Teacher Guide
College and Career Competency:
Communication

Definition:

Communication is considered an important part of social system theory, as articulated by social theorist Niklas Luhmann (Leydesdorff, 2000). Luhmann defined communication as requiring the unity of three elements: information, message, and understanding. Communication is not considered to have occurred if the intended information and message is not understood.

Communication is itself a key element of other interpersonal competencies like **social awareness**, **empathy**, **conflict management**, and **assertiveness**.

Communications is an enormous field of study. It is typically discussed in terms of verbal (oral and written) and nonverbal forms. Communications also encompasses visual languages like American Sign Language (ASL), which could be considered verbal and augmentative forms of communication.

This *Teacher Guide* will focus on oral and nonverbal (facial expression, gestures, posture; also known as body language) communication. Together these are the most common ways we exchange information. We will also highlight selective aspects of written communication. Being able to do all skillfully is essential for work, school, and socialization.

Essential Components for Students:

1. Share your thoughts, feelings, or ideas with others so that they can interpret the information.
2. Interpret others' thoughts, feelings, or ideas.
3. Develop shared understanding.

Research:

- Literature across the disciplines emphasizes the importance of well-developed oral communication skills in the workplace. Engineering, for example, is an intensely oral culture where the ability for engineers to listen to clients and translate ideas in a clear fashion is crucial for success (Dannels, 2002; Darling & Dannels, 2003). A study involving 354 managers in a range of industries shows that oral communication skills are the single most important attribute they value among entry-level employees (Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997). A survey conducted in 2010 by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that communication skills ranked first in essential skills for a job candidate (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Other fields including accounting, healthcare, and law require professionals to demonstrate high level oral communication abilities when interfacing with clients (Brindley & Reynolds, 2011; Gray & Murray, 2011; Smith, 2006).

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- Strong oral communication skills increase a job candidate's likelihood of receiving a job offer. A study by Barrick et al. (2012) indicates that the rapport-building phase of an interview has a direct bearing on whether or not interviewers form a favorable impression of candidates. Over the course of 130 mock interviews, the majority of interviewers in the study found the verbal abilities of candidates to be a significant factor when assessing their desirability as employees.

- Among adolescents and young adults, research shows that students' oral communication skills are enhanced through public speaking activities such as debates. Debates have been shown to teach students other important attributes and skills, including content mastery, listening, critical thinking, and **empathy**, and have been linked to college readiness (Anderson & Mezuk, 2012; Kennedy, 2007; Zare & Othman, 2013).

- Storytelling and story reading are proven ways to help children develop their oral communication skills in Pre-K-5 settings. Along with teaching students how to structure and articulate their thoughts, these activities help children develop a host of other literacy skills, including language comprehension and analysis (Hennings, 2000; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004; Palmer, Harshbarger, & Koch, 2001). Storytelling has also been shown to benefit students' emotional literacy and **social awareness** skills—key aspects of interpersonal competence (Huffaker, 2004; Killick & Bowkett, 2015).

- Nonverbal communication supplies structure and meaning to interpersonal communication. As Mandal (2014) notes, "Nonverbal signs help regulate the system, cueing hierarchy and priority among communicators, signaling the flow of interaction, and providing meta-communication and feedback" (p. 417). Without the information provided by nonverbal communication, receivers can easily misconstrue or miss out on vital elements of the sender's message. Similarly, a receiver's failure to notice or correctly interpret nonverbal information can lead to a breakdown in communication.

- Nonverbal communication plays an integral role in influence and persuasion—essential tools for effective interpersonal communication and a sense of **self-efficacy**. Research by Fennis and Stel (2011) demonstrates that individuals who have the ability to adjust their body language to suit a particular message and situation are more successful in influencing others to take a course of action than those who lack the personal and **social awareness** to alter their body language. A study by Jackob, Roessing, and Peterson (2011) notes that while body language does not typically trump content delivered through speech, it does have a direct effect on how significant, convincing, or powerful verbal messages appear to listeners.

- For students experiencing emotional problems or distress, certain types of written communication can be therapeutic. Travagin, Margola, and Revenson (2015) studied the effect that expressive writing had on students with emotional problems. They found that expressive writing had a small but significant effect on academic achievement. They attributed that to increased **self-efficacy** that came from self-observation as students reflected on what they learned from stressful situations. Researchers (Dolev-Cohen & Barak, 2013) found that adolescents who were experiencing emotional distress received emotional relief when they used instant messaging (IM) to communicate to friends. The researchers attributed the significant positive changes in the adolescents' emotional state to the intimate and private space of IM.

