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AUTHOR	Bell, Jennifer A.; King-Fitch, Catherine C.
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ABSTRACT

        This module, one in a series of performance-based
teacher education learning packages, focuses on a specific skill that
vocational educators need in order to integrate the teaching and
reinforcement of basic skills into their regular vocational
instruction. The purpose of the module is to give educators skill in
helping students improve their oral communication skills. It provides
practical techniques teachers can use (1) to assess their own skills
and those of their students, (2) to motivate students to improve
their skills, and (3) to create an environment conducive to skill
improvement. Introductory material provides terminal and enabling
objectives, a list of resources, and general information. The main
portion of the module includes three learning experiences based on
the enabling objectives. Each learning experience presents learning
activities with information sheets, checklists, samples, and case
studies. Optional activities are provided. Completion of these three
learning experiences should lead to achievement of the terminal
objective presented in the fourth and final learning experience. The
latter provides for a teacher performance assessment by a resource
person. An assessment form is included. (YLB)

Assist Students
in Improving Their
Oral Communication Skills
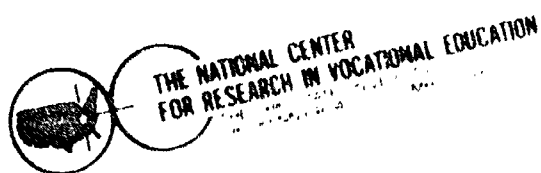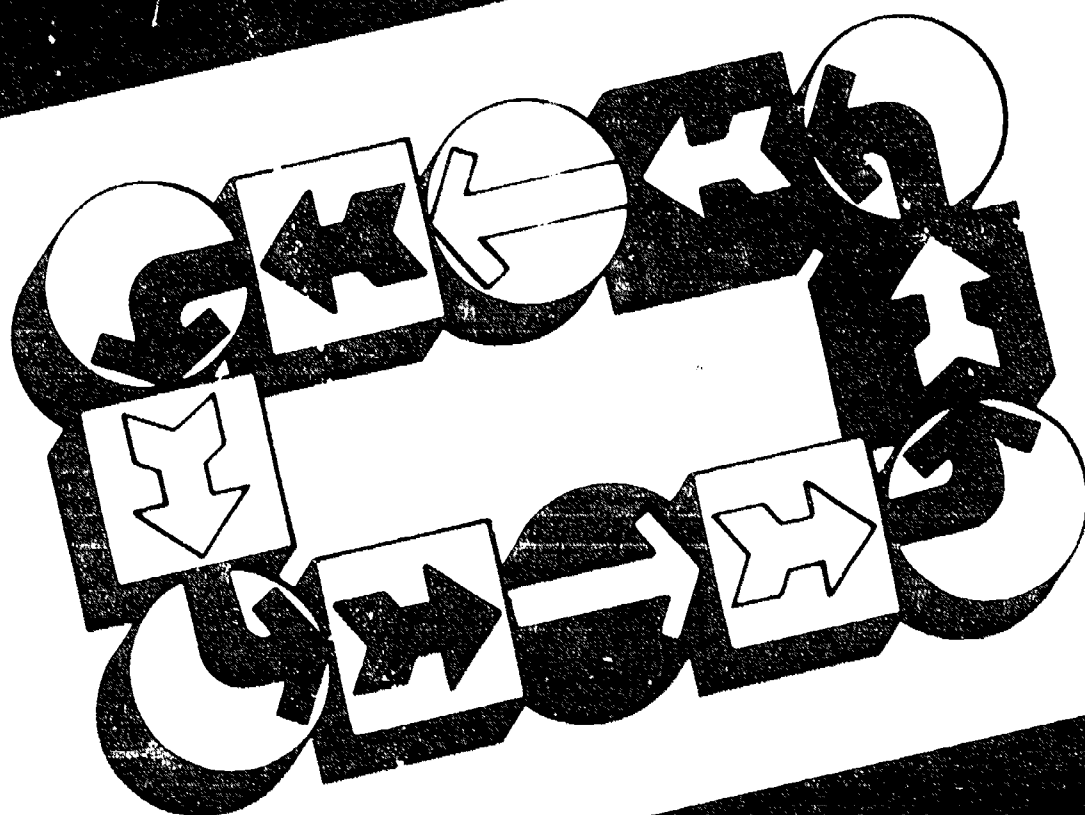
FOREWORD

This module is one of a series of 127 performance-based teacher education (PBTE) learning packages focusing upon specific professional competencies of vocational teachers. The competencies upon which these modules are based were identified and verified through research as being important to successful vocational teaching at both the secondary and postsecondary levels of instruction. The modules are suitable for the preparation of teachers and other occupational trainers in all occupational areas.

Each module provides learning experiences that integrate theory and application; each culminates with criterion-referenced assessment of the teacher's (instructor's, trainer's) performance of the specified competency. The materials are designed for use by teachers-in-training working individually or in groups under the direction and with the assistance of teacher educators or others acting as resource persons. Resource persons should be skilled in the teacher competencies being developed and should be thoroughly oriented to PBTE concepts and procedures before using these materials.

The design of the materials provides considerable flexibility for planning and conducting performance-based training programs for preservice and inservice teachers, as well as business-industry-labor trainers, to meet a wide variety of individual needs and interests. The materials are intended for use by universities and colleges, state departments of education, postsecondary institutions, local education agencies, and others responsible for the professional development of vocational teachers and other occupational trainers.

The PBTE curriculum packages in Category M—Assisting Students in Improving Their Basic Skills—are designed to enable vocational teachers and other occupational trainers to integrate the teaching and reinforcement of basic skills into their regular vocational instruction. The modules are based upon 85 teacher competencies identified as essential for vocational teachers to teach and to reinforce basic communication, computation, and employment skills as part of the ongoing occupational education program.

Many individuals and institutions have contributed to the research, development, testing, and revision of these significant training materials. Appreciation is extended to the following individuals who, as members of the DACUM analysis panel, assisted

National Center staff in the identification of the teacher competency statements upon which this category of modules is based: Milton Arnold, Lewis Cain, William Chandler, Jim Frazier, Jackie Marshall, Teresa Paige, Thomas Peterson, Marie Schemitz, and Nancy Underwood.

Field testing of the materials was carried out with the assistance of field-site coordinators, teacher educators, students, directors of staff development, and others at the following institutions: University of Alabama-Birmingham; Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute, New Mexico; University of Central Florida; Dupage Area Vocational Education Authority, Wisconsin; Holland College, P.E.I., Canada; Seminole Community College, Florida; University of Southern Maine; and Temple University, Pennsylvania.

Special recognition for major individual roles in the development of these materials is extended to the following National Center Staff: Lucille Campbell-Thrane, Associate Director, Development Division, and James B. Hamilton, Program Director, for leadership and direction of the project; Lois G. Harrington and Michael E. Wonacott, Program Associates, for module quality control; Cheryl M. Lowry, Research Specialist, for developing illustration specifications; Barbara Shea for art work; Adonia Simandjuntak, Graduate Research Associate, for assistance in field-test data summarization; and Catherine C. King-Fitch and Michael E. Wonacott, Program Associates, for revision of the materials following field testing.

Special recognition is also extended to the staff at AAVIM for their invaluable contributions to the quality of the final printed products, particularly to Donna Pritchett for module layout, design, and final art work, and to George W. Smith, Jr. for supervision of the module production process.

Robert E. Taylor
Executive Director
The National Center for Research in
Vocational Education

●MODULE
M-4

Assist Students in Improving Their Oral Communication Skills

Module M-4 of Category M—Assisting Students in Improving
Their Basic Skills
PROFESSIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION MODULE SERIES

Jennifer A. Bell, Graduate Research Associate
Catherine C. King-Fitch, Program Associate

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education
The Ohio State University

Key Program Staff:
James B. Hamilton, Program Director
Lois G. Harrington, Program Associate
Michael E. Wonacott, Program Associate
Catherine C. King-Fitch, Program Associate

INTRODUCTION

Your primary role as a vocational-technical teacher is to impart the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of your occupational specialty area to your students. In so doing, you provide them with the competencies they need to succeed in the world of work.

You impart these competencies by communicating material to your students—sending messages to them. These messages can be sent orally, visually, or in writing. In fact, the core of all social interaction consists of the sending and receiving of a variety of messages—verbally and nonverbally.

The success of your students—both now, in your program, and later, in the world of work—may depend in part on the effectiveness of their oral communication skills. Some students may not possess the oral communication skills they will need on the job. Some may not even be aware of the importance of having such skills.

Yet most students will eventually need to communicate with their supervisors and co-workers. Some may also need to communicate with the general public, in person or by phone.

Thus, to help ensure that students can succeed in your program and in the world of work, you may need to help them improve their oral communication skills. This does not have to be a difficult task. For one thing, if a student's skills are severely inadequate, there are specialists to whom students can be referred: English teachers, speech teachers, speech and hearing therapists, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL), and so on.

Beyond that, however, much of what you need to do to assist students in improving their oral communication skills can be done as part of your regular occupational instruction. Through your daily instructional activities, you can do a great deal to help students learn to communicate effectively in the kinds of situations they will encounter on the job.

This module is designed to give you skill in helping students improve their oral communication skills. It provides simple and practical techniques you can use (1) to assess your own skills and those of your students, (2) to motivate students to improve their skills, and (3) to create an environment conducive to skill improvement.

ABOUT THIS MODULE

Objectives

Enabling Objectives:

1. After completing the required reading, critique the performance of the teachers described in given case studies in assisting students in improving their oral communication skills (Learning Experience I).

2. After assessing your own oral communication skills, develop a plan for improving those skills as needed (Learning Experience II).

3. For a simulated classroom or laboratory situation, develop a plan for assisting students in improving their oral communication skills (Learning Experience III).

Prerequisites

The modules in Category M are not designed for the prospective teacher with no prior training and/or experience. They assume that you have achieved a minimal level of content knowledge in your occupational specialty and skill in the core teacher competencies of instructional planning, execution, and evaluation. They then build on or expand that knowledge and skill level, specifically in terms of assisting students in improving their basic skills.

Resources

A list of the outside resources that supplement those contained within the module follows. Check with your resource person (1) to determine the availability and the location of these resources, (2) to locate additional references in your occupational specialty, and (3) to get assistance in setting up activities with peers or observations of skilled teachers, if necessary. Your resource person may also be contacted if you have any difficulty with directions or in assessing your progress at any time.

Learning Experience I

Optional

Reference: Anderson, Joann Romeo; Eisenberg, Nora; Holland, John; Weiner, Harvey S.; and Rivera-Kron, Carol. Integrated Skills Reinforcement: Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening across the Curriculum. New York, NY: Longman, 1983.

Reference: Troyka, Lynn Quitman, and Nudelman, Jerrold. Taking Action: Writing, Reading, Speaking, and Listening through Simulation-Games. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

Oral presentations that you can observe and critique.

Peers with whom you can observe and critique oral presentations for the purpose of comparing and discussing evaluation results.

Learning Experience II

Required

A peer with whom you can conduct a debate for the purpose of assessing your oral communication skills.

Videotape equipment for taping, reviewing, and evaluating your oral communication skills. If videotape equipment is not available, you may ask a peer or your resource person to observe the debate and evaluate your oral communication skills.

Learning Experience III

Optional

Curricular materials (e.g., course outlines, courses of study, competency lists, curriculum guides) to use in developing a plan for improving students' oral communication skills.

Learning Experience IV

Required

An actual teaching situation in which you can assist students in improving their oral communication skills.

A resource person to assess your competency in assisting students in improving their oral communication skills.

General Information

For information about the general organization of each performance-based teacher education (PBTE) module, general procedures for its use, and terminology that is common to all the modules, see About Using the National Center's PBTE Modules on the inside back cover. For more in-depth information on how to use the modules in teacher/trainer education programs, you may wish to refer to three related documents:

The Student Guide to Using Performance-Based Teacher Education Materials is designed to help orient preservice and inservice teachers and occupational trainers to PBTE in general and to the PBTE materials.

The Resource Person Guide to Using Performance-Based Teacher Education Materials can help prospective resource persons to guide and assist preservice and inservice teachers and occupational trainers in the development of professional teaching competencies through use of the PBTE modules. It also includes lists of all the module competencies, as well as a listing of the supplementary resources and the addresses where they can be obtained.

