

Techniques to Improve Communication Skills of Engineering Students

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Abstract: *Effective Communication in English is the need of an hour in personal and professional life for Engineering students. Since all Multi National Companies are result oriented always seek for the employees who can communicate convincingly and effectively. A lack of effective communication skills serves only to be disqualified in the placement interviews. Hence, after a brief look at the outline of the students of engineering, I felt a need for the study of the appropriate techniques to improve communication skills of Engineering graduates for better placements. Therefore, the present paper attempts to suggest a few techniques to be adopted by the Engineering under graduates to equip with the essential skills. In this paper we will look at the various ways, methods and techniques which will help to improve communication skills in general and the English language in particular.*

Key words: *Communication Skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Effective Communication*

I. Introduction

The English word ‘communication’ is derived from the Latin term ‘communes’ or ‘communicare’ which means ‘to make common, to transmit or to import’. All the three meanings are useful but we have to concentrate on the ideas of making common, which implies sharing and interaction. When a message is sent out it becomes communication only when it is understood, acknowledged, reacted to or replied to by the receiver. If two speakers (communicators) having different languages communicate, this act can be called as communication. But if they shake hands (or smile), this act can also be called as communication. Because shaking hands is a universally recognized gesture of friendship. It shows that communication can be done with the help of verbal or non-verbal codes. Louis Allen definitions communication:

“Communication is the sum of all things which a person does when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another. It involves a systematic and continues process of telling, listening and understanding.”

Students of Engineering colleges are required effective communication in English to maintain relevance with the global environment. India is a multi-lingual country needs a common language for communication. English is considered as an international language is widely acknowledged and serves as an effective medium of instruction in the Indian. Thus, effective communication in English plays a cardinal role in our life and it has already been recognized by academia and industry alike. Effective communication is important for company executives, business managers, team members, and even job applications for them to know how to utilize communication tools and techniques to serve their purpose and reach their goals. Effective communication is an essential component for organization success, whether it is in the interpersonal intra group organization or external levels.

II. Listening Skills

Listening is the process of receiving, interpreting, and reacting to a message received from the speaker. People need to practice and acquire skills to be good listeners, because while we speak at the rate of 100 to 175 words per minute (WPM), we can listen intelligently at up to 300 words per minute. Since only a part of our mind is paying attention, it is easy to go into mind drift - thinking about other things while listening to someone.

Listening is an important aid to communication. It is one of the major skills for mastering a language other than the three being speaking, reading and writing. Listening with understanding is not merely hearing with ears but really in the mind. But hearing is an activity in which one doesn't have to put efforts to hear, ears will do their job of hearing sounds unless they are closed or defective; it is natural and effortless activity. On the other hand, listening involves efforts and attention. It is a conscious effort by the receiver to perceive and understand, given meaning to those sounds and words.

III. Speaking Skills

In today's world, the art of speaking has assumed greater importance. This is because having this ability brings greater opportunities as most companies rank speaking skills and other related communication skills as one of the most desired qualities in their prospective employees. Speaking skills are required to present

oneself effectively in placement group discussions and personal interviews. To master the skill of speaking effectively there are a few basic things that can be kept in mind to ensure that the verbal messages are understood, appreciated and remembered. These are: understanding the purpose of the presentation, keeping the message clear and concise, being thoroughly prepared and finally being vivid when delivering the message.

The delivery is the final stage in this process. Your delivery of your speech or presentation will make or break it, no matter how well you have prepared. Some useful tips for keeping your presentation vivid include:

- Use examples to bring your points to life
- Keep your body language calm, relaxed and natural.
- Don't talk too fast. Pauses are effective.
- Use a variety of tones of voice
- Use visual aids.

IV. Writing Skills

People all around the world are intimidated by writing but there are times when writing is the best way to communicate, and often the only way to get your message across. Mostly, this fear arises from the fact that once something is in written form, it cannot be taken back. Communicating this way is more concrete than verbal communications, with less room for error and even less room for mistakes. This presents written communicators with additional challenges, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, even writing style and actual wording. Furthermore, writing is the major means of communication within an organization; some estimate that up to 30% of work-time is engaged in written communication. Thus it is absolutely vital for any professional today, as their success and career growth depends on it.

Today the emphasis on all kinds of organizational writing is on simplicity and understandability.