- Applying the conventions and style of social media in a professional situation, however, can be problematic. For example, when people communicate using social media, the context is typically well understood. In technical or scientific correspondence, when the writer assumes that all readers have a common understanding of the context, important information can be left out, causing the communication to become ineffective. For a good discussion of this, with examples

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including the Columbia shuttle and BP oil rig disasters, see Boiarsky (2015), available at http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpl/articleDetails.jsp?arnumber=7235822&newsearch=true&queryText=boiarsky.

Assessments:

Please note that the assessments listed here reflect what is currently being used in multiple disciplines to measure communication. Not all of these measures will be easily used in classroom settings or by classroom teachers. However, the general knowledge that these measurements exist and the ability to review particular items from these assessments is valuable.

- Illinois State University developed the standards-based Speaking and Listening Assessment Project (SLAP) for K-12 learners. SLAP rubrics for high school students are available at https://bsinclairblog.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/hs_intermediate_rubric.pdf (Illinois State University, 2002b) and http://mhs.dcsdschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_3844624/File/Teachers%20Documents/Josie%20Stratton/English%20IV%20H/persuasive_rubric.pdf (Illinois State University, 2002a).

- Developed by a team of experts at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2010), the Oral Communication VALUE Rubric measures students' ability to deliver oral presentations. The rubric employs a 4-point scale to score organization, language, delivery, supporting material, and central message. The complete Oral Communication VALUE Rubric is available at http://assessment.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/OralCommunication.pdf.

- An informal 15-item survey on effective communication is available on the career website MindTools (n.d.), https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCS_99.htm. Scoring is immediate, and participants can get a detailed interpretation of their results.

- The National Communication Association's (NCA) *Large Scale Assessment in Oral Communication: P-12 and Higher Education*, available at http://www.natcom.org/uploadedFiles/Teaching_and_Learning/Assessment_Resources/PDF-Large_Scale_Assessment_in_Oral_Communication_3rdEd.pdf, provides a wealth of information about communication assessment across the educational spectrum (Morreale & Backlund, 2007). The work includes extensive, descriptive lists of instruments for measuring listening, speaking, and other aspects of communication.

- The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) is a self-reporting oral communication apprehension measure using a 5-point Likert scale across 24 statements about communication. See McCroskey (1982) for additional information on the instrument. The University of Hawaii offers the complete measure at https://www.hawaii.edu/gened/oc/PRCA-24.pdf.

- Created by researchers at the University of California-Santa Cruz, the Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT) is a video-based self-reporting measure of oral and nonverbal decoding. The tool is designed to measure participants' **social awareness** and emotional intelligence through a series of multiple choice questions. The IPT comes in 30 and 15 question formats. See Costanzo and Archer (1989) for complete information. An explanation of the IPT and sample videos from the tool are available at http://nonverbal.ucsc.edu/index.html (University of California-Santa Cruz, n.d.).

- The Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (PONS) and its short version, the MiniPONS, are instruments for measuring participants' ability to decode nonverbal information transmitted through audio and video formats. PONS presents participants with multiple choice questions to determine where they score on an interpersonal sensitivity scale. See Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers,

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and Archer (1979) for complete details. Further descriptions and excerpts from PONS may be found at https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/collections/neu:rx9144872.

- The Test of Nonverbal Cue Knowledge (TONCK) is an 81-item instrument that measures participants' ability to accurately identify emotions through a series of True/False questions. For full details, including the complete instrument, see Rosip and Hall (2004) at https://www.ffri.hr/~ibrdar/komunikacija/seminari/Hall,%202004%20-%20Nonverbal%20decoding%20accuracy.pdf.

Instructional Practices:

- Role-playing can be a helpful strategy for teaching effective communication. The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (2012) provides a resource on developing communication skills in youth at https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/communication.pdf that includes some role-play activities. For example, the teacher can ask for two volunteers to act in a short skit about a summer job. One student role-plays "Jade," whose summer job is mowing lawns, and the other student role plays "Mr. Z," who is the client. The skit revolves around Jade receiving negative feedback from Mr. Z. At the end of the skit, students are asked to answer a number of questions related to the interaction between Jade and Mr. Z.