The Guide to the Implementation of Performance-Based Teacher Education is designed to help those who will administer the PBTE program. It contains answers to implementation questions, possible solutions to problems, and alternative courses of action.
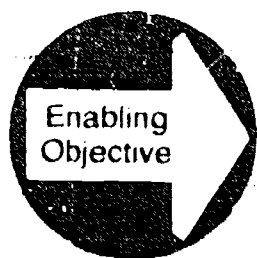
6

Learning Experience I

Enabling Objective

After completing the required reading, critique the performance of the teach-ers described in given case studies in assisting students in improving their oral communication skills.

Activity 1

You will be reading the information sheet, Assisting Students In Improving Their Oral Communication Skills, pp. 6–23.

Optional Activity 2
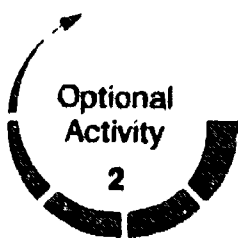
You may wish to read one or both of the following supplementary references: Anderson et al., *Integrated Skills Reinforcement*; and/or Troyka and Nudel-man, *Taking Action*.

Optional Activity 3
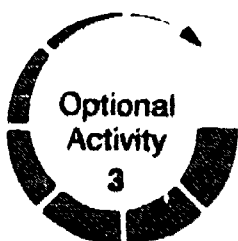
You may wish to identify opportunities to listen to and assess oral presenta-tions. You could choose to work with peers, assessing an oral presentation and then comparing your results.

Activity 4
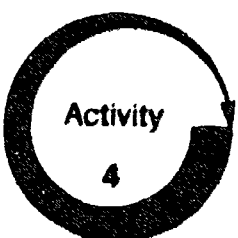
You will be reading the Case Studies, pp. 25–28, and critiquing the perfor-mance of the teachers described.

Feedback 5
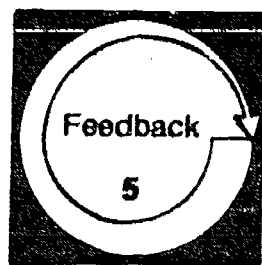
You will be evaluating your competency in critiquing the teacher's perfor-mance in assisting students in improving their oral com.nunication skills by comparing your completed critiques with the Model Critiques, pp. 29–32.

5

Activity

1

For information on the basic elements of oral communication and strategies you can use in helping students improve their oral communication skills, read the following information sheet.

ASSISTING STUDENTS IN IMPROVING THEIR ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Oral communication is a basic skill, central to human interaction. It is as basic a skill as reading and writing. In fact, most people—including students—spend the majority of their communication time speaking and listening, rather than reading and writing.

Most individuals need communication skills to succeed in their careers and in their personal lives. On the job, effective communication is important to workers and employers alike. For an employer, the success of the business often depends on the ability of workers to communicate with customers, peers, and or supervisors.

Communication is equally important to workers. In many occupations (e.g., receptionist, telephone operator, or salesperson), effective oral communication skills are a prerequisite for entry into the occupation.

Effective oral communication skills are also usually a prerequisite for advancement in the occupation. For example, in order to be promoted to middle- or top-level management positions in almost any organization, workers need to have highly developed oral communication skills.

Many instructors acknowledge that communication skills are important to personal and career success and, as such, should be part of the occupational curriculum. Thus, in some service areas such as marketing and distributive education, instructors traditionally have taught students how to communicate effectively as part of their vocational training. Likewise, the development of students' communication skills is often an integral part of vocational student organization activities.

In fact, the need to help students improve their oral communication skills is not confined to a few selected service areas. All students in all specialties can benefit from receiving assistance in improving their oral communication skills.

There is considerable evidence that helping students improve their oral communication skills can be accomplished in relatively simple ways. Current research suggests that students may have communication problems because they have not developed a repertoire of appropriate communication responses. In other words, students may fail to communicate effectively simply because they don't know what to say in a given situation.

Therefore, you can help students develop oral skills by teaching them the kinds of oral responses they will need for specific situations on the job. As an expert practitioner in your area, you should be knowledgeable about (1) the types of situations in which your students will need to express themselves orally and (2) the responses that are most appropriate.

8

The answer is that you are **not** expected to provide students with in-depth instruction in classes devoted entirely to oral communication skills. But you will find many opportunities to integrate oral communication instruction into your technical instruction.

For example, while students are learning welding or horticulture skills, they can also be learning the oral communication skills they will need on the job. If you regard your program content as providing the **context** in which oral communication instruction takes place, then working on oral communication skills will be an integral and relevant part of your classroom activities.

To assist students successfully in improving their oral communication skills, you will first need to **understand what is involved in oral communication.**

Second, you need to **assess your own oral communication skills** to be sure that you can both serve as a model of proper communication and teach the needed skills. Your assessment should involve measuring your present level of skills against a set of communication skills known to be necessary for your occupational specialty.

Third, you need to **assess students' oral communication skills.** You need to tailor your instruction not only to the communication skills required in the occupation but also to students' present levels of proficiency in those skills. Clearly, you must first determine what those proficiency levels are before you can plan how to improve them.

Fourth, you need to **create an appropriate environment** in which to facilitate learning and effect changes in students' oral communication patterns. As part of this environment, you will need to be sensitive, motivating, and accepting of individual differences.

Finally, you need to **use appropriate instructional techniques** for improving students' oral communication skills. The techniques you use will depend on the specific skills your students need, their present proficiency levels, and their learning styles and needs.

Let's look at each of these five elements in greater detail!

Your Role

As a vocational-technical teacher, you may serve in many roles and capacities. You counsel, you supervise, and you evaluate. However, your primary role is to help your students acquire technical knowledge and develop technical skills. Your main tool for doing so is communication in all its forms—listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Just as you rely heavily on communication to perform **your** task (that of instruction), students preparing to enter the world of work need communication skills to perform **their** jobs—now as students, and later, as workers. As you teach the specific technical skills needed in your service area, you also need to be sure that your students will be able to communicate with employers, customers, or co-workers on the job.

You may be thinking that you barely have enough time to teach the technical skills of the occupation. How, you may wonder, are you also going to find time to teach oral communication skills?

Understanding Oral Communication Skills
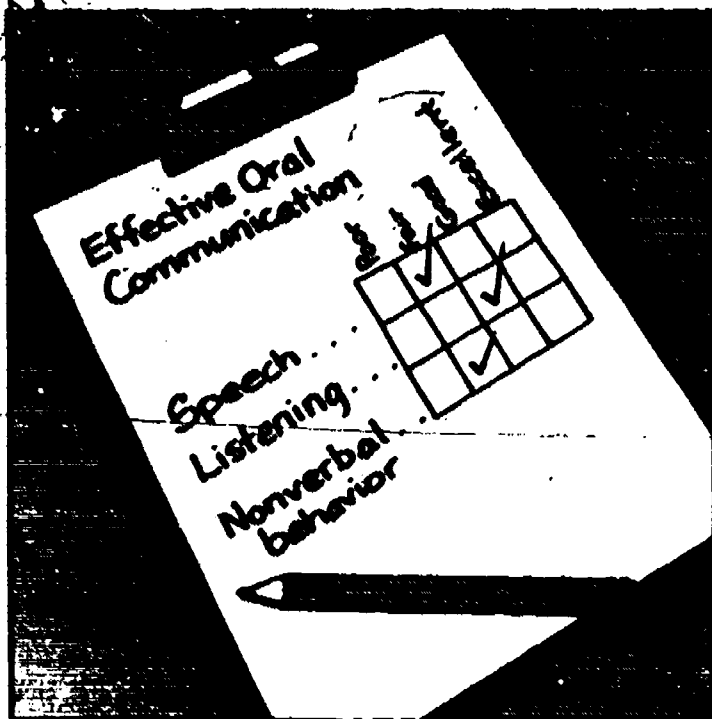
There are three major aspects of oral communication: speaking, listening, and nonverbal behavior. Effective oral communication requires both the speaker and the listener to be actively involved in the event. Often in the process of communicating, people switch roles, sometimes being the speaker and sometimes being a listener. Thus, one needs to be both a good speaker and a good listener for effective oral communication to occur.

In addition, both the speaker and the listener engage in nonverbal behavior—gestures, facial expressions, posture, and so on. The speaker's nonverbal behavior provides clues about the degree of his or her self-confidence, sincerity, and interest in the topic. The listener's nonverbal behavior indicates his or her level of interest, understanding, and attention to what is being said.

Speaking

Speech serves many functions. People use speech to provide information, to give instructions, to influence others, to get a point across, and so on. They also use speech to fulfill job obligations, such as talking to supervisors, customers, or co-workers.

To determine whether a particular message is likely to arrive intact, it is important to examine both the **substance** of the message and the **manner** in which the message is delivered. These two aspects of speech overlap, of course, and affect each other.

For example, if what Jason says is inaccurate or illogical, it won't matter how eloquent he is in expressing his thoughts. On the other hand, if Angela's

message is well thought out and logical but her pronunciation is unintelligible, her listeners still won't get the message. And if Fran's message is sound and his enunciation is flawless but he talks over the audience's heads, he will be an ineffective speaker.

Let's take a look at some of the elements of speaking you will need to consider in helping students to improve their oral communication skills.

Accuracy. The content of the message—the information given—must be correct. Are the facts accurate and up-to-date? Is the right terminology being used? Communicating a message may be difficult if the most appropriate words or phrases are not used.

Another aspect of being accurate is to provide information that is free of bias or prejudice. In expressing a personal opinion, for example, it is important for the speaker to explain beforehand that what he or she is about to say is a personal opinion and not a statement of fact.

Completeness. Another important aspect to consider is completeness—whether statements or questions express complete thoughts so that there is no doubt in the listeners' minds about what is intended. Are the listeners given the whole picture—enough so that they can really understand?

Are all sentences finished? Some people, for example, have a habit of starting a new sentence before they've finished the previous one. Or they stop in the middle of what they are saying to interject a comment or anecdote and then never finish what they were saying originally.

An audience cannot read the speaker's mind, so the speaker needs to express him/herself in complete thoughts. Being complete means organizing one's thoughts carefully beforehand and arranging one's facts and ideas in a logical, coherent sequence.

Organization. How people organize and sequence their thoughts depends on what they have to say. If they are telling a story, they might use time sequence to arrange their facts logically. Thus, someone might say, "At five-thirty, Tom arrived at the plant. He spent one hour checking the equipment to make sure it was in working order before the rest of the workers arrived at seven."

Time sequence is also appropriate when describing a procedure, such as baking a cake. A logical, step-by-step order could be used (e.g., obtaining a suitable recipe, locating the required ingredients, reading and following the directions carefully, and so on).

10

In other instances, logic and supporting arguments can be used to get a point of view across. First a point of view must be selected. That is, a decision must be made to agree or disagree with the argument. Then specific facts or details must be provided to support the point of view—arranged, perhaps, in order of importance.

Specificity. Being specific involves avoiding use of vague or general terms that may be misinterpreted by the listeners. One way to check the level of specificity of a statement is to test it using the "five Ws"—who, what, when, where, and why.

For example, consider the statement, "Nobody ever turns off the machines around here." Using the "five Ws," it is clear that the statement is singularly vague. Who? Nobody. When? Ever. Where? Around here. Why? No indication. Only the "what" is clear: machines are not turned off.

A more specific way of expressing the same thought would be to say, "Ted, Marie, and Pete, you did not turn off your machines before going out on break." By being more specific, the speaker helps to ensure that the message is received by the intended audience and that its content is unmistakable.

Being specific also applies to making sweeping statements or generalizations that are not supported by facts. For example, it is wise to avoid using such phrases as *everybody knows* or *all citizens nowadays*. Such phrases introduce generalizations that are rarely true.

Appropriateness. For a message to be received intact, it must also be appropriate for the intended audience. For example, the listener must be able to understand the vocabulary used. If the listener is not familiar with a particular word, the message can be lost unless the word is defined or another word, with which the listener is familiar, is used instead.

Similarly, the level of language used should be appropriate for the audience. What is appropriate depends to some extent on the situation and the audience. In addressing a prospective employer, for example, an individual will probably choose somewhat different words—perhaps more formal—than when talking to friends.

Conciseness. Another important speaking skill is being concise—that is, brief and to the point. Speech that is full of unnecessarily long or detailed explanations is likely to bore the listeners. Bored listeners usually stop listening. Consider, for example, the following long-winded statement:

We are wondering whether sufficient time has elapsed so that you are at the present juncture in a position to indicate to us whether or not favorable action has been taken concerning our request for more machines for the welding shop.

