

Ways to integrate communication skills into primary and secondary education

Communication skills are central to success in school, work and life. Developing reading skills early in primary school is predictive of academic success in secondary school, and strong communication skills upon entering higher education are linked to higher grades and graduation rates.¹

Communication takes many forms, from writing a paper or reading a book, to delivering a presentation or engaging in conversation or debate. Communication skills should be taught in all disciplines, not just English Language and Literature and Modern Languages, as learners will need to communicate about many different subject areas as they progress through higher education and the workplace. There are various skills that contribute to effective communication, including understanding the context and purpose of a piece of communication, crafting clear and cohesive messages, and active listening.

Below are some sample learning tasks to give you inspiration for how students can develop and practice communication skills in the classroom.

Learning activity	Skills involved	Options for modification
Learners prepare different versions of a tourist information leaflet for different types of visitors. The different visitors could include: a family with young children, a newly dating couple, a young person on a tight budget. Each leaflet should describe one or two places to visit in their town (they can differ depending on the target audience), explaining why those places are of interest.	This activity is particularly useful at eliciting learners' ability to consider context and purpose. The content and tone of their information leaflets should be persuasive, reflecting the purpose of convincing tourists to visit a particular location. Additionally, the content of each separate leaflet should reflect an understanding of what the different visitors (i.e. the audience) would find interesting.	This activity, as written, is most appropriate for an English Language and Literature or Modern Languages classroom. However, with a few tweaks, the activity could be relevant for a variety of subject areas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For a social studies or history class, the information leaflets could focus on particular countries or periods of time (e.g. the Renaissance). For a science class, learners could write information leaflets about different exhibits in an aquarium or natural history museum.
Learners are given a theme (e.g. Lost & Found; Mistakes) and compose an engaging, real-life story around it that they present orally (without notes) to the class.	This activity elicits learners' ability to organize their message so that their ideas flow clearly and cohesively, and select content that is engaging to their audience. Additionally, because the story is presented orally, learners must use nonverbal aspects of communication, such as gestures and body language, to help tell their stories.	Because students must match their stories to a theme, this activity could be used in a wide range of subject areas by selecting relevant themes. Mathematics classes could have a "Math in real life" theme while science classes could have an "Inventions" theme. This activity can be modified to be appropriate for younger learners by focusing the stories on more basic aspects of communication such as explaining the steps of an action in order, or describing something in enough detail that others can visualize it. Young learners could also retell a familiar story for a new audience.
Learners read an academic research article and then rewrite it for publication in a popular science magazine.	This activity elicits learners' ability to consider context and purpose. The learner must translate academic topics and terms into something that can be understood by the general public. This activity also requires reading an article with one set of genre conventions and altering those conventions so that they are appropriate for a different genre.	This activity could be used in nearly any subject area, as long as the instructor can find appropriate academic research articles.

¹ Pearson & P21, *Skills for Today Communication Executive Summary for Educators*

These are the big ideas behind the learning activities overleaf. Use these to adapt the examples for your students, or as guidance to devise your own learning tasks.

Both sending and receiving information are crucial

Communication is a social process of both productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening and reading) in which information is exchanged in order to convey meaning and achieve desired outcomes. Both sending and receiving information effectively are crucial to effective communication.

1

Production skills: A sender must be able to reliably craft and deliver messages that clearly convey the intended meaning and achieve the desired outcome.

2

Receptive skills: A receiver must actively listen and pay attention to messages in order to interpret the meaning intended by the sender.

3

Communicators must be able to apply these skills in a variety of domains, across a multitude of channels, and among a diverse group of communicators, all the while maintaining a focus on the ultimate goals of the communication.

Use practice and feedback to teach oral communication skills

Having students practice public speaking, review and self-assess their performance, and receive feedback from peers and teachers can support the development of oral communication skills.

1

Prior to practice, establish clear learning objectives and provide expert and peer models of successful performance so students will understand the target competencies.

2

Use video-recording tools to facilitate self-reflection on performance.

3

Have peers and teachers provide formative feedback, typically using a rubric. Use constructive criticism and highlight strengths in order to boost confidence.

Teach strategies for planning and revising pieces of written communication

Designing effective communication requires students to plan and reflect before engaging in communication itself. Many students, particularly those with less well-developed communication skills, will benefit from direct instruction in the planning and reflection phase.

1

Focus writing instruction on the writing process, which includes thoughtfully planning the piece of writing and engaging in revision and editing to refine the piece, in addition to the final written piece.

2

Organize planning activities using evidence-based instructional frameworks, such as PLAN-WRITE. This framework includes strategies like: Be mindful of the writing prompt, brainstorm and select specific main ideas to focus on, include details that support the main ideas, vary sentence structure and word choice to make the writing more interesting to read.²

3

Have students give and receive formative feedback on writing assignments and revise accordingly.

Focus communication assessments on tasks that students will experience in the real world

When designing any assessment, it is important to ensure alignment between the skills to assess, the evidence of those skills, and the tasks meant to elicit that evidence. Tasks should be similar to real-world communication scenarios, and evidence can be gathered through direct observation of the task or examination of an artifact of the task.

1

In addition to formal essays, consider other communication tasks students will experience during future schooling and in the workplace, such as writing emails, defending a thesis, or presenting at business meetings.

2

Rubrics are essential tools for assessing communication.

3

Role plays can be used to practice and assess interpersonal communication.

² De La Paz, S., & Graham, S. (2002). *Explicitly teaching strategies, skills, and knowledge: Writing instruction in middle school classrooms*. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(4), 687–698.

Are you incorporating communication skills instruction in your teaching? Tell us how. efficacy@pearson.com