



# Communication: Skill Development Framework

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# Introduction

Considerable evidence supports the need for learners to develop key personal and social capabilities, also known as ‘soft skills’, ‘future skills’ or ‘21st century skills’. Research shows that employers value these skills, and this will continue to be true, as these skills are the most resistant to automation as technology advances. Incorporating development of these skills into coursework and classroom instruction is often a challenge for instructors due to a lack of support on how to teach and assess these skills. There is also a perception that these skills must be taught separately when in fact they can be integrated into the existing curriculum. To support our content developers and the instructors who use our products, we have built Skill Development Frameworks around several key personal and social capabilities (including **Communication**).

The Communication: Skill Development Framework includes a research-based definition of the skill along with relevant sub-skills which are then broken down into detailed sets of ordered indicators that describe how Communication skills develop from basic to complex levels. We further validated the framework by running panels with external experts in the skill and Pearson content development experts.

In many cases, the indicators in the framework are flexible, in that they can be learned at a range of different ages with supports, scaffolds, and opportunities to learn and experience these skills. At the same time, there are normative developmental trajectories in the social, cognitive, and executive functioning capacities of children (particularly younger children). It is important to keep these developmental milestones in mind when determining which set of indicators is most appropriate for a given learner segment. The indicators can be adapted to support a variety of instructional activities. For example, they can serve as “look-fors” in a behavioral checklist or be used to populate a grading or observation rubric. Additionally, many indicators represent strategies that can be directly taught to learners.

The complexity of learners’ language skills (including vocabulary, syntax, etc.) will need to progressively develop in order to support the demands of more advanced acts of communication. For example, compared to a primary school student, a secondary school student will need more developed vocabulary skills in order to read and acquire the content knowledge necessary to include something in a piece of communication. They will also need more developed syntactic skills to actually produce the piece of communication. Instructional materials should ensure the prerequisite language skills are in place by teaching them through learning activities or including assessments (e.g., probes). These additional elements are important for enabling students to learn and demonstrate a certain level of competency, particularly at more advanced levels of the framework.

The context in which communication occurs also becomes more complex and less predictable, scripted, routine, or familiar as learners develop. At the highest levels, learners may create new kinds of communication. This change will have an impact on the specific ways that learners demonstrate communication skills.





## Glossary and Notes

### Communication

For the purposes of this framework, we define communication as a social process through which information is exchanged, using written or spoken language, in order to convey meaning and achieve desired outcomes. Communication supports different forms of social engagement, academic achievement, and occupational success.

### Pre-Skill Foundations

Represent the developmental considerations and milestones that must be met in order to practice the skill. These are particularly important for young learners (ages 3–7), or learners with learning disabilities or developmental delays.

### Mastery

Represents performance that would be typical of a highly effective adult, typically in a workplace setting.

### Message

For the purposes of this framework, we use this term to mean any piece of communication, written or spoken.

# Understanding the Context

Analyzing the context of a piece of communication, including goals/purposes and audience. Understanding how context can influence the planning and construction of pieces of communication.

Pre-Skill  
Foundations



Emerging



Basic



Intermediate



Advanced



Mastery

## Understand the Goals/Purposes of Communication

The learner understands there is a purpose, usually functional or social, to any piece of communication, while being unable to identify or explain the purpose of any specific piece of communication.

Identifies some general reasons one might have for communicating (e.g., ask for help; get something you need; make someone happy).

Identifies the primary purpose of a few basic types of communication (e.g., expository — to explain, persuasive — to convince).

Identifies the primary purpose of an intended piece of communication.  
Analyzes and identifies the strategies one might use to achieve the primary purpose of a piece of communication.  
With some support, identifies and discusses possible secondary purposes of a specific piece of communication (e.g., maintaining your relationship with someone in addition to trying to persuade them).