Effective speakers get directly to the point—they **give only the essential information.** The essence of the previous statement, for example, could be expressed more simply and in fewer words, as follows:

Are you now able to act on our request for more machines for the welding shop?

Speech can also seem wordy and imprecise if presented in a roundabout way. To avoid this, it is important to **be direct** and express thoughts simply. For example, instead of saying, "it is thought that" or "such an event would lead one to believe," one can simply say, "I think."

One way to cut down unnecessary verbiage is to **replace long phrases with shorter phrases** that mean the same thing. For example:

in view of the fact that	since, because
for the purpose of	for, to
along the lines of	like
in the event that	if
despite the fact that	although

Very often, roundabout expressions are used by people who are trying to avoid committing themselves to a point of view. Good speakers are never afraid to make a commitment. They simply ensure that they have facts or specific details to support their opinions. In fact, by speaking directly and clearly, they generally succeed in getting their messages across more effectively.

Correct grammar. Correct grammar—like a tidy shop—may be taken for granted and go unnoticed. But poor grammar—like a cluttered, unsafe work area—can stick out like a sore thumb.

When poor grammar is used, the message received may be clear. However, it is probably not the message the speaker wished to send. A few instances of "he don't" or "we ain't" can jangle listeners' ears enough to make them doubt the speaker's credibility. For a speaker who is trying to sway an audience, secure a job, obtain a promotion, or the like, this can be fatal.

Pronunciation. Correct pronunciation is another important part of effective speaking. A speaker who runs sounds together or omits sounds or syllables is generally hard to understand. For example:

Wham Igonnado nexsairdy? Ohdunno—probly jusidahome asuzhel.

Would a listener know that meant: "What am I going to do next Saturday? Oh I don't know—probably just sit at home as usual"? Speech that sounds like this is not only hard to understand but generally makes a poor impression on the listeners as well. Good speakers speak slowly, separate their words, and pronounce all the syllables as naturally as they can.

Another common pronunciation problem is that of giving vowels and consonants the wrong sound. For example, a speaker may have a tendency to say "git" instead of "get" or "dese" rather than "these." This kind of pronunciation may be acceptable in very informal settings. However, to make a good impression, effective speakers strive for correct pronunciation.

Practice is crucial to improving pronunciation habits. The aim is not to sound overly precise or artificial. It is equally annoying to listen to a speaker who gives each syllable an exaggerated pronunciation.

Good speakers have pronunciation habits that are neither sloppy nor stilted. They have adopted acceptable **standard** speech. For example, anchor persons for local or network news broadcasts are generally considered to be models of acceptable pronunciation.

Phrasing. Phrasing is very important in getting the meaning across to listeners. Effective speakers, who use correct phrasing, do a few simple things. They pause when they have completed a thought. They raise and lower their voices at appropriate intervals. And they stress important points by speaking more distinctly and slowly.

A speaker who does not distinguish between thoughts while speaking may end up with something like the following:

Thenlwentintomyclassbutlhadforgottenmy lessonplansandlwentbacktogetthembutl sawTomrememberTomhetaughtthe eighthgradeclasslastyear.

Without appropriate pauses or changes in pitch and tone, words can lose much of their meaning for the listener.

Pitch. The pitch of a speaker's voice also influences the impact he or she has on listeners, as well as the image they have of the speaker. Admittedly, it is difficult to change the natural voice pitch. However, it is important to be aware of how voice pitch may affect others.

For example, a person with a high-pitched voice may sound excitable, or nervous, or unsure of him/herself. Such people can often improve their speaking effectiveness by speaking more slowly, as well as lowering their voices a little.

Similarly, someone with a very deep voice may seem to be mumbling, because it is difficult to distinguish the sounds being made. These people need to try to enunciate as clearly as possible when they speak, consciously raising and lowering their voices to avoid producing a monotone.

Finally, some people speak too loudly or too softly. Listeners must be able to hear what is being said without having to strain to do so. At the same time, there is no need to speak to someone 1 foot away as if he or she were standing 50 feet away. Volume of speech must be adjusted to fit the needs of the situation and the audience.

Nonverbal Behavior

Another aspect of oral communication that can greatly affect a person's success in communicating with others is nonverbal behavior. Nonverbal behavior encompasses all the ways, besides words, that messages are sent. It includes some of the ways we have already discussed, such as pitch and phrasing—sometimes called paralanguage.

Nonverbal behavior also includes **body language**—facial expressions, posture, and gestures.

Nodding one's head in agreement, yawning, frowning, and smiling are all nonverbal devices that can communicate a message. Body language can communicate such messages as interest, enthusiasm or self-confidence.

Experts have suggested that if there is a discrepancy between a speaker's verbal and nonverbal behavior, the listener is apt to respond to the nonverbal behavior. It is, therefore, very important that a speaker's nonverbal and verbal messages be consistent.

To create a positive impression on listeners, a speaker's nonverbal and verbal skills must both be effective. Consequently, good speakers assess the nonverbal aspects of oral communication just as carefully as they examine the words or grammar they use.

Good speakers maintain eye contact with listeners. They maintain a relaxed and comfortable posture. They focus attention without making distracting gestures or motions, such as shuffling or fidgeting. They use gestures to emphasize or illustrate what they are saying. Sometimes, for example, they may point a finger, make a sweeping motion with their arms, or touch someone to clarify a point.

Effective speakers also avoid defensive or intimidating gestures, such as staring fixedly (or folding their arms across their chests). Rather, they suggest a friendly yet courteous attitude toward others by maintaining eye contact, smiling, nodding, or using other appropriate gestures.

11

Listening

'/ou may recall that, for communication to be effective, both listener and speaker must be actively involved in the event. Active listening is important, because it is through this two-way interaction that the speaker knows whether the listener has received and understood the message that was sent.

Active listening involves four elements: paying careful attention to the speaker, responding actively in the listening role, being sensitive to the speaker as a person, and being open-minded and fair.

Paying attention. In order to truly pay attention, the listener must concentrate on the speaker and on what is being said. A good listener does not daydream or prepare a response while the speaker is talking.

A person who listens with only "half" an ear"—while also watching or listening to something else going on in the room—gives the impression that he or she is not very interested in what the speaker is saying. Furthermore, by listening only superficially, that person is in danger of missing the real message the speaker is trying to get across.

Responding actively. Learning to be an active listener involves responding to the speaker both verbally and nonverbally. Active listeners nod or shake their heads at appropriate points or ask the speaker to clarify points they did not understand.

Like good speakers, good listeners maintain eye contact. They avoid turning their backs to the speaker. They stand as close to the speaker as possible without appearing too aggressive. Finally, they maintain a relaxed posture and avoid making distracting motions or gestures, such as shuffling their feet, nervously pulling at their hair, or biting their nails.

Being sensitive. Some people transmit an attitude of "convince me that I should listen to you." Good listeners, however, are receptive listeners. They convey—verbally and nonverbally—that they are interested both in the message being sent and in the sender of that message. They gain the confidence, trust, and respect of the speaker by communicating that they are actively and sympathetically listening.

Being open-minded. Bias is a major barrier to effective listening. If a person approaches a speaker from a biased point of view, he or she may tend to slant what is said or to react illogically. Taking a biased or prejudiced point of view can also cause the listener to pay selective attention to what is said. That is, the listener may hear only what he or she wants to hear and may miss or misinterpret valuable information.

Bias can relate not only to the substance of what is said but also to the speaker as a person. For example, a listener may have a biased attitude about a speaker's style of dress, age, sex, race, or ethnic background.

It is true that personal biases are difficult to erase. However, bias impairs the listener's ability to receive and evaluate the information being communicated. Thus, good listeners try to be as open as they can.

12   14

Assessing Your Own Skills

As a vocational-technical instructor, you need to set an example—to serve as a role model—of appropriate oral communication skills. You constantly send messages to your students. You not only instruct them in technical content, but you also send them messages about acceptable communication patterns.

Some experts suggest that a teacher's own oral communication may be the most important influence he or she has on students. Consider, for example, the following statements:

- Joe, that worksheet you did for me is full of mistakes, as usual. Why can't you pay more attention in class so you could get it right for a change?

- You did a pretty good worksheet for me, Joe, but it did have a few mistakes. Why don't we get together for a few minutes and work on some of the problems you seem to be having?

The tone of the first statement is derogatory and likely to humiliate the student and put him on the defensive. The second, on the other hand, is constructive, helpful, and encouraging. To be an effective role model, you need to practice what you preach. You need to show students the same courtesy and consideration in your oral communication that you expect them to display on the job.

In addition, you need to serve as a role model of correct and appropriate speech. If your own speech is sloppy, if it is of lower quality than will be expected of your students on the job, then you will not be a very effective role model. Teaching by example is not just one effective approach to improving students' oral communication skills, it is probably the most effective one.

How can you determine whether you can set a good example? One very effective way is to assess your oral communication skills—your speaking skills, listening skills, and nonverbal behavior—as objectively as you can.

This assessment process might seem somewhat intimidating to you. However, you should not feel threatened by the possibility of discovering that you may have some weaknesses in oral communication. Weaknesses, once uncovered, can be corrected. Furthermore, remember that you can conduct your assessment privately. Even if you ask colleagues to assist you, the results can be kept confidential.

An additional benefit of assessment is that the process may make you more sensitive to the fears your students may have about their communication skills.

There are a number of techniques you can use to assess your oral communication skills. One technique—which is economical in terms of time, effort, and money—is to make an **audiotape.** You could, for example, record yourself telling a story or presenting one of your lessons to an imaginary audience.

You can then replay the tape as often as necessary to make your assessment. By listening to the audiotape, you can easily assess such speech elements as pitch and phrasing. Is your voice pitched at a pleasant level—neither too high or too low? Do you pause at appropriate times, or do you pause too much and too long, with great "ers" and "uhs" breaking up the continuity of your presentation?

Perhaps you have heard your voice on tape before. If not, most people find that they never realized exactly how they sound.

You can also try to assess other speech elements: accuracy, completeness, organization, specificity, appropriateness, conciseness, correct grammar, pronunciation, and completeness. But self-assessment has its limitations. If your speaking skills are weak, you may not recognize it.

You may sound perfectly okay to you—which is why you speak that way in the first place. If you knew that your grammar and pronunciation were incorrect, you'd have corrected them long ago. You may listen and hear a well-organized and concise presentation, geared at the right level—and you may be wrong.

Thus, it is usually best to seek a second opinion—or more. You can enlist the help of a speech instructor or a colleague or friend who is an effective speaker. This person can listen to your performance and give you an assessment on the spot.

To assess your nonverbal behavior and active listening skills, audiotape clearly is not the best device. You can assess your own nonverbal behavior to a certain extent by making a presentation in front of a mirror.

A more effective, but less private, technique is to ask an observer to assess your performance in making a presentation to a group of students. Or you can make a presentation to peers and ask them to evaluate your oral communication skills. Or you can videotape one or more of your lesson presentations for assessment at a later time.

If you videotape a presentation, you can then play back the tape so that you can self-assess or get feedback from others concerning the adequacy of your oral communication skills (e.g., Did you know that you twisted your ring when you spoke? Did you know that you never look directly at students when they talk?).

All three aspects of oral communication—speaking, listening, and nonverbal behavior—can be evaluated using a videotape in which you interact with students.

Assessment, of course, is only the first step. Once you are sure that you have an **objective** assessment of your oral communication skills, the next step is to take whatever measures are necessary to remedy any identified weaknesses.

If, for example, you find that your pronunciation is less than perfect, you could tape a segment of the evening news on one tape, transcribe it, and then tape your reading of the same material on a separate tape. By comparing the two readings, you should be able to hear the differences. You can then practice until your pronunciation is more nearly like that of the "standard."

If grammar is the problem, a basic grammar book is a good place to start. Any English teacher would probably be happy to suggest a text you could use.

Other identified weaknesses, such as poor organization, may indicate that you need to plan your oral presentations more carefully—or think before you speak. If, on the other hand, phrasing and pitch are the problem, practice is indicated. Again, using an ordinary tape recorder, you can do a great deal to secure the kind of practice that can help you improve your oral communication skills.

Remember, as a vocational-technical instructor, oral communication skills are critical to your instructional effectiveness. However, what we are concerned about in this module is the oral communication skills of your **students.** And what is important in that regard is the following: you cannot expect to improve students' skills if your own are in need of improvement.

As mentioned previously, you will not be expected to provide intensive remediation for students whose oral communication skills are weak. Instead, you will be incorporating skill improvement within the vocational-technical curriculum.

