Communicating

Strong communication skills are fundamental to working effectively with others in a professional context, but it is also a skill that sits at the very heart of human relationships. Communication skills also link closely with other highly valued employability skills such as influencing and collaboration and can also be called interpersonal skills on a job description.

A good communicator might be skilled at presenting information in a number of different ways such as in writing or visually and by creating well-argued and relevant content, and expressing ideas with clarity. A crucial but underestimated element of good communication is understanding other peoples viewpoints by listening to others and seeking further clarification where needed. Being able to adapt your communication style to different groups, contexts and mediums is also important. More sophisticated communication skills can also involve successfully managing conflict within a team or motivating large groups through inspirational talks or by writing persuasive and engaging articles and books.

Excellent communication is essential in the workplace and employers recognise this as it ensures key information is understood and different perspectives considered. Communicating well at work will avoid misunderstandings and increase the likelihood of better, more considered outcomes.

How can I develop communication skills on my course?

• Take opportunities to present your work verbally during a seminar by making concise points, speaking clearly, and summarising at the end.
• Volunteer to be an Academic Rep for your Department or School and practice your skills by working with different groups of people to persuade and make positive changes.
• Essays and lab reports are the perfect opportunity to practice your written communication skills. Focus on the question or problem to be solved and seek feedback on early drafts to build up and practice writing clearly, concisely and to ensure you are answering the question being asked. CeDAS can provide support for academic skill development.
• In groupwork, volunteer to be the group leader to try out communicating in a different role, and possibly resolving any team issues that may arise. Offer to write up sections of the work to practice your written communication skills.

How can I develop communication skills outside of my course?

• Join a student society and seek out a communications type role, such as managing the social media feeds, writing a blog or creating video content.
• Seek out a specific society based on communicating, such as a debating society, comedy clubs, acting groups, student newspaper or radio.
• Offer to support and work with new students by volunteering to be a Peer Guide and developing your communication skills through this buddy/mentor role.
• Identify confident speakers such as those delivering TED talks or it might be an academic on your course and observe their techniques.
• Taking on a part time job that involves professional communication with colleagues and customers where you have to adapt your communication style and develop your listening skills.

How do people use this skill in the workplace

Royal Holloway graduates have used communication skills as:

• A Marketing Consultant writing a concise and influential summary of a new business proposal that can be understood quickly by senior decision makers.
• A Clinical Bioscientist explaining sensitive results to a member of the multi-disciplinary team.
• A Procurement Manager negotiating pay rates with a supplier to create a fair but cost-effective arrangement.
• A Human Resources Graduate trainee developing positive relationships with key members of the leadership team through a well-prepared presentation on a new Talent Development project.

How will employers assess my communication skills?

If you are applying for a role and the job descriptions states they are looking for someone who has strong communication or interpersonal skills, make sure you can demonstrate this on your CV. You may also be asked specific questions on an application form or in an interview which are designed to assess your communication skills. Examples of questions that could be asked include:

• What is the most difficult thing you have had to explain to someone? How did you do it?
• What is the most challenging presentation you have had to give? What did you do to make it successful?
• Can you think of a time when you have had to choose carefully how best to communicate with someone? Talk me through how you approached it.

If you’d like to get some help with structuring your answers for application forms or interviews using the STAR technique, visit the CVs and interviews section of the Careers Moodle site.

ShortListMe, Graduates First and eCareersGrad are available on the Moodle page to help you practice interview skills, case studies and psychometric tests.
If you would like to get more ideas on how you can ‘sell’ your skills on your CV then please watch our VIDEO CV workshop series, Part 3: Selling your 'Skills' on your CV (panopto.com).

If you are applying for a graduate scheme or Year in Industry and are invited to an assessment centre, it’s very likely that you’ll be assessed on your communication skills both through a group exercise but also possibly through a presentation. Assessors will want to see a range of communication skills such as how you listen to others and ask questions, show enthusiasm and encouragement and how you put your point across and persuade others. If you’d like to practice a group activity keep an eye out for the Assessment Centre workshops that run during the Autumn and Spring terms. These will be available to book via The Careers Portal.

You can make an appointment to speak with one of our Careers Consultants via the Careers Portal, where we can give feedback on your CV or application or help you to prepare for interviews and assessments, as well as help you think about your career options.