

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: LISTENING AND SPEAKING

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Human communication involves reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The short article describes how to use two of these, speaking and listening, in any subject area.

SPEAKING

Oral communication can enhance learning in any subject area. It can be used to manipulate lesson input or to examine and explore lesson-related ideas. It also provides those students who may have difficulties reading and writing another way to demonstrating their learning. Finally, it is open-ended so as to provide choice, challenge, and complexity for highly creative or intellectually gifted students.

How to Use Oral Communication Skills in Content Area

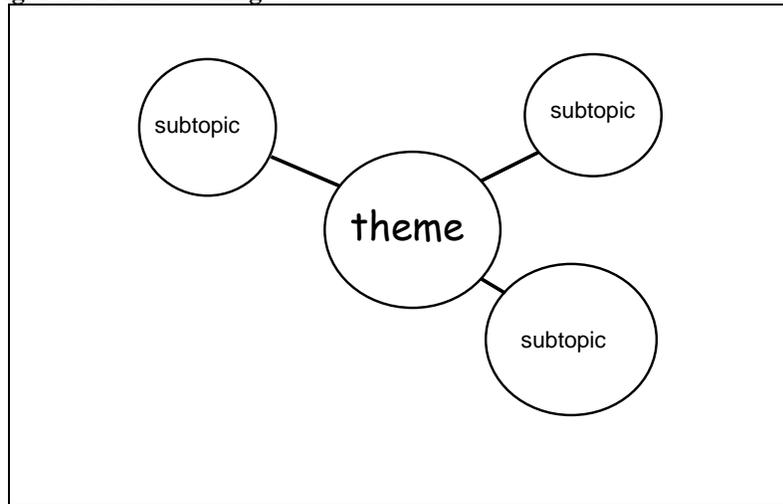
To use oral communication in a social studies context, first decide on three to five *Elements of Oral Communication* (EOC) on which to focus (see Figure 1). Then define each trait and demonstrate what it looks like. Then use the elements of effective skills instruction to teach them.

Figure 1. Elements of Oral Communication (EOC).

1. Look at your audience.
2. Use a moderate pace. Not too fast and not too slow.
3. Use inflection. Don't use just a monotone. Make your voice rise and fall to make listening more interesting.
4. Controlled stance. Don't lean or slouch.
5. Use your hands to emphasis points.
6. Pause at important parts.
7. Use visual aids.
8. Answer questions directly and succinctly.
9. Use correct grammar.
10. Use known words. Avoids slang or profanity.
11. Use words judiciously. Avoids non-words and non-phrases such as: "um," "well," "you know," and "you guys." Do not use extra words if it can be helped.
12. Be concise and to the point. Do not ramble.

Second, have students create a brainstorming web to find and develop a speaking topic (see Figure 2). To do this, identify a topic and print it in a circle in the center of a page of blank paper. Then think of two to three nodes or sub-topics and brainstorm to find interesting things about each. This brainstorming web is used as a prompt for oral communication. Use only single words or short phrases to hold each idea. The teacher will need to model this process initially by thinking aloud and drawing on a blackboard, poster, or overhead to create a brainstorming web.

Figure 2. Brainstorming web.



Third, students use their brainstorming web as a guide to give a short oral speech about their topic. The teacher should also model these speeches. These speeches should be no more than one minute in length for middle grade students and 30 to 45 seconds for primary students. This is much longer than most students think. To speak, students move into in groups of three to five. One student stands and gives his or her oral speech to the small group. Another student in the group should be designated as the time keeper and say, “*time*” when the allotted time is up.

Using this technique, four to six students speak to their small group at the same time instead of one student speaking to the whole class. This is a much less intimidating way of developing oral communication. Also, the teacher is able to see many students give their oral presentations within a relatively short time span. Students generally need to do this two to three times a week for a couple weeks to get comfortable with the process.

Below are five different ideas for choosing oral communication topics:

1. **Free choice.** Students are free to choose any topic for their speech.
2. **Trade book post-reading.** Students create a web and do a speech as part of a post-reading activity. Here they describe something interesting or important that occurred in the story.
3. **Textbook post-reading.** Students create a web and do a speech as an alternative to a worksheet or other kind of assignments related a social studies textbook reading assignment. Here they would pick out three or four interesting or important ideas from the assigned chapter.
4. **Content topics.** Students create a web and do a speech on a theme related to the content being studied. This can be extended by having students get new information related to their topic.

5. **Persuasive speech.** As part of a discussion, students to choose an issue related to social studies and make a case for a particular view.

Feedback and Assessment for Oral Communication

During the first weeks of oral communication, review the EOC but keep things very informal. Eventually, you can teach students how to respond and give feedback, however, there needs to be quite a bit of trust built in small group before you get to this point. It should be stressed that this is feedback and not criticism. It is used to improve oral communication and not as an evaluation or assessment. Also, all speakers, even the most polished profession speakers, use various forms feedback to improve their skills.