Perhaps the most effective tool you have, therefore, is your example. If your oral communication skills are good, the likelihood is that students will (1) follow your example, and (2) recognize that, indeed, such skills are important in the occupation you represent.

As you conduct your assessment procedures, you will probably find it helpful to use an oral communication checklist to focus your attention—and that of any other assessors—on the critical areas to be assessed. A checklist also provides a place for the diagnoses to be recorded. This helps to make the process as objective as possible. You can use a checklist like that presented in sample 1, or you can develop one of your own.

ORAL COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

Directions: Place a check (√) in the YES or NO box next to each item to indicate whether or not the person being evaluated meets that criterion for good oral communication. If an item is not applicable, place a check in the N/A box.

Name _____

Date _____

	N/A	YES	NO
In speaking, the person being evaluated:			
1. presents information that is accurate, up-to-date, and free of bias	☐	☐	☐
2. uses complete sentences	☐	☐	☐
3. finishes one thought before starting another	☐	☐	☐
4. avoids straying from the main point or digressing	☐	☐	☐
5. presents facts and ideas coherently and in a logical sequence	☐	☐	☐
6. avoids use of vague language or sweeping statements	☐	☐	☐
7. uses appropriate, correct vocabulary and explains new terms	☐	☐	☐
8. expresses ideas clearly, simply, and directly, using short manageable sentence constructions	☐	☐	☐
9. enunciates clearly and avoids running words together or mumbling	☐	☐	☐
10. pronounces words correctly and avoids exaggerated pronunciation	☐	☐	☐
11. uses correct grammar	☐	☐	☐
12. pauses in appropriate places	☐	☐	☐
13. controls his or her voice so that it rises and falls appropriately and emphasizes important points	☐	☐	☐
14. controls the pitch of his or her voice so it is neither too high nor too low	☐	☐	☐
15. controls the volume of his or her voice so it is neither too loud nor too soft	☐	☐	☐
16. uses nonverbal behavior appropriately, including:			
a. using body language (e.g., gestures, posture, facial expressions) to re-inforce the spoken message	☐	☐	☐
b. using paralanguage (e.g., tone of voice, inflection) that was consistent with the spoken message	☐	☐	☐
c. using body language to project an appropriate image (e.g., enthusiasm, self-confidence)	☐	☐	☐
d. maintaining eye contact with listeners	☐	☐	☐

Assessing Students' Skills

In your classes. you are likely to encounter students with varying degrees of oral communication competence Before you can begin to help them improve their oral communication skills. you need to determine their present levels of proficiency Then you will be better able to determine the type and amount of assistance your students need

As a vocational-technical instructor. you should know from reviewing occupational analyses and from your own experience exactly what oral communication skills students will need to enter and succeed in the occupation for which they are training You should also be aware of each student's career aspirations

It is in relation to these two sets of information — occupational requirements and career goals that you need to assess students' oral communication skills. That is what oral skills does the student have in relation to what he or she needs?

Your assessment should focus on the same three areas you addressed in assessing your own oral communication skills speaking. listening, and nonverbal behavior This need not be a difficult task if the assessment techniques you use (1) are practical in terms of time and cost and (2) allow you to closely examine the critical aspects of oral communication.

For example. to assess speaking skills you can ask students to give **short talks.** These could be talks related to the course content. which are presented to the whole class Or students could make their presentations to you on a one-to-one basis. while other students are completing an assignment. They could discuss a familiar topic for five minutes perhaps their reasons for enrolling in your program A short talk on a familiar subject is easy to prepare. and students usually feel more at ease talking on a subject they know well.

You could also devise **role-playing situations** or **simulations** relevant to your vocational-technical area Such situations can be used to assess students' oral communication skills in all three areas. For example. you could ask students to assume that they are talking on the phone to a prospective customer or talking to their job supervisor about a problem in the department.

In addition. **observation** is an appropriate technique for assessing body language and listening skills You need not interrupt your regular program activities to observe students communicating with you or with each other

Whatever strategy you use for assessing students' proficiency levels, you will need specific criteria related to the occupational requirements and the students' chosen career goals. And you will need a means of recording the results. A checklist like the one you used to assess your own skills (see sample 1) can be adapted for use with students.

Then, as students make oral presentations, you can use copies of the checklist to assess each student's performance. Or, during a presentation, you might assess only those aspects that must be observed (e.g., listening skills, nonverbal behavior). By also audiotaping the presentation, you could then evaluate the speaking skills more carefully at a later time.

Or you could videotape each presentation for later review and assessment. Taping has the advantage of allowing you to replay the tape as often as needed to make accurate and objective judgments.

Creating an Appropriate Environment

Students are more likely to improve their oral communication skills if there is a supportive atmosphere—one of openness and trust. To grow and improve, students need to feel accepted and free to express themselves orally without fear of ridicule or destructive criticism.

There are three main elements involved in creating a learning environment that is conducive to the improvement of oral communication skills: being sensitive, motivating students, and accommodating individual differences.

Being Sensitive

Some students may feel threatened by your attempts to get them to speak more clearly, use correct grammar, or use less slang or "filler" language ("like . . . you know"). Some may resent your efforts to change what they may consider to be an essential part of their behavior—of who they are.

Or students may be anxious for other reasons. Perhaps they fear that their peers or family might ridicule them if they acquire a new manner of speech. They may even be afraid that they'll never be able to improve their speech—they may be afraid of failure.

To minimize students' anxieties, you should ensure that you correct the behavior rather than criticize the student. You should also be consistent in your treatment. If you correct one student, don't let similar errors slide in another student. Similarly, you should praise correct usage as well as correct improper usage. If you maintain a balanced approach in these ways, students are less likely to resent your efforts.

There is often an added benefit to using a sensitive approach. If you are understanding and patient with students, especially the less proficient, you may be able to eliminate signs of nervousness, tension, embarrassment, or antagonism that may mar students' efforts at oral communication.

You also need to be sensitive to the interplay of personalities in the classroom or lab. Find out who the informal leaders are and identify shy or withdrawn students. You can then use class leaders to help influence (e.g., through praise and support) those students who are hesitant about participating orally.

Similarly, it is important to involve shy or withdrawn students in class or lab activities. If you allow any student to feel alienated, that student will be even less likely to succeed in improving his or her oral communication skills. You need to be sensitive to indications of boredom or interest, confidence or insecurity.

By being aware of the human factors involved in your class or lab, you will be better able to provide the support students need to improve their oral communication skills. By being sensitive to classroom interaction and manipulating it skillfully, you can develop a relaxed, give-and-take atmosphere. Such an atmosphere is essential to the improvement of oral communication skill.

Motivating Students

It is very important to recognize that each student is an individual with unique needs, goals, and abilities. What will serve to motivate each student will also vary.

One thing motivating many (if not most) vocational-technical students is the desire to be employed in a particular occupational area. Therefore, to motivate these students effectively, you need to recognize the importance of relevance. The oral communication skills you want students to acquire must be relevant to their occupational needs. And students must understand why—in terms of future employment success—they need to improve their oral communication skills.

For example, a home economics teacher may have students who wish to be fabric specialists. An analysis of the occupation indicates that considerable proficiency in oral communication is required. The work entails communicating with customers in a variety of situations: helping customers select fabric and notions, giving them information about fabric care, handling customer complaints, and so on.

These oral communication requirements should be included in the student performance objectives that the teacher develops. In that way, both teacher and students know, in advance, the type and extent of oral communication skill required in the specific job for which the students are training.

Similarly, **reinforcement** plays a crucial role in encouraging students to adopt desired behaviors, skills, and attitudes. Students need to gain satisfaction from improving their oral communication skills. And the achievement should be rewarded in some individually meaningful way.

For example, some students perform well because they like the instructor. Or because they want to impress their friends in the class. Or because they want to please their parents. Or because it is important to their self-esteem to do well. To select appropriate reinforcement techniques (rewards), therefore, you must know what interests and motivates individual students.

One method of learning more about your students' interests, needs, values, and preferences is to administer an interest inventory. A very simple inventory is shown in sample 2. Counselors at your school or college may have other inventories that you can use. Or they may have results on file of interest inventories your students have completed previously.

Once you are aware of students' individual preferences, you can reward them for achieving the desired goal with something that they value or need.

For example, students with strong leadership needs could be allowed to organize a group debate or lead a panel discussion. Students with strong social needs could be allowed to work as a group rather than independently.

Accommodating Individual Differences

Students learn at different rates—some faster, some more slowly than others. Their present levels of skill in oral communication will vary from individual to individual. They also have different learning styles—different preferences concerning how they learn best or most easily. Some students learn most effectively by listening, some by viewing, some by touching, and so on.

In addition, within any vocational-technical service area, students will have different career goals. These varying goals will very likely involve the need for different types or levels of oral communication skills.

You need to respond to these individual differences insofar as possible. If you are teaching in an individualized, competency-based program, this should be a relatively easy task. Students will have individual training plans, and they can work at their own pace on individual activities designed to help them improve their oral communication skills. Such activities can be designed specifically with each student's needs, interests, abilities, and career goals in mind.

In a program that uses primarily large-group instruction, there are still opportunities for individualization. Without individualizing activities, you can still individualize your expectations—in a fair way. Assume students are making class presentations, for example. After each presentation, you would probably provide feedback concerning the occupationally related **content** of the presentation.

Later, then, you could meet individually with students to provide them with feedback concerning the quality of the presentation in terms of their **oral communication skills.** Your feedback at that point could be specifically geared to how much progress each student has made based on where he or she started and where he or she needs or wants to go.

If students need more help, you can suggest activities that they can complete, individually, to secure the help they need. These activities should be selected with learning style preferences in mind. For example, students who learn most effectively through the auditory channel may prefer activities involving audiotapes, role-playing, simulations, or films.

SAMPLE 2

NEEDS AND INTERESTS INVENTORY

Directions: For each pair of items in Part I, check (√) the one that interests you more or that you like better. Then answer the questions in Part II.

Part I:

1. Working with numbers _____
   Working with words _____

2. Working in groups _____
   Working alone _____

3. Writing _____
   Public speaking _____

4. Dealing with the public _____
   Dealing only with co-workers _____

5. Selling _____
   Purchasing _____

6. Traveling _____
   Office work _____

Part II:

1. List the things you like to do for fun or pleasure when you're not in school.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Explain briefly the type of job you'd like to have in five years.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

19

21

Using Appropriate Instructional Techniques

As a vocational-technical teacher, it is not your responsibility to develop units of instruction on oral communication. If you were to spend your time running pronunciation drills and grammar lessons, you would have little time left for technical content.

Rather, you should seek ways in which to improve students' oral communication skills as part of your regular vocational-technical instruction. The techniques you use should be aimed at three major goals for oral skills improvement:

- Increasing students' awareness of the role of oral communication in their careers and personal lives
- Providing opportunities for students to practice and improve their oral skills
- Making students more sensitive to the human elements of oral communication

Increasing Students' Awareness

Developing students' awareness of what occurs during the communication process can help them understand the relevance of oral communication to their careers and personal lives. Helping them understand what **should** happen during oral communication may also help to motivate them to improve their oral communication skills.

Assume, for example, that you are teaching a unit in which oral communication skills are very important (e.g., taking telephone messages, dealing with customers, explaining equipment needs to a farm-equipment supplier, soothing a patient). In that context, then, you can do two things.

First, you can provide students with specific examples of how oral communication is used on the job. Examples of situations in which good or bad oral communication affected an outcome can be very effective in showing the relevance and importance of oral communication to the students' own career goals.

