Oral/Written Communication: Voice

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. Write Definitions in Your Own Words

Develop Your Own Voice

This is a simple but useful exercise. College professors often utilize multiple-choice questions on exams. It is not uncommon for students to challenge the professor for a missed question on the basis of there being a discrepancy in wording between what was presented on the exam and what was in the textbook. In other words, students are often looking for the wording to match verbatim. However, advanced learning involves the acquisition of a concept, not rote memorization of words.

Further, college work often requires that we paraphrase the work of others. We must learn to develop our own wording! This exercise, which involves definition of very basic terms, will help you to finesse your writing skills as well as develop your own “voice.”

For each of the following words, write your own definition. Do not use a dictionary to help you! Craft a definition in your own words.

• Creative
• Integrity
• Authentic
• Holistic
• Sarcasm

II. In Small Groups, Share Your Definitions and Compare them with Definitions from Other Sources

Consider the Following Questions:

1. Are your definitions similar to the definitions you found in other sources?
2. Do your definitions express the same idea/s?
3. Share your comparisons with your small group.