



SPEAKING IS COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

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Your university and institute may very well have a communication across the curriculum program that includes requirements for foundational speaking and writing skills that are then built on in later classes. Whether your school has a communication across the curriculum program or not, it is important to know that the skills you develop in this class serve as a scaffold from which you can continue to build and develop speaking skills that are tailored to the needs of your particular field of study. As you participate in oral communication within and about your field of study, you become socialized into the discipline-specific ways of communicating necessary to be successful in that field. This communicative process starts in the classroom.

What does a good communicator in a science class look and sound like?

What does a good communicator in a history class look and sound like?

ABSTRACT

In this article discusses Oral communication has always been a part of higher education, and communication skills in general became more of a focus for colleges and universities in the late part of the twentieth century, as the first “communication across the curriculum” programs began to develop. These programs focus on the importance of writing and speaking skills for further academic, professional, and civic development.

While there will be some overlap in the answers to those questions, there are also specific differences based on the expectations for oral communication within those fields of study. Knowing that speaking is context specific can help you learn which presentation style will earn you a better grade based on the discipline and the course. Although instructors try to bring professional contexts into the classroom, students have difficulty or avoid engaging with a “made-up” customer or company.

Making a more conscious effort to view the classroom as a training ground that simulates, but doesn’t replicate, the environment of your chosen career field can make your transition from student to practitioner more successful. While students know they are being graded and their primary audience is their professor, you and your classmates are also audience members in the class who can use the opportunity to practice communicating in ways relevant to your career path in addition



to completing the assignment and getting a good grade.

Social Sciences Social sciences include psychology, sociology, criminology, and political science, among others. Speaking in the social sciences is driven by quantitative or qualitative data reviewed in existing literature or from original research projects that focus on historical or current social issues. Social scientists often rely on quantitative and/or qualitative research and evidence in their presentations. Qualitative research focuses on describing and interpreting social phenomena using data collected through methods such as participant observation and interviewing—in short, watching and/or talking to people. Qualitative researchers value the subjectivity that comes from individual perspectives and seek to capture the thoughts and feelings of research participants and convey them using descriptive writing that allows readers to think, see, and feel along with the participant. Quantitative social scientists use statistics to provide evidence for a conclusion and collect data about social phenomena using methods such as surveys and experiments. Since these methods are more controlled, the information gathered is turned into numerical data that can be statistically analyzed. Rather than valuing subjectivity and trying to see the world through the perspective of their research subjects, as qualitative researchers do, quantitative researchers seek to use data to describe and explain social phenomena in objective and precise ways so their findings can be generalized to larger populations. Knowing what counts as credible data for each type of research is an important part of speaking in the social sciences. Some social scientists use qualitative and quantitative research, but many people have a preferred method, and individual instructors may expect students to use one or the other.

Presentations in the social sciences usually connect to historical or current social issues. Students may be expected to conduct a literature review on a particular societal issue related to race or poverty, for example. When presenting a literature review, students are expected to review a substantial number of primary sources and then synthesize them together to provide insight into an issue. Many students make a mistake of simply summarizing articles in a literature review. Students should put various authors in conversation with one another by comparing and contrasting the various perspectives and identifying themes within the research.

Students in social work and political science courses may be asked to evaluate or propose policies relevant to a societal issue. Reviewing information about persuasive speeches, discussed earlier, that include propositions of policy may be helpful. This type of presentation involves researching current and proposed legislation and may involve comparing and contrasting policies in one area with policies in another. A student in a social work class may be asked to investigate policies in urban areas related to homeless youth. A political science student may be asked to investigate the political arguments used in states that have passed “right to work” legislation. In any case, presentations in the social sciences may be informative or persuasive but should be socially relevant and research based.

Education/Training and Development.

Speaking in education/training and development involves students delivering a lecture, facilitating a discussion, or running an activity as if they were actually teaching or training. In each of these cases, students will be evaluated on their ability to present content



in a progressive way that builds new knowledge from existing knowledge, interact with their audience (students or trainees), and connect their content to the bigger picture or the overarching objectives for the lesson and course. Teachers and trainers also need to be able to translate content into relevant examples and present for long periods of time, adapting as they go to fit the changing class dynamics. All levels of the education and training and development fields include a focus on the importance of communication and public speaking. Listening is also a central part of teaching and training. Aside from being judged on how technical information is broken down as a speaker in a technical class may be, speakers in education and training are evaluated more on their nonverbal communication. Immediacy behaviors are important parts of teaching and training. Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal communication patterns that indicate a teacher's approachability. Effective use of immediacy behaviors helps reduce perceived distance between the teacher and student or trainer and trainee. Some immediacy behaviors include changes in vocal pitch, smiling, leaning in toward a person, nodding, providing other positive nonverbal feedback while listening, and using humor effectively. Teachers who are more skilled at expressing immediacy receive higher evaluations, and their students learn more. Immediacy behaviors are important for lecturing, facilitating, and interacting with students or trainees one-on-one.

Tips for Effective Lectures

- Put content that you are excited about in lectures.
- Move around to engage the audience; don't get stuck behind a lectern or computer.

- Actually write out examples; don't expect them to "come to you" as you lecture.
- Include notes to yourself to stop and ask for questions or pose a direct question to the audience.
- Start the lecture by connecting to something the audience has already learned, and then say what this lecture will add to their knowledge and how it fits into what will be learned later in the class.
- Do not lecture for more than twenty minutes without breaking it up with something more interactive.

Tips for Effective Discussion Facilitation

- Start the discussion off with an example that connects to something the audience is familiar with.
- Do not be afraid of silence. Pose the question. Repeat it or rephrase it once if needed and then wait for a response. Too often facilitators pose a question, wait a second, repeat and rephrase the question to the point that everyone is confused, and then end up answering their own question.
- Listen supportively and do not move from one person to the next without responding to his or her comment verbally and nonverbally. Use this as an opportunity to pivot from a response back to the topic of discussion, to another example, or to another person.
- Spend time making good discussion questions. Good discussion questions usually contain a sentence or two that sets up the context for the question. The question should be open ended, not "yes or no." Have follow-up questions prepared to move the discussion along.

Conclusion. If students/trainees are not actively participating, you can have them



write a brief response first, then share it with a neighbor, then come back to group

discussion. This is the “think, pair, share” method.

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