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Oral communication tip sheet

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.

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.

- 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.

- 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.