From there, you can use those examples to briefly describe the process of oral communication. For example, you could explain that, during oral communication, messages are sent, received, and interpreted. The message received from the sender (speaker) is interpreted by the receiver (listener) to obtain its meaning. Messages can be distorted because of misinterpretation of meaning, incorrect pronunciation or grammar, lack of shared vocabulary, poor listening skills, or various other communication problems.
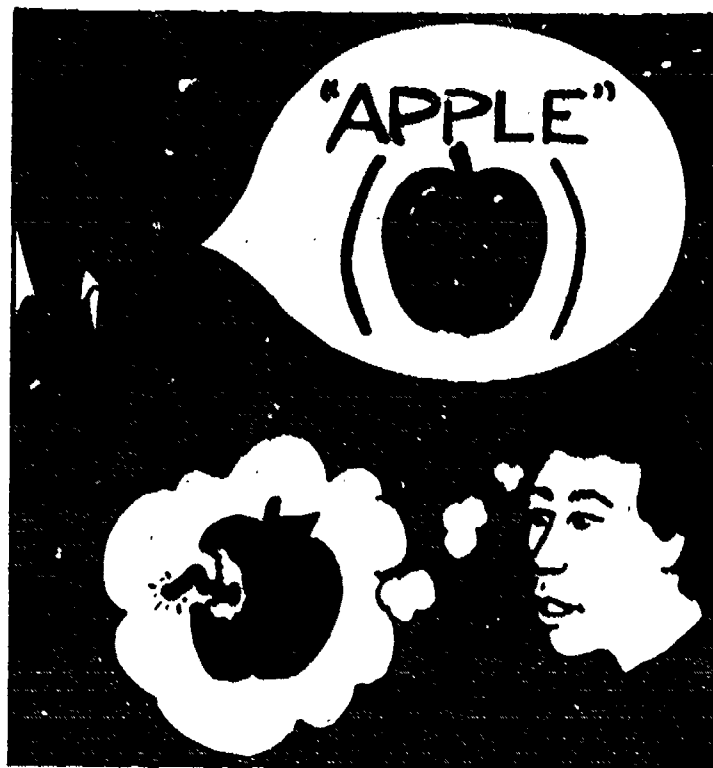
Finally, you can involve students in analyzing the situations you presented as bad examples to determine exactly how and where the communication process broke down. They can, in addition, analyze the good examples to determine what elements were present to make the communication process work. By being involved in such an analysis, students can become more aware not only of the process but of its importance to them.

Providing Instruction

A cognitive understanding of the nature, purpose, and importance of oral communication is not sufficient in itself. Students also need to apply the principles they learn. With a little thought, you can identify many opportunities to improve students' oral communication skills as part of your regular instruction.

A variety of techniques is available to you: having students make large- or small-group oral presentations; involving students in role-plays, simulations, and real-life situations; and providing samples of effective and ineffective oral communication techniques.

The results of the assessments you conducted initially will help to ensure that the instructional techniques you select are appropriate for the needs and competency levels of the students.

Oral presentations. Regardless of the occupations they wish to pursue, most students will benefit from the experience of speaking before a group, either individually or as part of a panel. There are many opportunities in every occupational program area for students to be involved in this way.

For example, a student who has special expertise in some technical skill can be asked to explain and demonstrate that skill to the class or to a small group of class members. Students who have completed individual or small-group projects can share their experiences by making oral presentations. Students can be asked to read different sources concerning a single topic and then share their findings through oral presentations.

Oral presentations are also usually an integral part of the activities of vocational student organizations. Students chair meetings, report on committee activities and in many other ways share information orally with the group. Helping students develop effective public speaking skills is a goal of many vocational student organizations. Gaining such skills can help students develop confidence as well as the ability to make clear, coherent, and concise oral presentations.

Providing these opportunities for practice is not sufficient, however. Students must receive feedback on their performance. Practice can't "make perfect" if students perform imperfectly and are left with the impression that what they did was fine. In that case, they will probably continue to repeat their mistakes—perhaps until poor performance becomes a firmly established habit.

Feedback can be provided on a large-group basis if the skill is occupationally related. For example, if marketing and distributive education students are learning to make sales presentations, it would be natural to evaluate them on their oral communication skills. Using a checklist of criteria to be met in the sales presentation, students could be evaluated both by the instructor and their peers. If the presentations are audiotaped or videotaped, students can later review the tape and evaluate their own performance as well.

Feedback can also be provided on an individual basis. This is particularly appropriate, as mentioned earlier, when the skill involved is not oral communication per se. For example, if a student is demonstrating a manipulative skill for the class, then the feedback provided in class should relate to the quality of the manipulative skill demonstration. Later, you could meet individually with that student to discuss the strengths of his or her oral skills and to point out (or, better still, to help the student identify) any areas needing improvement.

Role-plays, simulations, and real-life situations. Role-plays, simulations, and real-life situations can provide excellent opportunities for students to practice oral skills—at the same time they are learning the technical skills of the occupation. Office management skills, customer relations, sales techniques, telephone skills, patient interaction, and similar skills covered in a variety of occupational programs can be effectively taught using these techniques.

For example, students in a home economics class might be asked to participate in a **role-playing** situation involving an alterations specialist and a customer with a specified problem. Students could be paired off and allowed five or ten minutes each to role-play in front of the group. Group members could evaluate the performance of each employee, perhaps using a checklist.

Following each role-play, the group could provide feedback to the "alterations specialist" concerning the effectiveness of his or her oral communication skills. For example, did the alterations specialist greet the customer appropriately, determine the nature of the problem, explain to the customer what needed to be done to correct the problem, explain how much time the job would take, determine the cost and inform the customer, and so on?

Furthermore, was the specialist polite, considerate, sympathetic, and professional? Did he or she present an image of competence, as well as sensitivity, to the customer? Did the customer seem pleased with the way she or he was treated?

Role-plays can also be used to let students experience the difference between dealing with someone with good skills and someone with poor skills. For example, a student could be asked to role-play an angry customer with a legitimate complaint. The student could ther, be asked to explain that complaint three times, as follows:

- Once to a student role-playing an employee who responds only by mumbling senten e fragments in a low voice
- Once to a student role-playing an employee who responds to the customer's anger with anger
- Once to a student role-playing an articulate employee who responds with sympathy, patience, and unfailing courtesy

At the end of this experience, the "customer" should have a much deeper understanding of the effects on the "receiver" of different oral communication approaches. By walking in the customer's shoes, the student may begin to recognize the wisdom of the Golden Rule. He or she may be better able to see how essential good communication skills are to productive (and pleasant) human interactions.

Similarly, **simulations** are used in many areas to provide students with an opportunity to practice occupational skills, this time in a close-to-real job setting. In secretarial skills programs, for example, students may work in a simulated office situation. The lab is set up to resemble an office and "secretaries" are expected to perform as they would in a real office.

Oral skills can be built into such a simulation experience. In completing the "job assignment," students could be required to communicate with the boss, with co-workers, or with visitors to the office. Students could also simulate making and answering phone calls (e.g., responding to requests for information, ordering supplies, and so on).

Again, for the practice experience to be a learning experience, feedback must be provided. For example, in answering the phone, did the "secretaries" identify themselves appropriately; keep all calls brief; and express themselves clearly, completely, and concisely? If they needed to keep the caller on hold did they check back frequently to let the caller know that he or she had not been forgotten?

Students can also be given opportunities to practice using their oral communication skills in real-life situations. For example, if you have to call the business office to order supplies, you could allow students to assist you in doing these tasks. If students are involved in "live work," as is often the case in such programs as auto mechanics and cosmetology, this provides another opportunity for practice.

It can also provide students with a very real gauge of how effective their oral communication skills are. A student might perform nicely in a role-playing or simulated situaticn. Such situations can be somewhat predictable and controlled compared to real life. But a student who misleads, confuses, or upsets a real customer because of inadequate communication skills is likely to get a much clearer sense of how important those skills can actually be!

Samples of effective and ineffective communication. One way in which people learn is by copying. In general, for example, children whose parents speak English correctly will also tend to speak correctly—not because they learned the rules, but because they are repeating what they have heard.

Likewise, exposing students continually to models of effective oral communication increases the likelihood that they will learn to communicate effectively. Models can provide students with an ideal to aim for, as well as a gauge against which to measure their own efforts. As was mentioned earlier, one model students should be given is **you.** Your oral communication skills should be a daily example of what students should be working to achieve.

24

In addition, you may at times use **media** (e.g., films, audiotapes, videotapes) to introduce or present technical content. These same media, if carefully selected, can also provide models of effective oral communication. For this to occur, however, you must direct students' attention both to the content of the media and to the manner of presentation.

For example, following a film, instructors often ask a series of questions about the film's content to ensure that students have understood it. You could also include some questions concerning the narrator's speaking skills: pronunciation, phrasing, grammar, voice quality (e.g., pitch), and so on.

Or you may use **guest speakers** from your occupational area to provide instruction concerning a specific occupational skill or topic. By ensuring that guest speakers have good communication skills, you can provide students with appropriate models of effective oral communication skills as well. The fact that such people actually work in the occupation should go a long way toward convincing students that, in truth, good oral communication skills are important on the job.

By arranging to have a question-and-answer period following the speaker's presentation, you can also give students one more opportunity to practice their own oral communication skills.

Use of **negative examples** can also serve a purpose. For example, students can be asked to critique written scripts or specially developed videotapes illustrating job situations in which employees did not communicate effectively with others. By identifying the weaknesses, students can learn to recognize and avoid those same weaknesses in their own efforts to communicate.

Or, instead of employing your usual exemplary presentation style, you could make a short presentation with some built-in flaws. You could, for instance, nervously play with the chalk as you speak. You could add a good solid "you know" to the end of each sentence. You could gaze continually out the window instead of maintaining eye contact with students in the class.

Then, following the presentation, you could lead students in critiquing your performance and describing how the "flaws" made them feel. In all likelihood, many of them probably couldn't wait for the presentation to be over. They may not have heard much of what you said because the chalk tossing and "you knows" were so distracting. They may have felt alienated because you never looked them in the eyes.

Granted, these students may have witnessed other bad presentations. But they may never before have stopped to analyze **why** a presentation was unsatisfactory. By giving them the opportunity to identify both the flaws and their reactions to those flaws, you can help students develop a real desire not to commit those same "sins" themselves.

Increasing Students' Sensitivity

Many of the techniques already mentioned can help students to understand the subtle aspects of oral communication having to do with being sympathetic and understanding the needs of others. For example, a student who has made a presentation to an inattentive audience is probably much more aware of how important it is for listeners to respond appropriately by nonverbal means and to listen actively.

Similarly, a student who has dealt with an "inconsiderate customer" during a role-playing activity is probably acutely aware of how it feels to be on the receiving end of oral communication that is not courteous and kind—that criticizes the individual and not the performance.

Most important, if you wish to increase students' sensitivity, you must serve as a model of appropriate behavior yourself. And you must insist that students in your classes follow the standard you set.

Consider, for example, a teacher who ridicules students who make mistakes, making them feel even more foolish. Students in such an atmosphere will have every reason to believe that such behavior is acceptable. Worse still, they will probably learn not to expose themselves to the possibility of ridicule. They won't fail at improving their oral communication skills—because they won't try.

Then consider a teacher who is sensitive to the feelings of others and who encourages students to praise each other's work. The atmosphere created by such a teacher would be conducive to growth and improvement. Students could work together to achieve the oral communication skills they need to succeed, both in the class and on the job.

Optional Activity 2
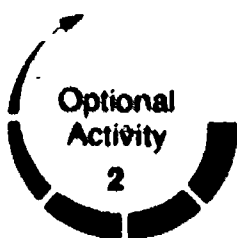
For additional information on improving oral communication skills, you may wish to read one or both of the following supplementary references: Anderson et al., *Integrate Skills Reinforcement*; and/or Troyka and Nudelman, *Taking Action*.

Integrated Skills Reinforcement is a clearly written, practical book that focuses on developing communication skills in the context of course work. Part 1 includes chapters on assessing students' speaking and listening skills. Part 3 provides strategies for encouraging students' effective use of those skills.

Taking Action presents six simulation-games and directions for using them to sharpen speaking, listening, and other communication skills.

Optional Activity 3

You may wish to identify opportunities to listen to and assess oral presentations. Such opportunities might include the following:

- Television or theater events
- Radio programs
- Political campaign speeches
- Lectures
- Sermons
- Presentations at meetings of civic, service, social, or parent-teacher organizations
- School assemblies or campus events
- Debates
- Other events in the school or community

You may choose to work with peers in completing this activity. In that case, you and your peers could assess the same presentation, compare your results, and discuss any differences in your assessments.

26

The following case studies describe how four vocational teachers assisted students in improving their oral communication skills. Read each case study and then critique in writing the performance of the teacher described. Specifically, you should explain (1) the strengths of the teacher's approach, (2) the weaknesses of the teacher's approach, and (3) how the teacher should have assisted students in improving their oral communication skills.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1:

Ms. Forbes had decided that she needed to assess her own oral communication skills. She felt this was a step she needed to take to ensure that she was competent to assist her students in improving their skills in this area. She was quite sure that she could do a better job if she set an appropriate example for them.

Using her own portable tape recorder, Ms. Forbes read a paragraph from a book and taped it. She then played back the tape, checking for correct pronunciation, pitch, tone, and phrasing. Pretty good, she thought.

