3. Essential Skills in Oral Communication

Essential Speaking and Listening Skills for College Graduates
Published in SPECTRA, March 1995 by the National Communication Association

This is a summary of the findings of a Department of Education-funded study which investigated the communication skills that faculty, employers, and policymakers believe are critical for college graduates to attain.1

Basic Communication Skills – General
Accept responsibility for their own communication behavior
Be aware of language indicating bias on gender, age, ethnic, or sexual/affectional orientation

Message Development and Organization
Accomplish their communication goals
Select the most appropriate and effective medium for communicating
Choose topic and message about which they are comfortable and knowledgeable to speak
Identify their communication goals
Develop and present an interesting and attention-getting introduction in a speech

Context and Situation Analysis
Adapt to changes in audience characteristics
Choose and broaden a topic according to the needs of the audience
Choose and narrow a topic as appropriate according to the occasion
Prepare a message and adapt or make changes to the physical setting
Understand their roles in a variety of settings
Prepare a message and adapt communication style to the context and situation in which the oral communication occurs

Message Support
Use motivational appeals that build on values, expectations, and needs of the audience
Research effectively information required for message preparation
Support arguments with relevant and adequate evidence
Provide appropriate supporting material based on audience, occasion, and purpose
Support message by incorporating statements of others into their own statements

Message Type
Develop messages that influence attitudes, beliefs, and actions
Deliver an impromptu or extemporaneous talk about topics with which the speaker is familiar
Describe or express feelings to others when appropriate
Compose and deliver an informative speech

Interpersonal and Group Communication – Situation Analysis
Recognize when another does not understand their message
Identify and adapt to the perceived needs and desires of other communicators
Make effective decisions during communication situations
Understand the influence of culture on language

Relationship Management
Understand and value differences in communication styles
Allow others to express different views
Describe or express feelings to others when appropriate
Effectively assert themselves
Manage conflict
Convey empathy when communicating
Build and maintain constructive relationships with superiors, peers, and subordinates
Cope with negative feedback
Motivate others to disclose information when appropriate

Information Exchange
Respond appropriately to feedback
Ask questions when they do not understand another’s message
Paraphrase or restate what speaker has said to confirm his/her meaning

Conversation Management
Demonstrate attentiveness through nonverbal and verbal behaviors
Convey enthusiasm for topic through delivery
Have confidence to approach and engage in conversation with new people in new settings
Be open-minded about another’s point of view

Communication Codes
Use appropriate nonverbal behaviors for the message and the audience
Identify and respond appropriately to discrepancies between the speaker’s verbal and nonverbal message
Recognize nonverbal behaviors and respond appropriately

Oral Message Evaluation
Listen empathetically to help speakers clarify their thoughts and feelings
Listen carefully to speakers with strongly accented or impaired speech
Analyze assumptions, evidence, and conclusions of an argument
Detect and evaluate bias and prejudice
Evaluate speeches and messages on the basis of the credibility of both the speaker and his/her message
Recognize speaker’s purpose or goal