or sharing your private feelings, fears, doubts and perceptions with your partner” (Schoenberg,

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<sup>35</sup> Again, if a student uses a source that is quoting another source, he or she must indicate this.

<sup>36</sup> This is a crucial point. The student did a great job!

<sup>37</sup> The student is approaching the topic from a new angle and therefore a new paragraph is needed.

<sup>38</sup> Excellent description of why disclosure matters in a healthy relationship.



2011). So no matter how busy your life gets make sure you set time aside even just 10 minutes a day to focus on quality communication between the two of you and you will continue to grow as a couple.<sup>39</sup>

### **Managing Interpersonal Conflicts<sup>40</sup>**

There will always be some conflict in a relationship but how it is approached will determine the success of a relationship. Management of conflict is the most common outcome but resolution of the conflict is recommended. “Although management is the most likely conflict outcome, it can be problematic when conflicts become serial arguments” (Bevan, 2014). For instance if Cassy tells you Jeremy on a regular bases that she does not like you talking bad about her family and you say you will not but it continues to be brought up, this is an example of management.<sup>41</sup> The conflict will likely keep taking place.<sup>42</sup> It is important that instead you find a way to resolve this conflict, so that it does not continue to happen. “This means that there is a strong likelihood that the issue will come up again and that the parties will engage in future interactions regarding the issue”. Resolution is important and should try and be obtained, these three things must occur for a resolution to happen:

“The parties in the conflict decide to end the conflict.

The parties are both satisfied with the outcome of the conflict.

The parties do not engage in or deal with the conflict again” (Bevan, 2014).

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<sup>39</sup> This is a great point. It would be nice to hear what this “growth” might mean.

<sup>40</sup> The language now says “Evaluate strategies for using communication techniques to resolve interpersonal conflicts.”

<sup>41</sup> The student could have been more specific here by adding the word “poor” to management.

<sup>42</sup> The student offers a good illustration of the importance of confiding in others and taking it into account in how one acts in the future.

With conflict management you're basically agreeing to disagree<sup>43</sup> and the conflict is not resolved and will more than likely come up again. For the well-being your relationship both of you need to make an effort to resolve the conflict, not just manage the conflict.<sup>44</sup> This could be dangerous for you both and each time the conflict could grow and cause more stress on the relationship. Resolution to the conflict needs to occur in order to have a more peaceful relationship.

So Cassy and Jeremy in closing if you do everything you can to keep your relationship healthy by working at it on a daily bases it will run more smoothly. Just as I mentioned earlier it is like a clock and needs all the parts working together. To have a healthy, happy fulfilling interpersonal relationship you must work at it. Constantly looking at ways to better your communication and conflict resolution with each other.<sup>45</sup> Communicating your dreams and hopes and your inner feelings will help you grown closer and more intimate with each other. Being empathetic towards your partner will also show each other how much you care for one another. There will be tough times, everyone has them, my wife and I have them but putting the work and time into your communication will defiantly<sup>46</sup> have positive impacts on your relationship.<sup>47</sup> Again congratulations and the best of luck to you in your upcoming marriage.

Sincerely,

Student's Name

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<sup>43</sup> This is a specific type of conflict management, not all.

<sup>44</sup> This is a crucial distinction. Nice point!

<sup>45</sup> This is an incomplete sentence. Notice that Microsoft Word has underlined it in green to warn that there might be an issue.

<sup>46</sup> Be careful with word choices. The student likely means "definitely." Defiantly means to do something in a rebellious way, which is very different than "definitely" which is synonymous with the term absolutely.

<sup>47</sup> Nice restatement of the student's key points.

## References

- Bevan, J. L., & Sole, K. (2014). *Making connections: Understanding interpersonal Communication (2nd ed.)*.<sup>48</sup>
- Lewandowski, G. W., Nardone, N., & Raines, A. J. (2010). The Role of Self-concept Clarity in Relationship Quality.<sup>49</sup> *Self & Identity*, 9(4), 416-433.
- Malouff, J. M., Schutte, N. S., & Thorsteinsson, E. B. (2014). Trait emotional intelligence and romantic relationship satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 42(1), 53-66. doi:10.1080/01926187.2012.748549<sup>50</sup>
- Schoenberg, N. (2011, January 17). Can we talk? *McClatchy-Tribune News Service*. Retrieved from [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-01-14/features/sc-fam-0111-talk-relationship-20110111\\_1\\_happy-marriages-couples-marital-therapy](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-01-14/features/sc-fam-0111-talk-relationship-20110111_1_happy-marriages-couples-marital-therapy).
- Terzino, K. A., & Cross, S. E. (2009). Predicting commitment in new relationships: Interactive effects of relational self-construal and power. *Self & Identity*, 8(4), 321-341. doi:10.1080/15298860802102273<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> To make this a perfect citation, include [Electronic version]. Retrieved from <https://content.ashford.edu/> at the end.

<sup>49</sup> Please only capitalize the first word of the article title. So this should read “

<sup>50</sup> Omit DOI number.

<sup>51</sup> This is mostly a very good reference list!