Then she decided to assess her body language. She went to the mirror and stood in front of it pretending that she was delivering her next day's lesson to the class. She checked to see if she projected enthusiasm and self-confidence to her imaginary audience.

She also assessed her posture. Did she seem nervous and tense, or was she relaxed and at ease? Did she have any nervous habits, like fidgeting or nail biting? Yes, she twisted her ring when she spoke.

After half an hour or so, Ms. Forbes felt quite satisfied that she had covered the important areas in self-assessment. She took out her trusty note pad and wrote down the areas in which she was a little weak so that she could work on improving them later.

Case Study 2:

Mr. Brock was testing his students' oral communication skills. The vocational director had asked him to do so, but Mr. Brock wasn't very enthusiastic about it. In fact, he really didn't see the point in doing it. After all, he wasn't a speech and communications teacher—his business was teaching automotive mechanics.

Mr. Brock figured that the easiest thing to do would be to write four or five topics—related to auto mechanics—on the chalkboard. Then he could ask the students to prepare a five-minute talk on the topic of their choice.

He'd thought about taping their presentations and then grading their performance later. But that would mean that he'd have to spend time at home assessing the results—time that could be better spent polishing his lesson plans for the next day.

The director had mentioned that she had a checklist of things to look for in assessing students' skills. But Mr. Brock didn't feel he had the expertise needed to do such a detailed rating of oral communication skills. Therefore, he decided he would just give each student an A, B, or C grade and leave it at that.

Well, he thought to himself, it wasn't very important anyway. These kids were in auto mechanics. It wasn't as if they were going to be in a line of work in which they'd have to give speeches or convince customers that a product was worth buying.

28

26

Case Study 3:

Classes had ended for the day, but Mr. Lynch was still in his lab. He was trying to figure out how to solve a problem that had him stumped. That day in class he had asked students to participate in some role-playing situations, and the experience had not been a pleasant or beneficial one.

First, six students had refused to participate. He finally had to threaten to report them to the principal to get them to agree to cooperate. And then those two troublemakers, Ben Small and Roberta White, had tried to make a mockery of the whole thing. Instead of playing their roles, all they did was grunt and groan, roll their eyes, and make rude noises and gestures.

What really annoyed Mr. Lynch was that these students refused to see any value in improving their oral communication skills. Yet some of them really had serious problems, and they needed a lot of help if they hoped ever to succeed in dealing with the public once they were out there on the job.

Mr. Lynch felt quite disheartened. He'd gone to the trouble of assessing the students' oral communication skills beforehand and analyzing the skills required for the occupation. He had used this information in planning instructional activities designed to help students improve their skills. He had also told the students quite clearly, over and over again, that these skills were important.

Not only that, he was also careful to make his own oral communication skills a model students could aim for. Those elocution lessons he had taken sure helped. And he always took the time to correct students when they erred in their speech. But with some students, all his efforts seemed to be in vain. Why couldn't they just accept the fact that they needed these skills if they were ever going to be good workers?

27   29

Case Study 4:

Ms. Berry could hardly contain her excitement as her students filed into the room and took their seats. A week ago, as part of a unit on job application skills, she had assigned each student to visit a specific local business. During the visit, the student's task was to interview a person who had responsibility for meeting with job applicants. She called the assignment "interviewing the interviewers."

Today, students were to start making ten-minute presentations to the class on what they had discovered. She hoped that when all the presentations had been made, the class would have a very good idea of what qualities employers look for during a job interview.

The first student to report was Meaghan O'Riley. Shy by nature, Meaghan made her presentation in so soft a voice that she could hardly be heard. Furthermore, she stared at the floor the whole time, making it even more difficult to hear what she was saying.

Some of the students started talking to each other, and Ms. Berry couldn't blame them. A talk that no one could hear was not particularly interesting. Ms. Berry thought perhaps Meaghan would pick up on this "cue" that she was losing her audience and talk louder. But Meaghan simply blushed and fought her way quietly onward. Everyone, including Meaghan, was greatly relieved when her talk was over.

Well, thought Ms. Berry, we certainly can't critique the content of her presentation because none of us heard it. But we can definitely provide her with some helpful feedback on her oral communication skills.

"Class," said Ms. Berry, "can anyone tell our shy Meaghan ways in which she could improve her oral communication skills?" Meaghan blushed redder still. She'd worked so hard on her speech—it was so well-written—why was this happening to her? Since when were they studying speaking skills in this class?

The first student to comment started his sentence with "One thing Meaghan did wrong was. . . ." But Ms. Berry stopped him and tactfully reminded him that their task was to suggest ways in which the speech could have been improved, not to identify what Meaghan did wrong—and she reminded the class that there was indeed a difference.

After that, several students offered suggestions for improvement. They were careful to point out the positive—that they had been eager to hear her speech since they knew she had prepared it well. And then they indicated that the speech could have been improved had she talked louder and talked to the class rather than the floor.

Several students made supportive statements. Jean said she knew exactly how Meaghan felt. If she'd had to go first, she said, she'd have prayed for a fire drill. Max said laughingly that he couldn't blame Meaghan for not wanting to look at his face.

Meaghan began to relax as she felt the support of the group. In fact, when Max made his remark, she was so relaxed that she laughed outright.

Before calling on the next student, Ms. Berry thanked the class for the quality of their oral communications in helping Meaghan.

As the next student started his presentation, Meaghan struggled with her feelings, which were very mixed. She certainly was grateful to her classmates for treating her so kindly. But she was quite sure she could never make a presentation in front of a whole group. And she resented being asked to do so.

That was one of the troubles with school, she thought. Teachers made you do so many things that had absolutely nothing to do with getting a job. If Ms. Berry had let her submit her written report, she was sure she would have gotten an A

30

MODEL CRITIQUES

Case Study 1:

Ms. Forbes was quite correct in deciding to assess her own oral communication skills. Certainly a thorough and objective assessment could point out to her the areas in which she was weak. As a result, she could improve her skills and set an appropriate example of effective oral communication skills for her students—a worthy goal.

Ms. Forbes used an effective technique—taping—for assessing her pronunciation, pitch, tone, phrasing, and so on. In addition, she used one acceptable technique for assessing her body language. By making her presentation in front of a mirror, she was able, to some extent, to check her posture, enthusiasm, gestures, and self-confidence.

However, Ms. Forbes's efforts were far too limited to provide her with any substantive information about the overall effectiveness of her oral communication skills. She failed to use all the techniques and resources available to her, and she neglected to assess herself in some very critical areas.

First of all, consider her taping activity. Reading a passage from a book is a good way to get a general idea of voice pitch and volume and, perhaps, phrasing. But it would give no indication of the way she normally speaks in front of a class—when she is not reading from a book.

The "ers" and "uhs" that sometimes flaw a presentation are less likely to show up when a person is reading aloud. Perhaps her voice becomes high-pitched and unpleasant when she gets excited during class. Or maybe she speaks so softly in class that many students can't hear her.

This exercise would not provide her with that critical information. In fact, the taping gives her many "unfair" advantages. She can carefully modulate her voice, talk directly into a microphone, and adjust the volume as needed.

Ms. Forbes's second effort—the mirror presentation—is equally limited in what it can tell her. The situation is highly artificial, and her performance would undoubtedly be affected by the fact that her attention was focused on specific skills. She would tend to perform well in those areas because she was probably intent on doing so. She was, in essence, stacking the assessment deck in her favor.

Ms. Forbes used only self-assessment and only "pretend" situations she set up outside the school. She could have audiotaped or videotaped one or more lessons (presented to actual students) for review and self-assessment. She could have invited observers (e.g., supervisors, colleagues) to sit in on her classes or to review taped presentations so they could assess her oral communication skills.

And Ms. Forbes could have structured the assessment using a checklist of criteria. Had she done so, she probably would have done a better job of assessing all the elements of oral communication. Instead, she neglected one very important area: the substance of her speech. She assessed pitch and posture, but she didn't assess her performance for accuracy, completeness, organization, specificity, appropriateness, conciseness, and correct grammar.

Perhaps Ms. Forbes failed to recognize that the substance of speech is just as important an area as the delivery of speech. More likely, her assessment situations prevented her from assessing substance. In taping a reading, the substance was the book's, not hers. And it is difficult to present to a mirror while simultaneously assessing your performance. There's a limit to how much you can look for.

Another area Ms. Forbes failed to assess was her listening skills. She could have enlisted the help of a friend to do this. She could have had a normal conversation with this person and asked him or her to assess her listening skills on the spot—preferably using a checklist.

Had she videotaped some classroom sessions, she—and others—could have reviewed those tapes to assess her listening skills. As it is, she has no way of knowing whether she is a sensitive, receptive, attentive, and active listener when she is interacting with others.

Ms. Forbes did make an attempt to document her "few, little" weak points by jotting them down on her note pad. This might have been an acceptable method of recording the results of her assessment if she had diagnosed all the required areas. Use of a checklist, however, would have been a more efficient method for recording her results. It would have also given her an objective basis for comparison as she strives to improve her skills.

Case Study 2:

Mr. Brock was, under protest, doing a few things right. His students' oral communication skills should be assessed. And the method he selected to assess those skills—asking students to make short oral presentations—was appropriate.

He's on the right track, too, in having assigned topics related to auto-mechanics. His efforts to improve students' oral communication skills should, in fact, relate directly to the occupational area.

However, Mr. Brock's attitude may ensure that the entire exercise will be ineffective. He does not regard student assessment in this area as a worthwhile activity. He thinks it is a waste of time because auto mechanics do not have the obvious need for oral communication skills that, for example, salespeople do. If he communicates those feelings to his students, it is likely that they, too, will consider oral communication skills to be of little value to them.

In addition, Mr. Brock's decision to "give the kids letter grades and be done with it" will ensure that improvement of students' oral communication skills does not become a part of his program. Letter grades describe overall performance. They would be of little value in identifying the **specific** areas in which students need to improve.

One also wonders what basis Mr. Brock will use in assigning grades, since he has no criteria on which to base his assessment. Perhaps he plans to focus primarily on technical content. If that is case, Mr. Brock would be, once again, sending students a very clear message that auto mechanics don't need good oral communication skills. A student with very poor skills would "learn" that his or her skills were "just fine."

Mr. Brock should have used objective criteria, such as those probably provided by the director's checklist, in assessing students' skills. And he should have taped the students' presentations so he could assess their performance more thoroughly and objectively. But had he done so, it is unlikely that the results would be any different. Mr. Brock's problems run deeper.

Mr. Brock needs to step back and assess his own attitudes and skills. There are a number of things he should do. First, he should take a careful look at the competencies required in the occupation. By reviewing occupational analyses and talking to employers, for example, he is likely to discover that oral communication skills are, in fact, needed to succeed on the job.

It would be interesting to hear Mr. Brock speak. Perhaps his skills are quite good and served him well when he worked as a mechanic. As a result, he may not realize what effect a lack of skills can have. Or perhaps his skills are weak. Maybe it is easier for him to say, "those skills aren't important," than to admit that his skills are poor.

In fact, however, Mr. Brock needs to conduct a thorough assessment of his own skills. He needs to determine how well equipped he is to help students develop the actual oral communication skills needed in the occupation. If he is weak in any area, he should secure the help he needs in order to improve.

Once Mr. Brock knows what skills are required and possesses those skills, perhaps he will value their importance more. That would allow him to provide the model his students need if they are to be motivated to improve their own skills. As a result, Mr. Brock could better equip his students with all the skills they need to succeed in the world of work.

Case Study 3:

Mr. Lynch obviously takes improvement of oral communication skills seriously. He had certainly done a great deal to prepare to help his students.

He had assessed the oral communication skills needed in the occupation, and he had assessed the students' skills. He had used this information to develop activities designed to help students improve their skills so they could succeed on the job. And he was so eager to be a good model that he even took elocution lessons.

Why, then, did some of his students refuse to cooperate? There might be several reasons for this. First, Mr. Lynch seems to think that for students to value the need for oral communication skills, all he has to do is tell them that those skills are important. Obviously that approach doesn't work.

Second, is his model the right model? Perhaps as a result of his elocution lessons, his speech is too formal. Students may know from their own experience that they will not be expected to speak like that on the job. They may, in fact, find his perfect elocution stilted and laughable.

32

Third, Mr. Lynch is so busy doing what's "best" for his students that he has lost sight of the fact that students do not always value what's best for them. He needs to identify what would motivate them to participate. He needs to identify what rewards they would be willing to work for.