The oral communication checklist below can be used as a guide in providing feedback (see Figure 3). For this type of assessment, some prefer to use a rating checklist with the following key: 4 = *outstanding*, 3 = *good*, 2 = *average*, 1 = *low*. As students become more comfortable with the EOC and the process of creating and giving speeches, you can begin to include elements that focus at the content of the speech such as topic, lengths, use of visual aids, interest, or value

Figure 3. Oral communication checklist

Oral Communication Checklist

Speaker _____

Topic _____

Key: ✓ = skill was present; ✓+ = skill was present to a greater degree;
 ✓- = skill was present to a lesser degree; # = let's talk.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| looks at audience | |
| uses a loud voice | |
| not too fast or slow (rate) | |
| controlled stance and hands | |

Something done well:

LISTENING

Effective communication involves both the ability to speak in order to accurately transmit your ideas and also to listen in order to receive what another has said. Often times when people talk about listening skills they are really referring to remembering skills. That is, how to remember or recall something that was previously said. *Listening skills*, however, are those receiving skills that enable you to fully attend to what another person says with honest intent (see Figure 4). Honest intent means that you sincerely try to understand and respond to what the other person is saying; you are not simply waiting silently for a quiet spot to jump in with your own ideas. Listen skills are a form of social or interpersonal skills that can be introduced in the intermediate grades. They are especially relevant in the middle school grades as students are grappling with social and interpersonal elements.

Figure 4. Listening Skills

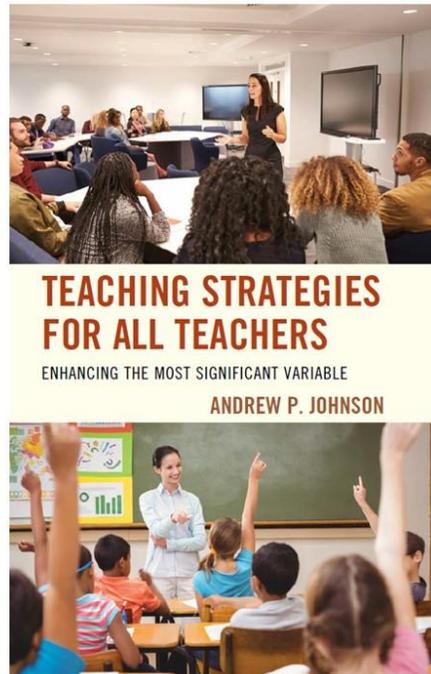
- 1. Eye contact:** Look at the person.
- 2. Be quiet:** It's not about you. Let the other person talk. Do not talk about yourself. Do not describe a similar situation in your own life.
- 3. Use verbal and nonverbal RTA:** Received Transmission Acknowledgment. Nod, "yes . . . I see . . . Okay . . . etc."
- 4. Clarify:** "Tell me more . . . I don't understand . . . Does this mean . . . I wonder about . . ."
- 5. Paraphrase:** "What you're saying is . . . It sounds like . . . So you want to . . . It seems to be that . . ."
- 6. Question:** "Why is it that . . . Do you want to . . . How is it that . . . What do you think would . . . What do you feel . . . What is it that you'd like to do . . . ?"
- 7. Reflect Outward:** "I'm feeling . . . I'm finding myself . . . I want to . . ."
- 8. Respond:** If the speaker asks for your opinion, you should provide one. Don't do this unless asked specifically.
- 9. Gently Suggest:** "What would happen if . . . Have you tried . . . Do you think you might . . . ?"
- 10. Show Interest:** Show the other person that you are interested in what he or she has to say.

In teaching listening skills, use direct instruction, modeling, and guided practice to teach each skill initially. For independent practice, move students into pairs. In pairs, one person describes a problem or situation from their while the other person uses listening skills. After five to ten minutes, switch roles. Figure 5 has a variety of cues or prompts that can be used for listening practice.

Figure 5. Cues for Listening Practice

1. Describe a time when something went wrong.
2. Describe a time when something went perfectly.
3. What seems to always get in the way of your being successful or doing what you want to do?
4. What kinds of things hurt your feelings? What kinds of things make you feel good?
5. Who has helped you? Who have you helped?
6. Describe the perfect friend. What traits does he or she have?
7. How are you different today than you were in the past?
8. What is something that you wonder about?
9. What do you doubt? What do you doubt about life, others, yourself, school, friends, or teachers?
10. Describe something you really like to do.
11. Describe something you do not like to do, but you know you have to.
12. Where would you like to be in the future? What would you like to be doing?
13. If you could fix something about your life or the way the world is, what would it be?
14. What are some changes you would like to make for yourself?
15. Describe some things that make you feel angry. What do you do when you are angry?
16. Describe some things that make you feel happy.
17. Describe at least two goals you would like to accomplish this year.
18. Describe somebody you admire or look up to.
19. What are some rules you think all humans should follow?
20. What do you believe? What do you believe about life, others, yourself, school, friends, or teachers?

Johnson, A. (2017). [*Teaching strategies for all teachers*](#). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.



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