Improving Your Communication Skills: Top Ten Checklist

CSU East Bay, Academic Advising and Career Education, Connecting Curriculum and Career

Communication (written, verbal, public speaking, listening and interpersonal) skills are always among the most desired skills employers seek when hiring college graduates. Over the past few years, CSU East Bay employers who recruit through the Academic Advising and Career Education (AACE) have expressed concern that some of our students demonstrate poor written English skills on resumes and in e-mails and inferior verbal communication skills during interviews. As a result, they are not offered positions within these organizations.

In response to employer concerns, the AACE staff developed this checklist of suggestions to help students and alumni improve their written and verbal communication skills. You have been given this checklist because a AACE staff member believes you can benefit from taking advantage of these suggestions.

1. **Academic Advising and Career Education (AACE)**

   AACE has two services that can be helpful in this area. Have a career counselor review your resume before sending it to employers or submitting it to be considered through the On-Campus Interviewing program. Also, you can sign up for one or more practice interviews to further develop and hone your English speaking skills prior to an interview. Call 510.885.3621 to learn more or to make an appointment with a career counselor.

2. **Student Center for Academic Achievement (SCAA)**

   CSU East Bay’s Student Center for Academic Achievement (SCAA) can help you develop strategies to improve your English writing skills. Some of their services include tutoring, an online writing lab, proofreading workshops and English Language Learner (ELL) workshops. For more information, stop by their office in LI (Library) 2550 on the Hayward Hills campus, call 510.882.3674 or visit their website at http://www.scsa.csueastbay.edu/~lrcweb/.

3. **Toastmasters**

   Toastmasters International is an organization dedicated to helping people improve their communication skills. Group members practice basic professional skills such as presenting a prepared speech, making impromptu remarks or facilitating a meeting. There is no instructor; instead, each speech and meeting is critiqued by a member in a positive manner, focusing on what was done right and what could be improved. From their website (www.toastmasters.org) you can enter your zip code and select a group that meets at a time that is convenient for you.

4. **Newspapers / Professional Journals / Magazines**

   Newspapers tend to be written knowing that readers want to obtain information quickly. Therefore, newspapers are frequently written to be easily understood by someone who is reading and comprehending at middle school grade levels. Consider following headline stories for a few weeks to see how facts are presented or interpreted by several different news sources and reporters. You may not need to actually subscribe to a daily newspaper since many newspapers also place their articles on-line. Professional journals typically hold to a more precise form of writing. Routinely read these publications to help you understand the basic foundations of English writing and to gain familiarity with the way language is used in your chosen profession. While reading popular “over-the-counter” magazines is also helpful, the writing style in these publications can sometimes be more informal.

5. **Public TV and Radio**

   While popular music radio stations can be helpful in understanding culture and slang, independent radio stations such as NPR and television stations such as PBS tend to be somewhat more formal in their approach to verbal communication. Consider listening to or watching news programs, call-in talk shows and educational programs. Even shows designed to be more comical in nature can help you better understand English and U.S. culture as you are exposed to humor and jokes. Many of these programs are available as audio or video podcasts and may be downloaded to your computer or personal mp3 player. Turn on the built-in Television Caption Decoder on your television (select English) so you can also see the words being spoken.

6. **Private Tutor**

   One of the best ways to improve your communication skills is to hire a private English tutor who has experience working with English language learners. A qualified tutor can help you identify which communication areas need improvement (listening, speaking, writing or reading). You can schedule routine meetings to discuss a variety of topics including current events, pop culture, and issues related to your career. To hire a tutor, contact local college/university English as a Second Language/English Language Learners (ESL/ELL) programs to find out what resources might be available.

7. **Writing Course**

   While individuals may be fairly competent at spoken English, written English poses an entirely different set of challenges. If you currently have concerns about your ability to write effectively and correctly in English, considering taking a remedial or basic English writing course at a college or university.

8. **Pen Pal**

   In the past, Pen Pals routinely exchanged handwritten letters via the postal service. However, with the advent of technology, you may want to consider developing an ePen Pal – someone who agrees to share e-mail communication with you on a routine basis. You can write about a variety of topics giving your ePen Pal permission to provide you with insights and suggestions for improving your English writing. You may even want to consider online social networks like www.livemocha.com which is referred to as, “. . . the social way to learn a language.”

9. **Roommate**

   In some cases, students may choose to live with roommates who are proficient in their native or primary language. Living with and routinely interacting with a native English-speaking roommate can help you improve your English speaking ability more quickly. Consider asking CSU East Bay’s Office of Student Housing and Residence Life to match you with a native English speaker when they make room assignments.

10. **ESL/ELL at Adult Schools and Community Colleges**

   Many California communities have adult schools with ESL/ELL (English as a Second Language/English Language Learners) programs designed to provide meaningful educational opportunities. To generate a list of adult schools near you, visit this website (http://www.otan.us/caeap/index.cfm) and enter your zip code. Many community colleges also offer ESL/ELL programs as well. The website below lists California Community Colleges. Contact your local community college and ask if they have an ESL/ELL program. (http://www.cccco.edu/CommunityColleges/tabid/830/Default.aspx)

   This document is available in alternative formats (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc.). Please contact the AACE to submit your request.