Although the writing skills required will vary a little from one document to another, there are certain common pointers which apply to all kinds of business correspondences. These could be listed as:

- 1) The writer to be successful needs to have a very clear about the aim of his/her writing.
- 2) Considering the audience or for 'whom' the document is being written
- 3) Planning the structure or 'how' of the document
- 4) Drafting, editing and revising the document:
- 5) Punctuation is used to clarify meaning and to highlight structure. It can also remove ambiguity and leads to elegance and easy interpretation.
- 6) The next aspect of writing that should be taken care of is spelling. Incorrect spelling distracts the reader and makes the author lose credibility. Computer spell-checking program provide great assistance, especially when supported by a good dictionary.

V. Reading Skills

According to Edward Fry, there are three reading speeds: study reading speed, average reading speed and skimming speed. Study reading speed is useful for reading material which needs total concentration and retention of its meaning. A good reader in this speed normally reads 200-300 words per minute and comprehends 80 % to 90 % of what he has read. Exam preparation needs study reading speed so that the students can comprehend what has been read. The average reading speed comprises of 250-500 words per minute. Such speed is used for everyday reading of newspapers, magazines, novels, etc. Skimming is the fastest reading speed. A good reader while skimming through material reads 800 words per minute. Often some parts of the reading material are left unread.

There are various techniques that can be used to improve one's reading speed. One of them is called the SQ3R Technique. Here SQ3R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. It is a proven technique to sharpen textbook reading skills. The SQ3R technique is primarily used to train the mind. There is yet another technique which helps train the eyes to increase the speed of reading.

This training of the eyes involves developing three core skills:

- 1) Increasing the eye -span which means increasing the number of words that one can grasp in a glance.
- 2) Reducing the number of times that the eyes need to re-read or go back to the written text.
- 3) Developing a rhythmical and regular movement of the eyes while reading.

VI. Modern Communication Media:

The beginning of human communication through artificial channels goes back to ancient cave paintings, drawn maps, and writing. In the last century, a revolution in telecommunications has greatly altered communication by providing new media for long distance communication. In this section we will look at two of the latest techniques of modern communication: the internet and its proper use popularly called netiquette and video conferencing.

A. Netiquette:

Netiquette is the term used to describe the code of conduct between those communicating on the internet and is concerned with internet courtesy and protocols. It includes often unspoken rules about what is considered appropriate and polite and respectful behaviour online.

The following are some of the E-mail tips or pointers which will help you to write professional and effective emails:

- If your Internet access is through a corporate account, check with your organization about their policy regarding e-mail and also whether your email is screened.
- Be clear about the content of the mail and then ensure that what you write is relevant, clear and concise.
- Use the principle of courtesy.
- Be concise. Try to keep your sentences to a maximum of 15-20 words. Email is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing than letters.
- When giving a reply to a mail, ensure that it is complete.
- The mail should use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Try and use active voice of a verb wherever possible. For instance, 'We will send your order today', sounds better than 'Your order will be sent today'.
- Give quick responses. An email should preferably be replied to within 24 hours of receiving it.
- Include a subject line in your message because it is the only clue that the receiver has about the contents when searching for messages.
- Use a brief signature on your mail.
- Use proper structure and lay out.
- Where ever required add disclaimers to your internal and external mails as this can protect you and your company from liability.
- Abbreviations and emoticons should be used with care and sparingly. In business emails, try not to use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud).
- Take care while formatting your message.
- Keep your language gender neutral. In this day and age, avoid using sexist language such as 'he or him'. Instead use him/her or the neutral gender.
- Use cc field sparingly. Try not to use the cc field unless the recipient in the cc field knows why they are receiving a copy of the message. Read the final mail before you send it .This will help you proof read the matter and weed out errors from the mail.
- If you are replying to a message, quote only the relevant parts.
- Do not use cute and suggestive email addresses for formal business communication.
- Don't read other people's private email.

B. video conferencing

Video-conferencing is a meeting or conference between two or more participants residing at the different locations, by using computer network to transmit and exchange audio, video and audio-visual data". Video-conferencing started becoming more useful in the mid 1960's. The process of globalization generated the need to interact with decision market. To meet them at their different geographical locations or call them at the host location was not only time – consuming but highly expensive. Video – conferencing solved all these problems and we can have effective official meetings and online conferencing with the participants.

VII. Conclusion

Developing the communication skills of the engineering students is very important in this present era of science and technology. These students can be well trained in Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing by the subject teachers of Communication Skills or Soft Skill Trainers from varies industries so they might perform well during placement and later in professional and personal life. Engineering students need to be motivated to be competent and confident to be effective communicator at various situations in life.

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