Finally, the environment Mr. Lynch has created is not conducive to improvement. His "model of perfection" has a hole in it. On the one hand, his intention is to help students improve their oral communication skills so that they will be able to deal effectively with the public. Yet in his own communication, Mr. Lynch is not sensitive to the feelings of others.

He evidently corrects students' speech each time they open their mouths. Thus, it is not surprising that they balk at participating in oral activities. When students do balk, he responds by threatening them with punishment. As a result, he may obtain their partic- ipation—but not their commitment.

Mr. Lynch needs to refocus. His concern should not be how to stop students from undermining his good intentions. Rather, he needs to figure out what he can do to get students to start improving. A good starting place might be to administer some interest inventories to find out things that motivate his stu- dents.

Another technique that Mr. Lynch might find help- ful would be to invite some representatives from the occupation to speak to the class. Students might be more willing to accept the need for good oral com- munication skills if it is reinforced by these credible sources.

If Mr. Lynch can take all the good preparation he has done and add some motivators and some sen- sitivity to his approach, he will probably find that the situation will begin to improve. Given activities of in- terest to them and an environment in which their every word is not evaluated and corrected, students may indeed work to acquire the oral communication skills they need to deal effectively with the public.

Case Study 4:

The greatest strength in Ms. Berry's performance was the atmosphere she ultimately created in the class. The second student should have no qualms about making his or her presentation. That student should be quite confident that the class will be atten- tive, sympathetic, and supportive.

Ms. Berry created that atmosphere not only by her instructions to the students but also in the way in which her instructions were presented. She in- sisted on sensitivity and, in general, she modeled sensitivity.

She tactfully reminded the students that their task was to suggest areas of improvement, not to enumerate faults. The fact that she "reminded" them of this suggests that she consistently maintained such an atmosphere in her class. That students complied with her reminder immediately and skill- fully also indicates that they were accustomed to op- erating in such an environment.

Ms. Berry helped to ensure that students would continue to communicate sensitively by praising their performance before calling on the second stu- dent.

She did, however, make a few slight errors on the road to sensitivity in this instance. It was probably not a good idea to ask shy-by-nature Meaghan to make the first presentation. If some students who felt comfortable making oral presentations had led off the effort, it might have created a relaxed atmo- sphere that would have helped students like Meaghan feel a little less intimidated.

Furthermore, allowing class members to chat be- cause "a talk that no one can hear is not particularly interesting" was not justified. Chatting during a pre- sentation is rude—regardless of the circumstances. Given her rapport with the class, Ms. Berry could probably have easily curbed the talking by a simple glance. And she should have done so. Good listen- ing skills are, after all, an essential part of the oral communication process.

And finally, she might not have had to remind stu- dents to be sensitive had she not set up the situation by referring to "our shy Meaghan." That is a belittling comment that should not have been made.

Ms. Berry's most critical error, however, relates to the total surprise Meaghan felt when she discovered that her oral communication skills were going to be evaluated. Evidently Ms. Berry models effective and sensitive oral communication and insists that her students follow her example. Yet she seems to have assigned them to make oral presentations without explaining how to make effective oral presentations and without indicating that they would be evaluated on their ability to do so.

As a result, Ms. Berry missed a perfectly good op- portunity to help students improve their speaking skills. The assignment was a good one. It excited her and undoubtedly motivated the students. It was part of the occupational curriculum and had rele- vance to their occupational needs and interests. Sharing their experiences was probably very inter- esting and beneficial.

It could have been even more beneficial had Ms. Berry prepared them to make their presentations. Even though she's not a speech teacher, she could have given them a brief explanation of do's and don'ts to remember in preparing and presenting an oral report. At the very least, she could have pro- vided this information in a handout or checklist.

31

If Ms. Berry did not feel qualified to "teach" students to make oral reports, she could easily have sought the help of a speech teacher or English teacher in the school. Other staff are usually more than willing to give assistance of this type.

Providing students with a checklist would also have prepared them to be evaluated on their oral communication skills and given them an objective basis for evaluating the presentations of the other students. In addition, using such a checklist can keep students focused on the full range of skills involved in oral communication.

Ms. Berry neglected to mention one other vital fact to her students. They seem to realize that interviewing the interviewer is job-related. But Meaghan, at least, seems to have no idea that oral communication skills are job-related also.

Ms. Berry is, overall, doing a fine job in helping students communicate effectively. She needs to build on the strengths and expand what she is doing.

If oral communication skills are needed on the job, students need to understand that. Otherwise students like Meaghan will have little motivation to improve their skills in that area. And, if Meaghan is to improve, Ms. Berry will need to provide her with guidelines to follow and with opportunities to practice her skills—successfully.

Level of Performance: Your written critiques of the teachers' performance should have covered the same major points as the model critiques. If you missed some points or have questions about any additional points you made, review the material in the information sheet, Assisting Students in Improving Their Oral Communication Skills, pp. 6–23, or check with your resource person if necessary.

34

Learning Experience II

OVERVIEW
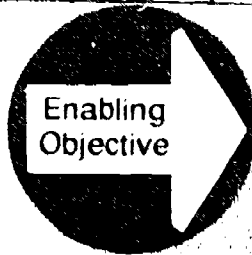
Enabling Objective

After assessing your own oral communication skills, develop a plan for improving those skills as needed.

Activity 1

You will be participating in a short debate with a peer and videotaping your performance. If videotape equipment is not available, you may ask another peer or your resource person to observe the debate.

Feedback 2
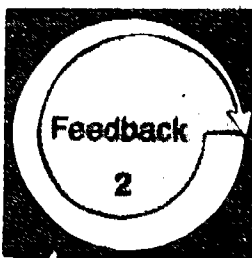
You will be reviewing the videotape and evaluating your oral communication skills, using the Oral Communication Checklist, pp. 35-36. If the debate is not videotaped, your competency will be assessed by a peer or by your resource person using that same checklist.

Activity 3

You will be using the Planning Worksheet, pp. 37-38, to develop a plan for improving your oral communication skills, as indicated by the results of your evaluation.

Feedback 4

You will be evaluating your competency in developing a plan for improving your oral communication skills, using the Planning Worksheet Checklist, p. 39.

Activity 1
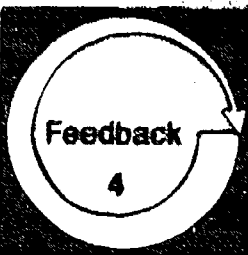
Select an issue and arrange to debate that issue for approximately five to ten minutes with a peer, each of you taking one side of the issue. Also make arrangements to secure the necessary videotape equipment to record your debate.

If you do not have access to videotape equipment, you may ask another peer or your resource person to observe the debate and evaluate your oral communication skills.

After all arrangements have been made, conduct the debate as planned.

Feedback 2
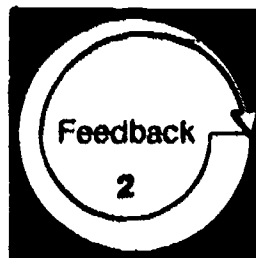
If you videotaped the debate, replay the tape and review your performance. After you have reviewed your performance, use the Oral Communication Checklist, pp. 35–36, to evaluate your oral communication skills.

If you did not videotape the debate, your oral communication skills will be evaluated by a peer or by your resource person, using that same checklist.

ORAL COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

Directions: Place an X in the NO, PARTIAL, or FULL box to indicate that each of the following performance components was not accomplished, partially accomplished, or fully accomplished. If, because of special circumstances, a performance component was not applicable, or impossible to execute, place an X in the N/A box.

Name _____

Date _____

Resource Person _____

LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

	N/A	NO	Partial	Full

When speaking, the teacher:

1. presented information that was accurate, up-to-date, and free of bias ☐ ☐ ☐

2. used complete sentences ☐ ☐ ☐

3. finished one thought before starting another ☐ ☐ ☐

4. avoided straying from the main point or digressing ☐ ☐ ☐

5. presented facts and ideas coherently and in a logical sequence ☐ ☐ ☐

6. avoided use of vague language or sweeping statements ☐ ☐ ☐

7. used appropriate, correct vocabulary and explained new terms ☐ ☐ ☐

8. expressed ideas clearly, simply, and directly, using short manageable sentence constructions ☐ ☐ ☐

9. enunciated clearly and avoided running words together or mumbling ☐ ☐ ☐

10. pronounced words correctly and avoided exaggerated pronunciation ☐ ☐ ☐

11. used correct grammar ☐ ☐ ☐

12. paused in appropriate places ☐ ☐ ☐

13. controlled his or her voice so that it rose and fell appropriately and emphasized important points ☐ ☐ ☐

14. controlled the pitch of his or her voice so it was neither too high nor too low ☐ ☐ ☐

15. controlled the volume of his or her voice so it was neither too loud nor too soft ☐ ☐ ☐

16. used nonverbal behavior appropriately, including:
   a. using body language (e.g., gestures, posture, facial expressions) to reinforce the spoken message ☐ ☐ ☐
   b. using paralanguage (e.g., tone of voice, inflection) that was consistent with the spoken message ☐ ☐ ☐

35

37

	N/A	No	Partial	Full

c. using body language to project an appropriate image (e.g., enthusiasm, self-confidence) .... ☐ ☐ ☐

d. maintaining eye contact with listeners .... ☐ ☐ ☐

e. avoiding use of distracting mannerisms (e.g., jingling coins in pocket, cracking knuckles) .... ☐ ☐ ☐

When listening, the teacher:

17. concentrated fully on the speaker and on what was being said .... ☐ ☐ ☐

18. responded actively, either verbally or nonverbally (e.g., by nodding head) .... ☐ ☐ ☐

19. remained open-minded toward the speaker .... ☐ ☐ ☐

20. used nonverbal behavior appropriately, including:
    a. using body language to convey a sympathetic and receptive attitude toward the speaker .... ☐ ☐ ☐

    b. maintaining eye contact with the speaker .... ☐ ☐ ☐

    c. avoiding the use of distracting mannerisms (e.g., drumming fingers, tapping foot) .... ☐ ☐ ☐

Level of Performance: Ideally all items received FULL or N/A responses. However, it is likely that your performance in some of the areas listed received NO or PARTIAL responses, indicating areas of oral communication in which you need to improve. Make a note of those areas. Then go on to complete the next activity, in which you can develop a plan for improving your oral communication skills as needed.
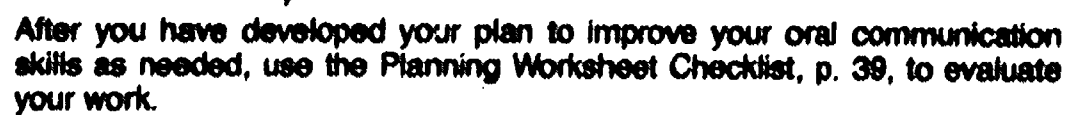
Activity 3

The previous evaluation activity should have identified for you any areas in which you need to improve your oral communication skills. Now, use the worksheet below to develop a plan for improving weak areas in your oral communication skills, as indicated by the results of your evaluation.

In the column labeled "Needed Improvement," list your own specific needs as indicated by your evaluation. Then, in the column labeled "How to Accomplish It," list the specific means you will use to gain skill in each identified area of oral communication.

It is very important that you be specific as you develop your plan. You should indicate the exact area needing improvement (e.g., lack of eye contact, monotonous tone, sloppy enunciation, inattentiveness as a listener). Then, you should describe a specific strategy for achieving each improvement needed (e.g., videotaped practice, assistance of a speech teacher).

PLANNING WORKSHEET

Needed Improvement	How to Accomplish It

Needed Improvement   **How to Accomplish It**

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Feedback
4

After you have developed your plan to improve your oral communication skills as needed, use the Planning Worksheet Checklist, p. 39, to evaluate your work.

40

PLANNING WORKSHEET CHECKLIST

Directions: Place an X in the NO, PARTIAL, or FULL box to indicate that each of the following performance components was not accomplished, partially accomplished, or fully accomplished. If, because of special circumstances, a performance component was not applicable, or impossible to execute, place an X in the N/A box.
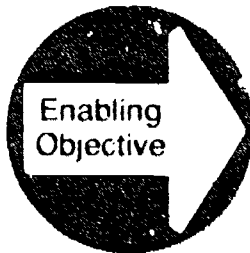
Name _____

Date _____

Resource Person _____

LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

	N/A	No	Partial	Full

The improvement plan:

1. included the specific areas of oral communication requiring improvement, as indicated by the results of the evaluation .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ■

2. provided for improvement in the areas identified, using techniques such as the following:
   a. consulting reliable resources .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ■
   b. observing models .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ■
   c. videotaped or audiotaped practice .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ■

3. identified specific, appropriate activities for improving oral communication skills as needed .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ■

4. was realistic and feasible in application .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ■

Level of Performance: All items must receive FULL or N/A responses. If any item receives a NO or PARTIAL response, review the material in the information sheet, Assisting Students in Improving Their Oral Communication Skills, pp. 6–23, revise your plan accordingly, or check with your resource person if necessary.

