503x Oral Communication Skills for Engineering Ph.D. Students

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Course Learning Objectives

Oral communication skills are vital in the formal and everyday tasks of
engineering practice and academic duties. This course will help you with
your oral presentation skills in academic, professional and informal settings.
Specific attention is placed on preparing for conference presentations.

We also address strategies for managing informal communication events
including one-on-one interaction, group meetings, seminars, and classroom
communications.

At the end of this course you should be able to accomplish the following:

- Formulate academic presentations with effective organization and
  structure of content
- Compose your presentation introduction and conclusion for maximum
  impact
- Implement the basic conventions for making presentations in varied
  contexts
- Apply principles for incorporating visual aids into your presentations
- Distinguish between various presentation tasks: lecturing, teaching,
  discussing, facilitating, demonstrating, training
- Assess audience needs in presenting situations
- Become attuned to non-verbal cues from your audience
- Manage your emotions and those of your audience
- Appropriately integrate story elements, description and humor
- Use formal and informal language to support understanding and delivery
- Define your own presentation personality and style
- Identify your presentation strengths and weaknesses
- Acquire tools for life-long improvement and assessment

Course Approach

The purpose of this class is individual skill development. Thus, much of this
class is experiential. The value is the opportunity to practice your oral
communicating and to then receive immediate feedback that you can use to
move forward. Each class is as participatory as possible in order to develop

your skills through practice, feedback, observation of others, understanding and application. You will receive personal feedback and will develop your own plan for improvement.

Schedule

Many students find this course valuable to practice presentations they will be giving outside our classroom. For example, you might do a trial run of a conference presentation you are preparing; you might present a lecture you'll be giving as a TA; or you might ask us to be a mock qualifying exam audience.

The schedule will be modified to incorporate your individual needs as much as possible. This course schedule will be subject to change, based on your ongoing presentation needs.

Assignments

You can complete as many of the following assignments as time permits:

- Technical how-to presentation (explaining step by step a process or activity)
- Research overview presentation (a project or current work)
- Lit review presentation (review an article, or present an existing review of the literature in your research area)
- Elevator speech (2-minute pitches to different audiences)
- In class activities to help you navigate a variety of speaking situations: leading discussions, fielding questions, explaining graphs, charts and other visual data
- Undergrad lecture (condensed version of a teaching presentation)
- Conference presentation (condensed version of a talk you are planning to give or have already presented)
- Critical review presentation (review an article, book, etc.)
- TED Talk, lightening talk

In class activities will help you navigate a variety of speaking situations: leading discussions, fielding questions, explaining graphs and visual data

Course Requirements

To get the maximum value from the class do your best to participate and do as many presentations as possible. Specifically, you should:
- Attend class sessions – if you are unable to prepare for your presentation, attend anyway! You learn a lot from watching others
- Give your best effort when presenting and attend fully to your colleagues when they are presenting
- Provide oral feedback to your colleagues
- Fill out self-assessment forms of your own presentations