Analyzes how secondary purposes might impact the strategies one uses to achieve the primary purpose of a piece of communication.  
Analyzes how the different purposes of a piece of communication could impact how you select and organize the content in the message.  
With minimal support, analyzes how decisions about setting (e.g., space/location, acoustics, time of day) can impact how effectively a piece of communication achieves its purpose.  
With minimal support, analyzes and identifies strategies for revising a piece of communication to adapt to different purposes of the author.

Independently evaluates communication products for adequately achieving their purposes and identifies ways they could be revised.  
Analyzes and discusses how to successfully balance several different and possibly contradictory purposes when composing a piece of communication (e.g., how to persuasively argue one's point without harming the relationship).  
Demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the purposes of a communicative situation, including the interplay between one's own purpose and the purpose of others.

## Understand the Audience

The learner has a rudimentary knowledge of what an audience is

Recognizes that different audiences might have different expectations for communication (i.e., you talk differently with your teachers than with your parents).

Recognizes the basic needs of an audience, such as the information the audience requires in a given situation.

Identifies how characteristics of the audience might influence their response to an existing piece of communication (e.g., their relationship with the producer or past experience with the information being communicated).  
With some support, identifies strategies one might use to address the needs of a given audience.

Anticipates the knowledge, values, potential biases, and emotional reactions of the audience when planning a piece of communication.  
Analyzes how the needs of different audiences could impact how you select and organize the content in a message.  
Analyzes and identifies strategies for revising a piece of communication to adapt to different audience needs.  
With minimal support, analyzes and identifies strategies for revising a piece of communication to adapt to different purposes of the author.

Holistically plans an entire piece of communication using the knowledge, values, potential biases, and emotional reactions of the audience to help achieve the desired outcomes.  
Independently evaluates communication products for adequately meeting the needs of the audience and identifies ways the communication product could be revised.

# Composing Messages

Producing pieces of communication with accurate and compelling content that adhere to relevant conventions and have ideas which flow clearly and cohesively. When relevant, incorporating appropriate nonverbal signals to enhance a piece of communication. While producing pieces of communication, consistently monitoring effectiveness and appropriateness, and revising accordingly.

**Pre-Skill Foundations**

● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
**Emerging**

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
**Basic**

● ● ● ○ ○ ○  
**Intermediate**

● ● ● ● ○ ○  
**Advanced**

● ● ● ● ● ○  
**Mastery**

## Select Appropriate Content

The learner should have prerequisite content knowledge, and/or the reading and listening skills necessary to acquire additional content knowledge.

With prompting and support, distinguishes some of the differences in the information presented in two different types of communication produced by someone else.

With some support, incorporates key content requested for a specific piece of communication (e.g., shares a personal experience from the summer when asked to talk about something they did during the summer holiday).

With some support, incorporates content that is appropriate for distinct types of communication (e.g., facts and data for an expository text, dialogue for a narrative text).

With some support, incorporates content that is appropriate for distinct channels of communication (e.g., knowing that certain information is best shared in a face-to-face conversation rather than via email or text message).

Includes relevant and appropriate content that aligns to the requirements of a given type of communication.

Includes relevant and appropriate content for the selected channel of communication.

With some support, can change content according to different types or channels of communication.

Includes content that is well suited to meet the conventions of different types of communication (e.g., including the most relevant pieces of evidence in a persuasive argument or making consistent points in an expository essay).

Selects the most appropriate channel of communication for conveying specific content (e.g., discussing multifaceted topics or personal matters through conversation rather than email).

Selects the most appropriate and effective content for a particular piece of communication based on an evaluation of the social and stylistic conventions of various types of communication.

Independently evaluates own communication products to ensure they have appropriate and effective content.

Independently seeks out the content needed to produce appropriate and effective communication.

## Organize the Message

The learner needs sufficient language, reading, and listening skills to recognize the organizational features of a piece of communication.

Identifies different segments of a narrative story (e.g., beginning, middle, and end).

Logically sequences a few basic events to show cause and effect (e.g., correctly sequencing a mixed set of pictures of situations).

The learner needs sufficient language, writing, and speaking skills to produce a short piece of communication featuring a few basic organizational structures.

