

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

**Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow**

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## **Communication Skills Laboratory in Engineering Colleges**

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# Communication Skills Laboratory in Engineering Colleges

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## **Effective Communication Skills for Engineers**

Effective Communication is made possible with the help of language. Engineering profession is no exception to this general rule. Engineers are also required to interact with their co-workers, the public, their clients, superiors and even news media conversing face to face, in writing or over the telephone and read and write emails, letters, reports and proposals. Such a demand is placed on the part of the engineers right from the beginning of their career in their junior positions. Individuals who are able to communicate well in speaking and writing always have an edge over others in persuading people to their thinking and plan of action. They impact others and have some influence over the thinking process and action plans of others.

## **The Lack of Adequate Skills in English among the Engineering Students**

It appears that Tamilnadu has the largest number of engineering colleges in India, nearly 300 or more. Students, accepted for the bachelor's degree in the various branches of engineering and technology, have learned English for many years, in most cases for 10 to 12 years. However, many of these students have learned English as one of the subjects and have not used it as the medium of instruction. Even when they have learned various subjects at the secondary and higher secondary levels through the medium of English, their actual performance in English outside the classroom is not functionally adequate for effective communication with others.

## **Communication Via English for Engineering Students**

Considering the need for effective competence in English, students of engineering courses are now required to enroll in English Communication classes. This course is designed to equip the students with the necessary communication skills that would help them in their profession. This course is expected to prepare students to adapt themselves with ease to the needs of the industry, etc. After completing their studies and when they take up a profession, this course is expected to help them use English in an effective way.

## **A New Course in Communication Skills in English**

The Communication Skills Laboratory course (GE1352) prescribed by Anna University, Chennai, for the engineering students is an interesting development. This article deals with the course module, internal assessment and end semester examination procedure and how the students are able to develop their communication skills through this course.

Teaching English to B.E./B.Tech engineering students has become a pleasant exercise since the introduction of this course. Communication Skills Laboratory course (GE1352) has been prescribed for the Engineering courses by Anna University, Chennai.

### **Objectives of the Course**

The objective of the course is as follows:

1. To equip students of engineering and technology with effective speaking and listening skills in English.
2. To help students develop the soft skills which will make the transition from college to workplace smoother and help to excel in jobs.
3. To enhance students' performance at Placement Interviews, Group Discussions and other recruitment exercises.

### **The Course Module**

The Course Module consists of English Lab plus Career Lab.

English language Lab's PC based session consists the following:

1. Listening comprehension
2. Reading Comprehension
3. Speaking

Interactive Teacher Console and language software are required for teaching these skills.

Career Lab (class room session) consists of the following:

1. Resume / Report Preparation & Letter Writing
2. Presentation Skills
3. Group Discussion
4. Interview Skills

Career Lab software is required to understand the modules for practice. The students view and listen to programs such as Business English, Telephone conversation, Letter writing, Presentation skills, Stress management, Group discussion, and Interview skills.

### **Monitoring the Progress**

At the end of each session of the Lab, review exercises such as reading comprehension and error correction are given for the students to answer and the computer evaluated sheets are to compiled as a record. Students maintain a hard copy of the presentations (2

topics) and CV and covering letter to a company for placement and review the exercises of PC based session. Similar exercises for the Career Lab are to be compiled in the record.

Internal Assessment is awarded for 20 marks based on attendance, maintenance of laboratory record and test marks.

### **Semester Exam**

In the End Semester examination, students are tested in English Lab and Career Lab. 40 marks are allotted for English Lab and 60 marks for the Career Lab.

#### **English Lab (40 marks)**

Listening Comprehension:

Gap filling (10 words) – 5 marks

True / False (10 statements) – 5 marks

Multiple choice (10 statements – Choosing correct options) – 5 marks

Reading Comprehension:

Gap filling (Choosing 10 correct words out of 15 words) – 5 marks

Multiple choice (10 statements – choosing best options) – 5 marks

Sequencing of Jumbled sentences – 5 marks

Common errors in English

Correcting the errors (grammar) in 10 sentences – 10 marks

#### **Career Lab (60 marks)**

Oral presentation on a given topic for 3 minutes – 30 marks

Group Discussion – 30 marks (6 member group discussion for 15 minutes on a given topic)

The examiners evaluate the presentation of the candidate for 30 marks, taking into account the student's fluency, content and accuracy (grammar) of presentation.

For Group discussion, the students are grouped into batches of 6 each. Each student of a group is awarded marks out of the total of 30 marks, based on his or her initiative, participation and skills of persuasion. The communication skills laboratory course kindles the interest of the students to develop their communication skills for scoring marks in the examination and help hone their skills further for future use.

Examinations have been conducted in the even semester of last academic year 2006-07 and in the odd semesters V and VII of this academic year 2007-08.

## **Response of the Teachers of English**

Teachers of English in the colleges were very encouraged by the experience they received in conducting this examination as internal and external examiners. In my college, we also received encouraging reports from the teachers of engineering departments that their students began to interact well with them using English in their classes and they were very happy about it. Even the weak students who hesitated to speak in the class tried his or her best to perform well on the given topic in front of the external examiner.

## **What Needs to be Done as a Follow Up?**

We need to increase the motivation of the students to learn English better. Counseling sessions with the teachers of English may be arranged. During these sessions, teachers should provide a list of activities that the individual student can perform on his or her own outside the classroom.

Students may be encouraged to meet with the teachers of English for a few sessions every month, even to practice their English with the teachers. Individual sessions help students to shed their inferiority complex or their hesitation to use English.

Library may be equipped with a variety of CDs and DVDs with standard English materials for them to listen and watch, which the students should be encouraged to borrow from the library. Total immersion in English through listening will be a good step to develop their comprehension skills.

Teams of students may be formed with 3 or four students in a team. At least one of the students should have some adequate skills in English. These teams must be encouraged to meet on a weekly basis after supper for an hour or so to practice speaking English. The leader of the team will monitor the progress, and the members will help correcting each others' pronunciation, choice of diction and grammar. Members of the team may be encouraged or asked to play a variety of roles in possible job situations, interpersonal activities, etc.

Students may be encouraged to recall words they know in English and use them in appropriate sentences.

Students may be encouraged to write short essays ranging from 10 sentences to 100 sentences and display their work on a regular basis in the classroom.

Students may be given a series of visuals and asked to use the visuals to identify and write down as many words as possible. Perhaps, we can ask the students to develop their own pictorial glossary using visuals they come across in daily life situations.

There are many more activities that the teachers and college managements can encourage so that the students at the end of their degree program will have adequate English skills to compete and enter jobs of their choice.

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