

Where Do You Start? What's Important?

Students need to know — need to be taught — among many other things, how to introduce themselves properly, how to make meaningful eye contact, how to start and maintain conversations, how to interact with all kinds of people, how to give a successful interview, manage relationships, and eventually stand up and address a live audience with authority and confidence. Students must learn to create rapport, trust and respect. These are the basic components of nearly every affirmative human interaction, including those explicit and implicit in realizing the 21st Century Skills.

This area of the language arts is best taught face-to-face in an informal, low-risk and highly interactive way. The instructor needs to model the manner of delivery that achieves proven, positive results; i. e., the instructor must be a teacher as well as mentor and role model. Nothing becomes second nature until it becomes first nature first. Students must not only see what effective communication looks and feels like; they must also understand the details of how it's done so they can practice and hone their skills.

Here's where we start:

Introductions

Knowing how to introduce oneself with an appropriate handshake, proper eye contact, and a fitting demeanor is a foundational skill. It's the way we begin most interactions with others and likely sets the tone for a brief conversation, a meeting, or a life-long relationship. You can't say the first thing twice!

The Elevator Speech

The ability to make a short presentation (in the time of an elevator ride in a relatively short building) that appropriately informs a friend/client/collaborator/boss of who you are and what you do. It's one of the very basic elements of oral communication.

Vocabulary

Studies show a direct correlation between vocabulary and success. The point here is not just learning new words but to developing in our students a curiosity for the power, nuance, and proper application of our rich language. It's no accident that the end of the German word for vocabulary, Wortschatz, means treasure.

Listening

Active and engaged listening is an essential, but often neglected part of the communication spectrum. It's essential to showing, and to having, respect.

Communication Etiquette and Courtesies

Start with the basics: "Thank you," "Please," and, "I'm sorry," Then move to rules of etiquette involving communication devices and situational needs.

Overcoming Fear

The fear of public speaking ranks right up there with death as our number one fear. Students must master proven methods of dealing with and overcoming this fear from the very beginning of their public speaking careers, including relaxation exercises, visualization techniques, and most importantly knowing what they're talking about before they speak.

How To Ask For What You Want

We ask for many things each day: “May I be excused from class today?” “Will you give me this job?” “How about a raise?” “Will you go on a date with me?” But it’s not just asking, timing and tone figure importantly.

The Interview

The skills deployed in a successful interview apply well beyond securing employment or entrance to advanced education. An interview is taking place when you ask for a loan or try to put a work team together, or when you’re choosing a contractor to paint your house. Do you know who’s in control during an interview?

Being Nice and Being Liked

What? No kidding! Studies have shown that on job interviews, all other things being equal, an employer will pick the “nice” person, the “likeable” one, over others.

Networking

Networking has always been a challenge for even the most accomplished of communicators. Knowing how to work a room, make connections, and establish and maintain relationships, are the skills that mark a successful person.

Speech Construction and Delivery

Finally, building on everything that’s come before, it’s time to get up in front of a room of people and give a speech. It’s time to knock ‘em alive!

When students practice and synthesize these elements in the right sequence over the right amount of time, the result can be a confident, well-spoken individual, not just someone ready to be a better student, but someone ready to be heard.