



Communication skills for career development

Whatever the aspirations of your students, it is likely that at some point after leaving school they will be required to attend an interview. Even if it is an informal matter, good communication skills are key not only to getting hired, but also to being successful in the workplace. The ability to communicate well is a life skill which students can use to achieve their goals both in the work place, and in their private lives.

The following teaching resource material can be used across two 45 minute - 1 hour sessions, or can be adapted to fit the time and availability. Ideally every student will get the chance to “have a go” during the group mock interview section in session two.

Session one: Making a good first impression

Learning Objective:

To introduce basic communication skills:

- ✓ *Body Language*
- ✓ *Facial expression*
- ✓ *Eye Contact*
- ✓ *Voice pitch, volume and modulation*
- ✓ *Listening skills (dealt with further in session two)*

1. Welcome and Introduction

- Importance of communication skills in work place and private life.
- More likely to achieve your goals if you can present yourself well.
- Exam qualifications are important, but success depends just as much - if not more - on communication skills.
-

Activity One: Group discussion – try to involve the students, perhaps getting them to write responses on a flip chart at the front of the room. Ideally you will end up with a list of the key elements (see below) which go towards developing good communication skills.

1. Can you think of anyone famous or someone you know in person that you would say is a “good communicator”?
2. What is it that marks them out and makes people listen to them?
3. What do you notice about the following:

Body Language:

Are they confident and open with gestures, or hunched over/ shy? Note their posture!

Facial expression and eye contact:

What do you notice about facial expression? Do they smile? Do they make eye contact from time to time? Or do they look away when talking to you.

Voice:

The pitch and volume of their voice? Do they speak audibly and clearly? Are they expressive or do they speak in a monotone? Do they speak fast or in a measured and controlled way? Do they pause between ideas? Think about the way they talk – not only the words they say.

Listening skills:

Do they listen to other people attentively or do they do all the talking?

2. Move the lesson on to the importance of first impressions.

First impressions count!

1. Body language says far more about you than you might realise.
2. The impression you make isn't necessarily dependant on WHAT you say.
3. We call this NON VERBAL CUES.

E.g. if you say “I'm really pleased to meet you”, but you don't smile, speak in a monotone and shake your head whilst talking, your words will be saying the opposite of what your body is saying! Most people believe the NON VERBAL CUES over the words being said.

FACT:

- Studies show when you meet people for the 1st time you only have a 30 second window, before they form an opinion about you.
- It can take a further 20 minutes to change their minds – so if you're in an interview situation you could have blown your chances before you have even started.
- Actual words spoken count for only 7% of the impression you make
- Tone of voice counts for 38%
- Body language and facial expression counts for 55%

Albert Mehrabian Survey 1967

**It takes only 30 seconds to make an impression on someone
and 20 minutes to change their initial view!**

3. Summary so far...

The most important elements for creating a good impression at an interview or first meeting

1. **BODY LANGUAGE:** The way you walk into a room (head up, shoulders back, good posture, confident stride)
2. **FACIAL EXPRESSION:** Make eye contact (about 60% of the time – staring at the person without looking away at all will unnerve them!) and don't forget to smile.
3. **VOICE:** Introduce yourself clearly and audibly. Note that if you smile your voice will have natural friendly warmth.

Activity Two: The Meeting Exercise and introducing the HANDSHAKE

In some formal situations you might need to shake hands. It's important to get this right as it can give a negative impression if you don't get it right.

Get everyone in the room to stand up and shake hands with their neighbour, smile and make eye contact and introduce themselves, e.g. "Hi, I'm Tom, good to meet you!"

Alternatively pick three volunteers to act as the "panel". The panel should stand in a row at the front of the classroom – invite members of the group to come up individually and "meet" the panel.

Ask the group: How was the body language? How was the handshake – firm grip, too hard or weak? Did they make good eye contact? What was the tone of voice like?

4. Move the lesson on to how to explore the issue of confidence in relation to communication skills.

How to project a more confident YOU – the 1st rule for communicating well!

1. It's natural to be nervous in new situations and people often show this in their body language etc. Sometimes they come across as unfriendly or cold when really they're just feeling a bit awkward.
2. There is a lot you can do to appear more confident.
3. And if you appear more confident, you can trick your brain into feeling more confident!

