

Three-Way Communication: Close the Loop Before Acting

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 9, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

Hearing a message is not the same as understanding it. A short instruction can reach the wrong person, lose an identifier or suggest a different action. Three-way communication gives the sender a chance to catch that difference before the receiver carries out an authorized task. Practice the exchange without moving equipment.

Objective: Complete a clear message, an accurate repeat-back and the sender's confirmation before proceeding under the task's authorization process.

Key hazards or failure points

Wrong receiver; clipped radio traffic; missing location or identifier; several actions bundled together; acting during the repeat-back; a correct message mistaken for permission to bypass required checks.

Practical controls

- Sender: get the intended person's attention, identify yourself and the work location, then give a concise message. Preserve the exact equipment identifier and separate information from an instruction to act.
- Receiver: explain the intended meaning back, repeating critical identifiers and values accurately. Ask about missing or unclear information. Do not fill a gap with what usually happens.
- Sender: compare the repeat-back with the intended message and explicitly confirm or correct it. After a correction, obtain another repeat-back. Task-specific signaling rules and emergency stop arrangements still govern.

Verify It in the Field

With hazardous actions prevented, rehearse a clearly identified practice message using a paper task example. Have an observer compare sender intent, receiver repeat-back and final confirmation. Include a harmless mismatch to check that it is caught before the exchange is accepted.

Check communication from the actual safe working positions using the required radios or other method. Confirm the intended receiver hears the entire message. Record the location, equipment, actual result and time. Correct reception problems rather than repeatedly guessing at clipped words.

Ask both people what happens after confirmation and what still authorizes the work. Identify the required procedure, checks and decision owner. Record any difference and repeat the rehearsal after correction; communication agreement alone does not verify physical conditions.

Stop and reassess

Hold the affected action when the receiver is uncertain, confirmation is absent, a correction remains unresolved or communication is lost. Follow the task's defined safe response. An urgent stop warning must receive its prescribed immediate response; do not delay it to complete this practice sequence.

Ask the crew

1. Which detail in today's message must be repeated exactly?
2. How will the sender show that a repeat-back is correct?
3. What required check still applies after both people agree?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 2, pp. 26–27; HSE Safety Critical Communications. Full references: webpage..

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/three-way-communication-close-the-loop

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