- The Oral Communication VALUE Rubric (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010) can be used to instruct students on the fundamental criteria for good oral communication, such as how to have a clear central message that is easy to identify. The Rubric is available at http://assessment.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/OralCommunication.pdf.

- Similarly, the SLAP rubric developed by the Illinois State University for K-12 learners can help guide instructional strategies for teaching students ways to better deliver oral presentations. For example, the rubric recognizes the importance of purposeful hand gestures and good eye contact when delivering persuasive presentations. The rubric is available at https://bsinclairblog.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/hs_intermediate_rubric.pdf (Illinois State University, 2002b) and http://mhs.dcsdschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_3844624/File/Teachers%20Documents/Josie%20Stratton/English%20IV%20H/persuasive_rubric.pdf (Illinois State University, 2002a).

- "Teaching Your Students How to Have a Conversation" (Mendler, 2013) provides eight tips on how to help students develop both oral and nonverbal communication skills. Among the tips, the author suggests teachers use the S.L.A.N.T. strategy (Sit up straight. Listen. Answer and ask questions. Nod to show interest. Track the speaker.). See the article at http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-your-students-conversation-allen-mendler.

- The Virginia Department of Education (2010) offers sample lesson plans for teaching oral communication, as well as speaking, listening, and media literacy, for K-12 students. A range of lessons, including ones involving "Summarizing story events" and how to "Differentiate between formal and informal language," can be found at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2010/lesson_plans/.

- Through its *Speaking in the Disciplines* site, the University of Pittsburgh (2008) outlines six types of oral communication activities and offers a number of useful instructor and student resources for classroom application, including works addressing argumentation and **conflict management**. While these activities are designed for college-level students, they can be adapted to a high school classroom. Complete details are available at http://www.speaking.pitt.edu/about/oral-comm.html.

- The curriculum committee of the California High School Speech Association (2004) offers a wealth of lesson plans for Speaking Across the Curriculum, including ones focused on persuasive speaking, listening, multimedia, oral interpretation, and spontaneous speaking. See the lessons at http://idebate.org/sites/live/files/handouts/Speaking%20Across%20the%20Curriculum.pdf.
- Teachers can strengthen students' nonverbal communication skills by incorporating movement and dance into instruction. The video "Communication Through Movement and Dance" (Teaching Channel, 2011) provides an engaging lesson on the topic for K-5 students. See the video and accompanying materials at https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-non-verbal-communication.
- The Utah Education Network (2011) offers a repository of materials and instructional procedures designed for teaching adults nonverbal communication. The material could be adapted to high school students. Helpful resources include lectures and worksheets on personal space. The materials are available at http://www.uen.org/Lessonplan/preview.cgi?LPid=28909.
- The card game "Slap What!" provides an interactive way for middle school students to learn about the importance of nonverbal communication and how to develop positive interpersonal relationships. See http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00649.x/full (Haithcox-Dennis, 2011) for full information, including the game directions and grading rubric.
- Nonverbal communication is an important aspect of **conflict management**. Recognizing this fact, researchers at the Conflict Resolution Education Connection (n.d.) developed a complete unit for training adolescents to recognize and master many aspects of nonverbal communication. The unit is available at http://www.creducation.org/resources/nonverbal_communication/index.html.
- The University of Ulster (Dixon & O'Hara, 2008) prepared a resource on communications skills as part of the Making Practice Based Learning Work project. The manual includes a general introduction to effective communication and basic skills, as well as practical exercises. It is available from http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415537902/data/learning/11_Communication%20Skills.pdf.
- Some simple strategies for removing barriers to effective communication are available from http://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships/effective-communication.htm (Robinson, Segal, & Smith, 2016). They include becoming an engaged listener by focusing fully on the speaker, nodding to show interest in what is being said, and paraphrasing back to the speaker what was heard.
- Some resources that teachers can use to teach high school students effective business writing are listed below:
  - https://www.moneyinstructor.com/businesswriting.asp
  - http://www.collegexpress.com/articles-and-advice/majors-and-academics/articles/college-academics/cultivating-exceptional-writing-skills-success-college-and-beyond/
  - https://www.teachervision.com/letters-and-journals/resource/26369.html
  - https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/How-to-Write-Email-Email-Netiquette-Effective-Real-World-Business-Writing-CCSS-1057069

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