Activity Three: The Confidence Circle

This is a trick used by professional TV presenters, actors and public speakers. It helps them cope with confidence issues, such as stage fright, but it can be adapted for everyday situations, for e.g. when going to a job interview, meeting new people at college, having to speak out in public or even one-to-one situations. It takes a bit of practice to get used to, but is an invaluable tool when you need a quick confidence boost!

If possible get everyone to move into a space – if not, demonstrate the idea with a volunteer at the front of the room.

1. *Think of a time when you felt really confident and on top of the world. Think about your body language and facial expression. What was it like? How did they sound? Alternatively imagine someone you know or someone in public life who always seems confident and relaxed.*
2. *Now picture a circle on the floor in front of you – large enough for you to step into.*
3. *Step into the circle and take on the persona of you at your most confident or the person you have imagined who is always confident.*
4. *Concentrate on your body language etc. and note how it feels.*

You can use this trick whenever you feel in need of extra confidence. Just step into the circle and it will go with you until you no longer need it there. If you adopt confident body language and tone of voice people will react more positively to you and you will start genuinely to feel more confident.

Activity Four: Remembering to breathe!

How you breathe can make a huge difference to your communication skills. When people are anxious they tend to breathe in a rapid and shallow way or sometimes they forget to breathe altogether. This can affect body language making the person hunch over and draw their shoulders up and can even make them feel a bit light headed. It can also make the voice high pitched, thin and breathy sounding.

If someone is breathing too fast they often find it difficult to concentrate and the mind jumps from thought to thought like a monkey jumps from tree to tree. You can deal with this by learning some simple breathing exercises.

- 1. Stand up straight, consciously lowering your shoulders and lifting up from the breast bone, with your hands relaxed by your sides.*
- 2. Now breathe slowly and deeply from the diaphragm.*
- 3. Try not to force the breath but let it in and out slowly and naturally*
- 4. Pause for a few seconds*
- 5. Repeat*

If you take a few breaths like this before going into a situation where you need to communicate well, you will discover that your voice is strong and calm and your mind will be more focused.

5. Assessment to conclude the lesson

- What are the 5 most important skills for good communication?
- Can you demonstrate each of them? (choose a class member for each)
- Over the next few days try to put into practice some of the techniques you have learnt today, including the tips we've looked at for being more confident.

Looking ahead to the next session.

- In the next session we will look further at developing communication skills: how to make conversation, build rapport and learn to listen

6. Extension Work

Some students may want to go on to try a one-to-one mock interview. For resource material see www.bussats.com/assets/interviewskills.pdf

Session Two: Developing communication skills for interviews and workplace

Learning Objective:

To build on basic communication learnt in session one and develop interview skills

- ✓ *Listening skills*
- ✓ *Building rapport*
- ✓ *How to ask and answer questions*
- ✓ *How to give a good account of yourself at interview*

1. Welcome and Introduction

- **Re-cap on first session:** We looked at some of the main communication skills to help make a good first impression. Can you remember what they were?
Body Language
Facial expression
Eye Contact
Voice pitch, volume and modulation

We also looked at ways to develop confidence to improve how you communicate.

- **In this session:** We will learn what to do once you've made your "first impression". Develop listening skills, build rapport and deal with questions in an interview setting.
- In the second half of the lesson we will put some of these skills into practice.

2. Move the lesson on to exploring interpersonal skills: effective listening

Learning to listen

1. Communication isn't a one-way process. All good communicators listen carefully and respond appropriately to what the other person is saying.
2. Learning to listen is beneficial in a variety of ways. For e.g. in the workplace it can help you resolve arguments, lead to fewer mistakes and greater productivity.
3. Do not assume you know what someone is saying – sometimes if you listen carefully you will hear quite a different message to the one you were expecting.

How to listen to another person

- You may have to start them off by asking an “Open question” (one that cannot be answered with “yes” or “no”).
- Encourage them with body language: try leaning towards them slightly, making eye contact and nodding/shaking head in response.
- Encourage them with verbal cues, such as “yes” or “I see” or “go on...”
- Ask occasional questions if you are unclear as to what is being said, but try not to interrupt.
- Concentrate on what’s being said, on body language and voice pitch etc.

If someone says “I’m really looking forward to college next year” but the tone is subdued, they look down at the floor, appear hunched and anxious, the body language will be giving you a different message from the words.

Learn to decode the non-verbal cues.

