

Pointers

for Effective Communication

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As a student-teacher you must hone your skills of effective communication. Listening, speaking, and writing for a variety of audiences are essential skills of educators. The following pointers can help you communicate better with students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and the general community.

Know Your Audience

First, identify the audience with whom you will be communicating. You may be talking about the same topic to everyone; however, you will need to approach the topic in ways that are explicit to individuals:

- When communicating with students, make sure the discourse is age-appropriate. While hand-drawn cartoons (e.g., a star or some other positive image) work well for the youngest learners, a written memo works better with older students.
- When communicating with non-art educators avoid jargon or art-specific acronyms. It is doubtful that parents or administrators will know the shorthand of the language of art.
- When communicating with administrators provide details in a concise manner, not in flowery prose.

Be an Enthusiastic Listener

Communicating includes whole-hearted listening, turning your undivided attention to the speaker. When a child or an adult addresses you:

- Stop what you are doing or ask the person to wait a moment while you finish the task at hand.
- Look at the person.
- Listen with your full attention.

- When the speaker is finished speaking, ask: Do I understand that what you said is ...?

A moment or two of undivided attention gives the speaker confidence that you care about what is being said. Inquiring whether you understand further supports this notion.

Use Good Grammar and Proper Language

The best rule of effective communication is to watch what you say and write. Modeling good grammar and proper use of language helps children learn these skills. Students, especially the youngest, are copycats who will emulate your speech and writing.

When communicating in writing, remember that what you write makes a lasting impression. It is important that your writing be neat, complete, and correct. What you write becomes your professional face to people who may never meet you.

- Use spell check or ask another adult to edit your document.
- Do not post any document to a website or send any document home that has not been carefully proofed.
- Check for proper capitalization and use of punctuation.
- Do not use all capital letters.
- Be sparing with your use of exclamation marks.



Tara Nunimaker models effective communication by using an interactive digital whiteboard to explain concepts about fractals.

Be Respectful

When verbally communicating, treat your audience with respect.

- Do not speak down to students. If the vocabulary seems too difficult for students to grasp, use the correct word or phrase and define it, then use it again until the word or phrase becomes understandable in context.
- Steer clear of “baby talk” with the youngest students. Treating young students with respect includes communicating with them on a more mature level.
- Never use put downs. Even when used in jest, sarcasm and mockery is inappropriate for the educational environment.
- Use clear and non-condemning language when discussing problems with parents, colleagues, or administrators.

As with all elements of teaching, practice indeed makes perfect (or almost perfect). Incorporating skills of effective communication during your student-teaching experience will help you with aspects ranging from classroom management to development of professional relationships.

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