

English Language Skills: Teaching, Testing and Assessment for Engineering Students

Maheswara Rao Ch.
D. Vijaya Lakshmi

Abstract

The present paper presents several steps to help engineering student acquire effective communication skills. The paper also suggests steps to make effective assessment and testing of English communication skills in engineering colleges. Regular training in presentational skills, group discussions, debate, role plays, interviews, proficiency of language use, etc. will help engineering students to master communication skills.

Key words: Communication skills, presentational skills, group discussions, debate, role plays

Introduction

English Communication Skills play a significant role in getting a good job and in getting hikes in salary and position. Because of this reason, engineering colleges and non-engineering colleges focus on improving English Communication Skills of students by establishing computer assisted language laboratories with relevant and adequate software systems. However, what is presented here could be used with or without language laboratory. At the same time models are more easily and repeatedly presented in language laboratories.

Presentation Skills

To succeed in professional career, good presentation skills are needed.

Key Factors of a Presentation

- ✓ Presentation skills require sufficient preparation of the needed content with clarity of thought and ideas, proper body language and strong intention to present a topic.

- ✓ Always first impression is the best impression. Before we start our oral speech, our body speaks something to the audience, and the message thus conveyed could be either positive or negative. Our appearance plays an important role here. A proper dress code, eye contact, body postures, effective use of gesture, etc. are core factors in presenting a topic in an effective way.
- ✓ Accuracy of the topic idea and limitations of the topic are to be made clear.
- ✓ Presentation is to be interactive and energetic.
- ✓ Methodology of presentation is to be decided in advance: Whether you will use notes, white/black board, LCD projector, etc.
- ✓ Inform time and length of presentation in advance so that audience will be mentally prepared to listen attentively.
- ✓ Structure your presentation according to your convenience to communicate effectively.
- ✓ Rehearse well before your presentation and anticipate the questions and keep the answers ready to face the audience in question and answer session.
- ✓ Make use of nonverbal communication
 - Maintain eye contact
 - Use facial expressions
 - Use gestures
 - Walk a little
 - Modulate your voice

Checklist for Our Own Assessment

- Did I initiate the topic effectively?
- Did I conclude the presentation satisfactorily?
- Did I present the topic clearly, confidently and interestingly?
- Did I use proper body language in the presentation?
- Did I face question and answer session effectively?
- Did I use simple, clear understandable expressions?
- Was the purpose of presentation served?
- Did I manage time well?

Evaluation Sheet for the Participants or One or Two Selected Evaluators

Evaluator's Name----- Speaker's Name-----

Topic----- Date-----

“Scoring: Circle appropriate number from 1 to 10 (highest score is 10)” (Kumar, E. Suresh and Sreehari, 2007)

Topic (appropriate to audience, sufficiently narrowed)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Organization (introduction, body, conclusion)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Delivery (gestures, voice, pauses)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Body language (gestures, eye contact, facial expressions)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Language ability (correct, concise, clear, courteous)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Group Discussion

Group discussion is a process of interactive oral communication among a group of people, where ideas, opinions, thoughts and feelings are shared in a purposeful way. It is given an essential role in the fields of academics, business and administration. Group discussions are gradually more used as apparatus to sort out candidates with the right abilities, either for job purpose or for admission into diverse courses. It is a tool of problem solving, decision making and personality assessment (Sastra, nptl).

Important Features of Group Discussion

- ✓ Effective communication skills
- ✓ In-depth knowledge about given topic
- ✓ Amicable and cooperative environment
- ✓ Effective participation
- ✓ Clarity in thought and expression

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 16:1 January 2016

Maheswara Rao Ch. and D. Vijaya Lakshmi

English Language Skills: Teaching, Testing and Assessment for Engineering Students

- ✓ Good listening skills
- ✓ Suitable words and expressions
- ✓ Leadership qualities
- ✓ Team building skills
- ✓ Proper non-verbal signs
- ✓ Creativity
- ✓ Assertiveness

Check List for Our Own assessment of Participation

- Did I participate effectively in the discussion?
- Were my ideas expressed clearly and shared properly?
- Did I interrupt courteously and diplomatically?
- Did I show team building skills?
- Did I support/oppose in polite way?
- Did I listen each and every point attentively?
- Did I make comments in an appropriate way?
- Did I motivate other participants to be active in the discussion?
- Did I take an active part in decision making?

Evaluation Sheet for the Participants or One or Two Selected Evaluators

Evaluator’s Name----- Speaker’s Name-----

Topic----- Date-----

“Scoring: Circle appropriate number from 1to 10 (highest score is 10)” (Kumar, E. Suresh and Sreehari, 2007)

Communication skills (fluency, clarity, accent and intonation, error-free language)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Knowledge on the given area	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Body language (eye contact, facial	

expressions, proper gestures and postures)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Leadership skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Logical capability	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Ability to persuade and flexibility	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Assertiveness and creativity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Debate

Debate is mainly an argument on a certain topic where participants take a particular stand by giving supporting details and opinions. The huge endeavor that participants put forth to accomplish something in this intellectually electrifying activity that is truly inspiring. “A number of studies have reported that participation in debate increasing the critical thinking of the students” (Allen, et al.1999). Many results show that one can develop over all skills by participating in debate. “Debate participation promotes problem solving and innovative thinking, and helps students to build links between words and ideas that make concepts more meaningful” (Bellon, J. 2000).