Activity one: Listening exercise

Put two chairs facing each other at the front of the room. Pick a couple of student volunteers. One is the designated “listener” and the other is the “speaker”

1. *The “listener” will ask a question: eg. Where do you see yourself in 5 years’ time? What are your goals and ambitions? What could hold you back? What are your greatest strengths?*
2. *The “speaker” will reply.*
3. *The “listener” will encourage them by using correct body language and verbal cues as outlined above.*
4. *At the end of the conversation, the “listener” will attempt to summarise what the “speaker” has told them.*
5. *The “speaker” will be asked to give feedback. Did they feel they were being heard? How did the “listener” come across? Was the summary accurate?*

4. Move the lesson on to exploring “how to build a rapport”

Creating a good rapport

1. Being able to listen and respond is a great way to “build rapport” both in your professional and social life.
2. Building rapport means you have a state of understanding with another person which makes communication easier. In other words rapport is getting on well with another person, or group of people and finding common ground.

Activity Two: Rapport building exercise

One way of building rapport is to find something in common with the person you are talking to. Getting on well with your colleagues or employer will often involve some sort of social interaction but it can be difficult to know where to start.

1. *Split the group into pairs – trying not to put them with close friends. Ask them to make small talk using “safe” topics.*
2. *They should try to talk about shared experiences, perhaps injecting an element of humour – but avoid making direct jokes about other people.*
3. *Rapport is about finding similarities with other people.*

Feedback: ask the students how they established rapport. Did they find anything in common? How difficult was it to get the conversation started?

5. Move the lesson on to interview technique: Asking /answering questions

1. Discuss the difference between open and closed questions. If you want someone to reply using more than one word, you should ask a question beginning with “how, what, which”.
2. Answering questions in an interview might require a bit more thinking time than usual. It is fine to pause or ask for a second or two to formulate your answer. One way to play for time is to repeat the question back before replying.
3. Be honest! If you don’t know the answer it is fine to admit it. Interviewers usually see through waffle. One technique is to deflect the question by answering something else for e.g. “I’m sorry I don’t know much about the cold war, but I can tell you about the build up to World War 2 as historically I suspect the issues were related”.

Activity Three: Interview session

This highly effective group exercise is designed to help students put into practice all the skills they have learnt so far: body language, facial expression, eye contact, voice pitch, volume and modulation, listening skills, rapport building, asking and answering questions. Although the students are likely to know each other quite well, it is interesting how intimidating it can feel to be in the “hot seat” (both for the interviewers as well as the interviewees)

- 1. Place three chairs at the front in a row with one chair facing them (sideways on so that the class can see the facial reaction of all participants)*
- 2. Select 3 students to be the interview “panel” and a volunteer interviewee.*
- 3. The interviewee should temporarily leave the room until you call them in.*
- 4. Give the panel a list of questions (see below for suggestions – but make sure they are appropriate for the “candidate”) and ask them to pick one each.*
- 5. Brief the panel to stand up when the interviewee returns. The panel should introduce themselves to him. They should shake hands.*
- 6. Watch the way the interviewee walks, how he greets the panel (smiling, eye contact etc) and how he responds (voice pitch and volume).*
- 7. Once seated the panel should start asking the questions.*
- 8. Note the interviewee’s body language, eye contact etc.*
- 9. At the end of the interview the panel should thank the interviewee.*

Feedback time. How was it for the interviewee? What did the interviewers notice? What did the audience think? Try to let as many students as possible have a go.

NB: This session can be stretched to the time you have available and could be used as a stand-alone session depending on numbers. See suggested questions below.

7. Assessment to conclude the lesson

- What new skills did we learn today?
- Can you think of a situation where you might use listening or rapport building skills?
- Over the next few days try to put into practice some of the techniques you have learnt.

Looking ahead:

Some students may want further mock interview practise. For resource materials see www.bussats.com/assets/interviewskills.pdf

Suggested questions for interview panel:

- What can you tell us about yourself?
- Why are you applying to university/work (as relevant)
- What motivates you?
- What makes a good team player?
- Can you think of a time when you had to solve a problem – what did you do?
- What is the most challenging thing you have ever done?
- What do you like most about school and why?
- What are your long term goals?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- What makes you angry?
- Where was the last place you travelled to? What impressions did you come away with?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Describe a book you have read/ film you have watched recently?
- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What would you do if you discovered your friend cheating in an exam?
- If you could be Prime Minister for the day, what would you do?
- Which of our laws would you change and why?
- Should people go to prison if they're caught drink driving?
- What do you think are the worst problems facing the world?
- Tell me what you know about global warming?
- What is the most creative thing you've ever done?