



Top tips for improving your oral communication skills

When trying to get your point across to others through spoken words (orally), here are a number of key things to bear in mind:

- **Clarity:** Be clear. Don't overcomplicate things. Use simple language. Before you speak, think about the message that you want to get across. George Bernard Shaw is reputed to have said that "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place". Check with others to make sure that they have understood your message.
- **Brevity:** Don't waffle: it's infuriating. Don't 'dance around' your subject or give way more background information than is necessary. Don't use one hundred words where ten will do. Get to the point as quickly as possible and then reinforce it.
- **Empathy:** Consider your audience. Who is listening to you? Will they understand you? Have they got the time to listen to you? Might you need to speak up, speak more slowly, or explain certain words or phrases? Could they be offended or upset by anything that you have to say?
- **Respect:** Be respectful when speaking with others. Good manners are always appreciated. Don't use offensive language. Don't stereotype people, and be careful not to use racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, or other prejudiced language when you speak. If you are presenting, make sure to thank your audience for listening.
- **Confidence/authority:** To really get a message across, deliver it with confidence. If you believe in your message, it is more likely that others will too. Speak up so that your listeners can hear you. Ensure that what you say is based on evidence and reason, rather than emotion or belief.



Communication, Teamwork and Presentation Skills

- **Tone:** How you say something is almost as important as what you say. If you sound angry, irritated, bored, or sad, it will interfere with your message. A little humour is usually appreciated, but if you crack joke after joke while you speak, you are likely to devalue what you are saying.

For more on presentation skills, see the **Delivering your presentation** section of the Academic Skills Hub. For more in-depth materials on presentation skills, see the '**Groupwork and Presentations**' module in the skills4study course on TLC100 The Learning Centre on Blackboard. See also the All Aboard tutorial **Presentation Skills and Tools**, available at <http://www.allaboardhe.ie/presentation/>.

While speaking is a key communication skill, so too is listening. We often don't listen as well as we think we do – most of us remember less than half of what we hear! **Active listening** involves:

- **Paying close attention** to what somebody is saying (and sometimes, what they are not saying explicitly, for example, through body language, tone of voice, and so on).
- **Letting the speaker know** that you are listening attentively: nodding, tilting your head, asking appropriate questions, reflecting back your understanding of what has been said.
- **Making sure that you understand** the meaning of what the speaker is saying: seeking clarification when you need to, but not making inappropriate interruptions.
- **Not concentrating only on how you will respond** when the speaker is finished talking, but responding **thoughtfully and respectfully** when you have an opportunity to do so.
- Many people find it helpful **to record or to take notes** when listening. It is unethical to record another person without informing them that you are doing so and seeking their prior consent.