Essential Tips of Debate

- ✓ Knowledge about the topic
- ✓ Support the statements with examples
- ✓ Unity is to be maintained (If team)
- ✓ Structure of the content
- ✓ Use sign posts
- ✓ Link the points effectively
- ✓ Use proper eye contact and facial expressions
- ✓ Deliver the thought clearly, carefully and logically

Self-evaluation can be done by using the same sheet used to evaluate group discussion self- evaluation sheet with slight changes.

Evaluation Sheet for the Participants or One or Two Selected Evaluators

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 16:1 January 2016

Maheswara Rao Ch. and D. Vijaya Lakshmi

English Language Skills: Teaching, Testing and Assessment for Engineering Students

Evaluator's Name----- Speaker's Name-----

Topic----- Date-----

“Scoring: Circle appropriate number from 1 to 10 (highest score is 10)” (Kumar, et al. 2007)

Subject matter (ideas, linking and order)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Refutation (opposing the points of rival)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Delivery (Voice intelligibility and pauses etc.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Language skills (listening and speaking error free language)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Body language (eye contact, gestures and postures)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Attitude	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Role Plays

Communication is nothing but the way people interact with their colleagues, peer group, salespersons and even other business owners and friends. Role-play is an effective communicative strategy in which students act the role of another character, thereby achieving an appreciation for others' points of view. Similarly, there is an understanding between the complexity of resolving issues and problems in the real world. “A conversation can be anything and can take any turn. It is easy to start a conversation if you are confident, friendly and not shy to open a conversation with anyone. So it is more a personality problem if someone cannot start a conversation.”(Hariprasad, et al. 2014)

A Few Important Tips are given below.

- ✓ Feel confident or secure and think that you are going to give or get information.
- ✓ Adopt positive and a confident attitude that will put other comfort.
- ✓ Have a backup plan if starting line fails.
- ✓ You break the ice and introduce yourself, if you don't know the people.
- ✓ Have firm eye contact and maintain good body cues.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 16:1 January 2016

Maheswara Rao Ch. and D. Vijaya Lakshmi

English Language Skills: Teaching, Testing and Assessment for Engineering Students

- ✓ Give a firm hand shake, if necessary.
- ✓ Modulate the voice according to the situation.

Check List for Our Own Assessment

- Was my language apt to the conversation?
- Did I use proper gestures and eye contact?
- Was my initiation good?
- Did I modulate the voice in proper way?
- Did I impress the person in positive way?

Conclusion

Communication has traditionally been seen as verbal or non-verbal. “Our understandings of communication are based on a rapidly evolving field that incorporates many different domains” (Iksan, et al. 2012). Legitimate and consistent testing and assessment of communication skills can be challenging, as these skills are difficult to assess through written tests. A range of assessment methods and tools have be used to assess all categories of communication skills. In this context, clearly defined target skills and well trained observers can provide a high reliability for language assessment. “Training and assessment of communication skills can pose several challenges to learners of English communication skills. Understanding the benefits of teaching and assessing communication skills outweigh the challenges of implementing can be motivated teachers and learners” (Seajme, Vol.18, No.2, 2014).

References

1. Allen, Mike, etal. “A Meta-analysis of the Impact of Forensics and Communication Education on Critical Thinking,” *Communication Education*, 48, January 1999.
2. Bellon, J. (2000). “National Center on Education and the Economy.” *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission of the Skills of the American Workforce*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.
3. Iksan, ZH, et al. ‘*Communication skills among university students*’, *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 59, pp. 71–6, 2012.

4. Group Discussion. Web. 14 Dec., 2015.
http://www.sastra.edu/nptel/download/Prof%20GPRagini/pdf_New/Unit%2026.pdf
5. The Importance of Teaching and Assessing Communication Skills in Medical Education.
Web. 14 Dec., 2015. http://seajme.md.chula.ac.th/articleVol8 No2/1_Editorial_vol8-2.pdf
6. Kumar, E. Suresh, et al. *A Handbook for English Language Laboratories*. Hyderabad: Foundation Books, 2013. Print.
7. Prasad, M. Hari, Et.al. *Strengthen Your Communication Skills*. Guntur: Maruthi Publications, 2013. Print.

Maheswararao Ch.
M.A., M.Phil. B.Ed., (Ph.D. Scholar)
Assistant Professor of English
Vishnu Institute of Technology
Bhimavaram 534202
Andhra Pradesh
India
maheshkeats@gmail.com

D. Vijaya Lakshmi, M.A., PGCTE, M.Phil. (Ph.D. Scholar)
Senior Assistant Professor of English
Vishnu Institute of Technology
Bhimavaram 534202
Andhra Pradesh
India
dvlakshmi1973@gmail.com