Oral/Written Communication: Free Writing

1. LEARNING OUTCOME

Students will become aware of the career-readiness competency Oral/Written Communication and connect this competency and the skills associated with it to the assignment topic.

2. OBJECTIVE

The following exercises are designed to help you identify your oral/written communication skills and put them into practice. As you move through them, reflect on what you believe are your most significant strengths and weaknesses when it comes to oral/written communication.

3. ORAL/WRITTEN COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Based upon an analysis of multiple frameworks, effective communication is thought to encompass several dimensions. Markle, Brenneman, Jackson, Burrus, and Robbins (2013) define effective communication this way: “Effectively communicate multiple types of messages; communicate across multiple forms; and effectively deliver messages to varying audiences” (Sparks, Song, Brantley, & Liu, 2014, p. 4).

Viewed this way, we can see that good communication involves three elements:

1. Genre (type of information)
2. Medium (method of communication)
3. Recipient (receiver of information)
4. EXERCISE ONE

I. Familiarize Yourself with the Following Information About Effective Communication

Effective Communication Involves Attention to:

**Context and purpose:** Of course, writing and spoken speech must take into account the specific purpose of the communication. However, it is also important that communicators tailor their words to the context - formal or informal, for example.

**Audience:** To some extent, audience awareness is linked to context and purpose. In communicating effectively, we must consider our specific audience. What do they already know? Are they experts in the field or novices? Are they acquainted with a particular jargon? If not, how will we adjust our wording?

**Development and organization:** Effective communication is well developed and clearly organized. This may require a preliminary draft or two. It is often helpful to develop an outline of the major points to be covered.

**Sources:** Effective writing often involves the use of existing sources. Part of using sources effectively is the ability to identify and assess the merits and credibility of different resources. In addition, effective communicators can identify the elements of a resource that need to be included.

**Modes:** Increasingly, effective communication involves familiarity with multiple modes of information expression and delivery. For instance, employees in many fields are often asked to give presentations that involve written and oral speech coupled with a presentation of numerical data, graphs, or charts.

Effective Communication is Tied to All Career-Readiness Competencies.

One of the skills which employers value most in prospective employees is the ability to communicate clearly. Indeed, “written communication” is identified as a “generic skill” in the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes project (Sparks, Song, Brantley, & Liu, 2014). Being able to articulate one’s ideas clearly, whether in spoken or written speech, is fundamentally important as it is tied to virtually all of the other career competencies. Most notably, effective communication is tied to critical thinking and problem solving as well as team work and collaboration.

Effective Communication and Problem Solving

Communication can take a “knowledge-telling” approach or a “knowledge-transforming” approach (Sparks, Song, Brantley, & Liu, 2014, p. 12). Engaging in a knowledge-telling approach is more mechanical and less contextual. A writer, or speaker, simply views her or his information as needing to be conveyed. The communicator is a deliverer of ideas, but is not assuming the role of persuader. In other words, he or she is not trying to transform but only to inform. Knowledge-telling involves less cognitive “prep time,” as the communicator does not need to spend much time planning and organizing, or assessing the context or audience.

Knowledge-transforming communication, on the other hand, is linked to problem-solving. Transformative communication is typically more deliberate and more effortful. The transformative speaker is not simply the “messenger.” She is providing context and depth, in addition to the basics of the information. Transformative communication must attend more carefully to context, audience, and – of course – purpose.
5. EXERCISE TWO

I. Practice Free Writing

Select a Topic or Question You Would Like To Learn More About and Write for Ten Minutes

Please note: As the ability to communicate well is strongly tied to analytical and critical thinking as well as problem-solving, you may find that these exercises challenge those skills as much as your writing abilities!

This exercise is designed to help you assess your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to narrowing a topic which you would like to pursue for further investigation. The point of the exercise is to identify a topic, write down as much as you know or would like to know about it, and flesh out a research question. In short, the point is to get comfortable articulating ideas on a sheet of paper.

STEPS:

• Select a topic or question that you would like to learn more about. This can begin as broad or narrow, general or specific. You might like to pursue something specific to your intended major.
  
  ⇒ Broad topic examples: The weather; the economy; World War II; gender roles; death rituals.
  
  ⇒ More specific: Is the current economy strong or weak? Why do the leaves change color in the Fall? Are crime rates up or down? What factors affect the lifespan of a sea turtle? Are immunization rates declining? What is the best American novel of all time?

• Consider the following: What is the main question you would like to address? Are there multiple dimensions to the question? If so, what are they? What do you already know? Where have you learned about this topic? Where/how could you learn more? Why is this important or useful? To whom might this topic be important or useful?

• Use the stop-watch feature on your cell phone or watch and set it for 10 minutes!

• Write!

II. In Small Groups, Share Your Writing and Reflect on Your Experience

Consider the Following Questions:

Based on what you wrote:

1. Could you generate a specific research question or topic? If not, why not?

2. Could you begin to conduct research on this topic? If yes, would you know where to begin?

3. Have you identified one or two key questions related to the topic?