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ORAL COMMUNICATION TIP SHEET

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This tool provides practical tips to help you improve your oral communication skills. Review each of the tips below and practice the ones that are the most relevant to your learning needs.

General tips

- Slow down your speech and pronounce words clearly and correctly.
- Vary your pitch, tone and volume to emphasize key words or sentences.
- Record yourself speaking and then listen to the recording to analyze your pitch, tone, speed and volume.
- Adjust the volume of your voice to your audience (e.g. speak softly when you are talking one-on-one; speak louder when you are talking to a larger group or across a room).
- Be conscious of your speech to avoid filler words (e.g. um, uh, ah, like, well, etc.).
- Organize your thoughts and ideas before speaking (e.g. write notes on what you want to say).
- Do not interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- Concentrate on the speaker's message and resist distractions in order to focus your attention on listening.
- Respond non-verbally to show understanding and interest when communicating (e.g. nodding your head, smiling, etc.).
- Make eye contact when listening or talking to people.
- Ask questions until you are sure you understand what is being said.
- Be specific when asking questions and giving answers.
- Take notes to help remember what is being communicated.

Higher level tips

- Use common words rather than technical terms or acronyms to communicate.
- Restate in your own words what the speaker said and ask questions for clarification (e.g. "Let me be sure I understand correctly. You are saying _____?").
- Tailor your conversation or message to your audience (e.g. when dealing with customer problems, listen, sympathize and try to offer solutions).
- Maintain focus on your key message when presenting to a group by reminding participants of the intended purpose if the discussion goes off track.
- Use different approaches when communicating an important message (e.g. diagrams, personal examples, etc.).
- When presenting, write down key points or phrases to help remember your presentation. Look at your notes, but do not read your notes for an extended length of time.
- Pause at key points during a long speech or presentation to emphasize an important point and to allow the audience some time to reflect.
- Keep calm, take a deep breath, and respond politely when dealing with an emotional or difficult situation. If necessary, remove yourself temporarily until you are able to voice your opinions in a calm, clear and non-judgmental way.
- Use the active voice, which is more direct as the focus is placed on the person or thing, rather than the passive voice (e.g. say "I will finish the report tomorrow" rather than "The report will be finished tomorrow").

- Use “I” statements (e.g. “I think”, “I need”, or “I feel”), as opposed to “You” statements (e.g. “You should”, “You are”, or “You did not”), to clarify feelings and assumptions that may surround problems.
- Use adverbs (e.g. slowly, extremely, loudly, etc.) and adjectives (e.g. cold, small, good, etc.) to help give more meaning and information about what you are talking about.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions when listening to others; keep an open mind to others’ ideas and do not stop listening if you disagree.

Oral communication practice and learning exercises

Practice your oral communication skills by completing the following exercises. Use the oral communication tip sheet if you need additional help as you work through these exercises. A learning plan template is also included to help guide your skills development.

General practice exercises

1. Think of a problem you successfully resolved at work. Verbally explain what you did and how you did it. Use the table below to help guide your explanation. Write your notes in the space provided.

General practice exercises	
Problem	What was the problem or issue? Why did it have to be solved?
Action	What action(s) did you take? Describe what you did, step-by-step.
Result	What were the results of your actions? Did you fix the problem?

Higher level practice exercises

1. Prepare a short presentation on a topic related to your work using the following guidelines:

- Clearly **identify your audience’s needs** and tailor your presentation accordingly.
- Start with an **introduction** that outlines your purpose and format.
- Include an **icebreaker** activity, particularly when some members of the group do not know the others well.
- Use **short exercises** and **open-ended questions** to engage your audience.

- Use **visual aids**, **anecdotes** and **examples** to illustrate your points.
- **Speak clearly**, varying your tone and pace.
- **Encourage** participants to ask questions.
- **Concentrate** on your main message(s).
- **Summarize** the key points.

2. The following sentences are written in the passive voice. Say them in the active voice.

- A decision was unanimously reached by the team.
- The package was delivered by Lucas.
- Before the meeting was over, the new funding had been approved by the committee.
- A total loss of data is often produced by that type of computer error.
- Last year, 10 new employees had been trained by the time we introduced the new machinery.

Suggested Answers:

Active voice:

- The team unanimously reached a decision.
- Lucas delivered the package.
- Before the meeting was over, the committee had approved the new funding.
- That type of computer error often produces a total loss of data.
- We had trained 10 new employees by the time we introduced the new machinery last year.

3. The following sentences are written using negative language. Rephrase the sentences and say them using positive language.

- You did not specify your address so we cannot send the materials you requested.
- I do not know how to do this, so I would need training.
- I got your report. The introduction does not work. Can you come up with something different?

Suggested Answers:

Positive language:

- Please send us your mailing address so we can process your request.
- I am eager to acquire new skills to apply to my job.
- Thanks for your hard work. I like what you have done so far. May I suggest the following changes?

Additional learning exercises

- Practice rehearsing a speech in front of a mirror.
- Practice pronouncing each syllable when you speak to ensure clarity in your message and to slow down your speech.

- Listen closely to someone who speaks well and repeat what they are saying while imitating the tone and rhythm of their speech.
- Use a dictionary to find the correct pronunciation of words that are difficult for you to say and practice repeating these words.
- Listen to audio books while riding or driving to work.
- Take part in discussions by asking questions and sharing your views.
- Seek opportunities to train others on a new product, service or procedure.
- Ask for feedback from co-workers or employees regarding your vocabulary and level of detail when speaking.

My learning plan

Complete this worksheet to help guide your skills development. Set a target date to reach your goals and use this date to track your progress.

My learning goal is to improve my oral communication skills by:

_____ (insert date).

Tips or practice exercises I can use to improve my oral communication skills include:

Additional resources (e.g. books, courses, workshops, co-workers and/or supervisors, etc.) to help improve my oral communication skills include:

Additional learning activities (e.g. job shadowing, new work responsibilities, volunteering in my community, etc.) to help improve my oral communication skills include:

Examples that show I have improved my oral communication skills include:

End of Module

EduVantage wishes every aspirant the very best in harnessing this important skill of Oral Communication.

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