Three Way Communication

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v2.0 | October 13, 2026 | 5–10 minutes plus field checks

What and why

Three-way communication is a message, a repeat-back and the sender's confirmation or correction. It makes differences in understanding visible before an action depends on the message. A message can sound clear while its identifier, location or intended action is misunderstood. Closing the loop gives both people a chance to resolve that difference.

Objective: Complete the message, repeat-back and confirmation, including correction of an incorrect identifier.

When and where

Use it for important verbal instructions or status information where misunderstanding could affect safety or the work. Follow any task-specific communication or signaling rules. Face to face, by telephone or by radio, wherever the approved method provides reliable communication. Check it from the real safe working positions.

How to use it

- SENDER: get the intended receiver's attention. State who, where and the concise message. Distinguish a status report from an instruction.
- RECEIVER: repeat the meaning back, preserving exact critical identifiers and values. Ask about unclear information instead of guessing.
- SENDER: confirm accuracy or correct the message and obtain another repeat-back. Agreement does not replace work authorization.

Verify It in the Field

From safe working positions, check the actual communication method under expected conditions. Record whether the complete message was understood, by whom and when.

Paper practice: tell a partner, 'Training only. Mark Room 12 unavailable.' Partner repeats Room 21. Correct it, hear Room 12 repeated and confirm before marking the paper.

Ask what still authorizes the real work. A correct exchange does not prove that a physical control is present or functioning.

Failure points and stop triggers

Wrong receiver; clipped words; similar identifiers; several actions bundled together; acting before confirmation. Hold the affected action for uncertainty, missing confirmation or lost communication. Follow prescribed emergency responses immediately; do not delay an urgent stop to finish a repeat-back exercise.

Toolbox talk questions

1. Which identifier must be repeated exactly?

2. How will we respond to a clipped message?

3. What check is still required after confirmation?

Use the separate supervisor field check and attendance sheet. Practice is not qualification or work authorization.

Source: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, printed pp. 26–27. References and task-specific limits on the webpage.

Next step: Apply this skill to one step on the free JHA/JSA field-verification worksheet.

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

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