With support, uses the basic organizational structures appropriate for different types of communication (e.g., intro, body, conclusion for an argument).

With support, uses transitional words or phrases to link ideas.

With support, groups related ideas together.

Organizes a piece of communication (written or oral) into relevant ideas or subsections that flow appropriately.

Uses transition words or phrases or cohesive devices to create cohesion among different sections of a piece of communication.

Identifies organizational features of different genres of communication.

With some support, plans, structures, and sequences information logically within a piece of communication.

Organizes pieces of communication so that ideas appropriately build on one another.

Uses appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to create cohesion and link ideas.

Analyzes how the needs in different genres, communication channels, and/or social situations could impact how one should organize a message.

Organizes varied forms of information into messages that support a wide range of communicative purposes.

Selectively organizes the presentation of information within a message to best suit the specific communicative purpose or audience.

Independently evaluates the organization and flow of communication products, and revises as appropriate.



# Composing Messages

Producing pieces of communication with accurate and compelling content that adhere to relevant conventions and have ideas which flow clearly and cohesively. When relevant, incorporating appropriate nonverbal signals to enhance a piece of communication. While producing pieces of communication, consistently monitoring effectiveness and appropriateness, and revising accordingly.

Pre-Skill  
Foundations



Emerging



Basic



Intermediate



Advanced



Mastery

## Utilize Nonlinguistic or Nonverbal Tools

The learner needs sufficient social skills to recognize that nonverbal or nonlinguistic aspects of communication can support linguistic communication.

With encouragement, speaks at a volume that is appropriate for the setting.

With encouragement, makes appropriate eye contact with others for brief periods of time.

With encouragement, discusses the use of gestures to communicate (e.g., a wave can indicate saying 'hi').

Uses tone of voice and volume that are appropriate for the setting.

Speaks at a rate that supports the spoken message.

Maintains culturally appropriate eye contact with listeners and speakers.

Identifies how gestures can support or detract from effectively communicating.

Takes turns and pauses for others to speak; avoids unproductive interruptions.

Modulates tone of voice and volume to support emphasis during communication.

Modulates pace of speech appropriately to support emphasis during communication.

Uses appropriate gestures to convey key points.

Modulates a variety of nonverbal cues (including but not limited to voice, eye contact, and gestures) to better convey their message.

Monitors the nonlinguistic and nonverbal aspects of communication of themselves and others in light of the context in which the communication occurs (e.g., understanding that some gestures are inappropriate in different social-cultural contexts).

Can flexibly use a variety of nonverbal tools across different social-cultural contexts to improve effectiveness as presenter or speaker.

## Adhere to Conventions

The learner needs sufficient language, reading, and listening skills to recognize the conventions present in different communication activities.

The learner needs to use some of the conventions that match social expectations around different situations that affect the length, tone, content, and pace of communication.

Recognizes that there are different communication activities (e.g., asking permission, seeking assistance or participation or agreement, raising concerns or points of disagreement) with different expectations regarding conventions.

Identifies some of the conventions in a piece of communication produced by someone else that qualifies it as formal or informal.

Explains some of the differences between the conventions for different types of texts or communication activities.

Recognizes that different contexts require different levels of formality, emotional sensitivity, precision, and evidence.

Uses rudimentary mechanics in short, basic written communication.

Varies formality, vocabulary, and syntax appropriate to the context or domain.

Applies differing norms for different social-cultural communicative contexts around formality, emotional sensitivity, precision, and evidence.

Adheres to the changing norms and conventions of particular disciplines, social-cultural contexts, or domains (e.g., academic, business, journalistic, personal, etc.).

Flexibly adapts conventions and level of formality to match the context of particular pieces of communication.

Discerns and observes nuances in the conventions required by different types of communication used in different disciplines and domains.

Independently self-evaluates own use of conventions and revises as appropriate.

Evaluates others' use of conventions for appropriateness for context and purpose.

# Understanding Messages

Thoughtfully interpreting the communications of others (both written and spoken) and responding effectively given the social context.

Pre-Skill  
Foundations

● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Emerging

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Basic

● ● ● ○ ○ ○  
Intermediate

● ● ● ● ○ ○  
Advanced

● ● ● ● ● ●  
Mastery

Engage in Active Listening (primarily for social contexts where a response is expected)

The learner needs sufficient attentional control to focus during an interaction.

The learner must have sufficient language skills (e.g., vocabulary, syntax) to understand the message they are listening to.

Responds appropriately to others after they have finished speaking.

On request, recalls some elements from a speaker's communication.

When listening to others, understands that their gestures reflect some of their intended meaning.

Uses basic techniques to signal lack of understanding.

Infers the meaning of unfamiliar words from the message.

Summarizes some of the main points shared by a speaker.

Acknowledges information shared by others.

Understands how verbal and nonverbal behaviors can be used to convey to a speaker that you are paying attention.

Identifies which elements of a message are particularly important to pay attention to based on one's purpose for listening.

Makes accurate inferences about a speaker's message based on stated information.

Uses verbal and nonverbal cues to indicate attention and/or a willingness to listen.

Conveys empathy and sensitivity towards others' needs during a conversation.

Interprets nonverbal behaviors of other speakers to understand their key points.

Modulates attention to different parts of a message to support one's purpose for listening.

Makes accurate inferences about a speaker's message that go beyond just the stated information.

Asks clarifying questions that show a deep understanding of another's point of view.

Identifies when a speaker's nonverbal signals contradict or emphasize their spoken message.

Monitors their own feelings and responses to the speaker and their message.

Accurately identifies the emotional state of the speaker.

Monitors understanding while listening, probing further when necessary.

While listening, ensures that the speaker feels heard and understood by providing appropriate feedback in the form of verbal messages and nonverbal behaviors.

Chooses appropriate instances to reflect what the speaker is feeling and/or saying back to them.

Pays detailed attention to a spoken message, understanding the words that are spoken along with more nuanced/implied meanings.

Independently and automatically adapts approach to listening (including varying attention) to suit genre, degree of content familiarity, and language complexity of a message.

# Understanding Messages

Thoughtfully interpreting the communications of others (both written and spoken) and responding effectively given the social context.

Pre-Skill  
Foundations



Emerging



Basic



Intermediate



Advanced



Mastery

Engage in Deep Reading (primarily for individual contexts where an immediate response is not expected)

The learner needs sufficient language, experiential, and reading skills to understand a given piece of text.  
The learner knows that an aim of reading (or listening to something be read) is to understand the message.

On demand, recalls key details from a message.  
Identifies when they struggle to understand something that has been read.  
Briefly summarizes the main points of something that has been read.

Infers the meaning of unfamiliar words from the message.  
Draws simple inferences about unstated information in a message (e.g., attitudes and feelings of characters).  
Distinguishes between literal and figurative information in a message.  
Identifies similarities and differences between an original story and a retelling.

Makes predictions based on information in a message.  
Infers the unstated central message, theme, or lesson from a piece of communication.  
When prompted, changes approach to reading to suit degree of content familiarity and language complexity of a message.  
Interprets a given message in light of other texts or messages when the other messages are provided and connections are explicitly pointed out.

Draws logical inferences about unstated information in a message (e.g., motivations of characters, implied meanings in informal and formal texts).  
Analyzes a message in light of its context (e.g., what was the author trying to achieve?)  
Independently uses an understanding about related texts or messages to make interpretations about a given message (e.g., identifying a message as a parody).  
Adapts approach to reading and listening to suit the genre(s), degree of content familiarity, and language complexity of a message.

Justifies interpretations of different types of texts.  
Independently and automatically adapts approach to reading to suit genre(s), degree of content familiarity, and language complexity of a message.  
Uses an understanding about the context of a message to make decisions about how to use or interpret the information (e.g., is this message intended to be factual/reliable enough to include in an academic paper?)