NOTES

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42

Learning Experience III

Enabling Objective
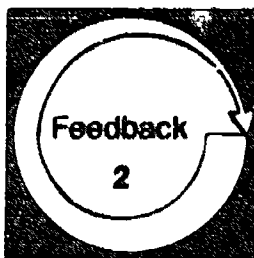
For a simulated classroom or laboratory situation, develop a plan for assisting students in improving their oral communication skills.

Activity 1

You will be developing a plan for improving students' oral communication skills as part of your regular vocational-technical instruction, using the Planning Worksheet, pp. 43–44.

Feedback 2

You will be evaluating your competency in developing a plan for improving students' oral communication skills, using the Planning Worksheet Checklist, pp. 45–46.

NOTES

44

Activity 1

Select a unit of instruction from your own occupational specialty. You may select a unit you have developed as part of your preservice or inservice training or one that you have developed and used in your teaching. You may also wish to obtain related materials, such as course outlines, courses of study, competency lists, or curriculum guides, as additional resources.

Using the worksheet below, identify opportunities for oral communication activities in the selected unit. These should include assessment of students' oral communication skills, activities aimed at improving their oral skills, and opportunities for practice.

PLANNING WORKSHEET

Unit of Instruction: _____

Performance Objectives: _____

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A. Activities that provide opportunities for assessment of students' oral communication skills:

Activities	Procedures

B.   Activities that provide opportunities for improvement of students' oral communication skills.

Activities	Oral Skills Addressed	Procedures
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

C.   Activities that provide opportunities for practice of oral communication skills:

Activities	Oral Skills Addressed	Procedures
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Feedback 2

After you have developed your plan for improving students' oral communication skills, use the Planning Worksheet Checklist, pp. 45–46, to evaluate your work.

44   46

PLANNING WORKSHEET CHECKLIST

Directions: Place an X in the NO, PARTIAL, or FULL box to indicate that each of the following performance components was not accomplished, partially accomplished, or fully accomplished. If, because of special circumstances, a performance component was not applicable, or impossible to execute, place an X in the N/A box.

Name _____

Date _____

Resource Person _____

LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

	N/A	No	Partial	Full

The Improvement plan:

1. included activities for:
   a. assessing students' oral communication skills .... □ □ □
   b. increasing students' awareness of oral communication skills in general .... □ □ □
   c. helping students recognize which **specific** oral communication skills are needed to succeed in the occupational area .... □ □ □
   d. helping students recognize the **need** for effective oral communication skills on the job .... □ □ □
   e. assisting students in improving their oral communication skills .... □ □ □
   f. providing opportunity for practicing oral communication skills ..... □ □ □

2. included activities related to:
   a. speaking skills .... □ □ □
   b. listening skills .... □ □ □
   c. nonverbal behavior .... □ □ □

3. identified specific, appropriate activities for assessment, improvement, or practice of oral communication skills .... □ □ □

4. identified activities that are relevant to:
   a. vocational-technical program content .... □ □ □
   b. students' needs and interests .... □ □ □
   c. students' career goals .... □ □ □

5. included a variety of oral communication activities including, as appropriate:
   a. oral presentations .... □ □ □
   b. role-plays, simulations, or practice in real-life situations .... □ □ □
   c. samples of effective and ineffective communication (e.g., role models, media) .... □ □ □

6. was realistic and feasible in application .... □ □ □

45

47

Level of Performance: All items must receive FULL or N/A responses. If any item receives a NO or PARTIAL response, review the material in the information sheet, Assisting Students in Improving Their Oral Communication Skills, pp. 6–23, revise your plan accordingly, or check with your resource person if necessary.

46   48

Learning Experience IV

Terminal Objective

In an actual teaching situation,* assist students in improving their oral communication skills.

Activity 1

As part of your duties as a teacher, assist students in improving their oral communication skills. This will include—

- assessing your own oral communication skills
- assessing students' oral communication skills
- creating an appropriate environment for improving oral communication skills
- using appropriate instructional techniques to help students improve specific oral communication skills

NOTE: Due to the nature of this experience, you will need to have access to an actual teaching situation over an extended period of time (e.g., one to three weeks).

As you conduct each of the above activities, document your actions (in writing, on tape, through a log) for assessment purposes.

Feedback 2
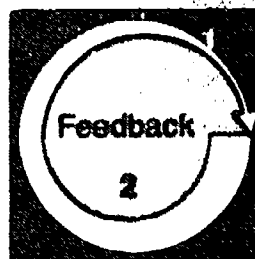
Arrange to have your resource person review any documentation you have compiled. If possible, arrange to have your resource person observe at least one instance in which you are actually working with students to assist them in improving their oral communication skills.

Your total competency will be assessed by your resource person, using the Teacher Performance Assessment Form, pp. 49–51.

Based upon the criteria specified in this assessment instrument, your resource person will determine whether you are competent in assisting students in improving their oral communication skills.

*For a definition of "actual teaching situation," see the inside back cover

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TEACHER PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FORM
Assist Students in Improving Their Oral Communication Skills (M-4)

Name _____

Date _____

Resource Person _____

Directions: Indicate the level of the teacher's accomplishment by placing an X in the appropriate box under the LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE heading. If, because of special circumstances, a performance component was not applicable, or impossible to execute, place an X in the N/A box.

LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

	N/A	None	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
In assessing his/her own oral communication skills, the teacher:						
1. examined his/her speaking skills, including:						
a. accuracy	☐	☐	☐	☐		
b. completeness	☐	☐	☐	☐		
c. organization	☐	☐	☐	☐		
d. specificity	☐	☐	☐	☐		
e. appropriateness	☐	☐	☐	☐		
f. conciseness	☐	☐	☐	☐		
g. grammar	☐	☐	☐	☐		
h. pronunciation	☐	☐	☐	☐		
i. paralanguage (e.g., pitch, tone of voice, phrasing)	☐	☐	☐	☐		
2. examined his/her nonverbal behavior, including:						
a. gestures	☐	☐	☐	☐		
b. facial expressions	☐	☐	☐	☐		
c. eye contact	☐	☐	☐	☐		
d. posture	☐	☐	☐	☐		
3. examined his/her listening skills, including amount or level of:						
a. concentration	☐	☐	☐	☐		
b. active responses	☐	☐	☐	☐		
c. sensitivity	☐	☐	☐	☐		
d. open-mindedness	☐	☐	☐	☐		
4. recorded the results of assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐		

In assessing students' oral communication skills, the teacher:

	N/A	None	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
5. Identified oral communication skill requirements related to the occupational area and students' individual career goals	☐	☐	☐	☐		
6. examined students' speaking skills	☐	☐	☐	☐		
7. examined students' nonverbal behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐		
8. examined students' listening skills	☐	☐	☐	☐		
9. recorded the results of assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐		
10. used appropriate assessment techniques	☐	☐	☐	☐		

In creating an appropriate environment, the teacher:

	N/A	None	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
11. accommodated students' individual needs, abilities, and preferences in the instructional approaches used	☐	☐	☐	☐		
12. displayed sensitivity toward student anxiety or fear	☐	☐	☐	☐		
13. corrected student errors in a positive, constructive manner	☐	☐	☐	☐		
14. reinforced correct performance (e.g., using praise)	☐	☐	☐	☐		
15. used reinforcement techniques appropriate to individual students' needs, interests, and preferences	☐	☐	☐	☐		
16. provided motivation by demonstrating the relevance of oral communication to students' goals and needs	☐	☐	☐	☐		
17. involved all students in improvement of oral communication skills	☐	☐	☐	☐		

In helping students improve specific oral communication skills, the teacher:

	N/A	None	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
18. provided instruction to develop students' awareness of oral communication	☐	☐	☐	☐		
19. provided instruction geared to each student's need for improvement	☐	☐	☐	☐		
20. provided opportunities for practice using a variety of approaches (e.g., role-plays, oral presentations)	☐	☐	☐	☐		
21. helped students evaluate their own progress and performance.(e.g., through use of media)	☐	☐	☐	☐		
22. provided samples of effective communication for students to use as models (e.g., media, guest speakers).	☐	☐	☐	☐		
23. provided samples of ineffective communication (e.g., through media and role-plays) for students to critique.	☐	☐	☐	☐		

	N/A	None	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
24. enccuraged students to improve their oral skills through participation in the vocational student organization	☐	☐	☐	☐	■	
25. acted as a role model of appropriate oral communication skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	■	

Level of Performance: All items must receive N/A, GOOD, or EXCELLENT responses. If any item receives a NONE, POOR, or FAIR response, the teacher and resource person should meet to determine what additional activities the teacher needs to complete in order to reach competency in the weak area(s).

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ABOUT USING THE NATIONAL CENTER'S PBTE MODULES

Organization

Each module is designed to help you gain competency in a particular skill area considered important to teaching success. A module is made up of a series of learning experiences, some providing background information, some providing practice experiences, and others combining these two functions. Completing these experiences should enable you to achieve the terminal objective in the final learning experience. The final experience in each module always requires you to demonstrate the skill in an actual teaching situation when you are an intern, a student teacher, an inservice teacher, or occupational trainer.

Procedures

Modules are designed to allow you to individualize your teacher education program. You need to take only those modules covering skills that you do not already possess. Similarly, you need not complete any learning experience within a module if you already have the skill needed to complete it. Therefore, before taking any module, you should carefully review (1) the introduction, (2) the objectives listed on p. 4, (3) the overviews preceding each learning experience, and (4) the final experience. After comparing your present needs and competencies with the information you have read in these sections, you should be ready to make one of the following decisions:

- That you do not have the competencies indicated and should complete the entire module
- That you are competent in one or more of the enabling objectives leading to the final learning experience and, thus, can omit those learning experiences
- That you are already competent in this area and are ready to complete the final learning experience in order to "test out"
- That the module is inappropriate to your needs at this time

When you are ready to complete the final learning experience and have access to an actual teaching situation, make the necessary arrangements with your resource person. If you do not complete the final experience successfully, meet with your resource person and arrange to (1) repeat the experience or (2) complete (or review) previous sections of the module or other related activities suggested by your resource person before attempting to repeat the final experience.

Options for recycling are also available in each of the learning experiences preceding the final experience. Any time you do not meet the minimum level of performance required to meet an objective, you and your resource person may meet to select activities to help you reach competency. This could involve (1) completing parts of the module previously skipped, (2) repeating activities, (3) reading supplementary resources or completing additional activities suggested by the resource person, (4) designing your own learning experience, or (5) completing some other activity suggested by you or your resource person.

Terminology

Actual Teaching Situation: A situation in which you are actually working with and responsible for teaching secondary or postsecondary vocational students or other occupational trainees. An intern, a student teacher, an inservice teacher, or other occupational trainer would be functioning in an actual teaching situation. If you do not have access to an actual teaching situation when you are taking the module, you can complete the module up to the final learning experience. You would then complete the final learning experience later (i.e., when you have access to an actual teaching situation).

Alternate Activity or Feedback: An item that may substitute for required items that, due to special circumstances, you are unable to complete.

Occupational Specialty: A specific area of preparation within a vocational service area (e.g., the service area Trade and Industrial Education includes occupational specialties such as automobile mechanics, welding, and electricity).

Optional Activity or Feedback: An item that is not required but is designed to supplement and enrich the required items in a learning experience.

Resource Person: The person in charge of your educational program (e.g., the professor, instructor, administrator, instructional supervisor, cooperating/supervising/classroom teacher, or training supervisor who is guiding you in completing this module.

Student: The person who is receiving occupational instruction in a secondary, postsecondary, or other training program.

Vocational Service Area: A major vocational field: agricultural education, business and office education, marketing and distributive education, health occupations education, home economics education, industrial arts education, technical education, or trade and industrial education.

You or the Teacher/Instructor: The person who is completing the module.

Levels of Performance for Final Assessment

N/A: The criterion was not met because it was not applicable to the situation.

None: No attempt was made to meet the criterion, although it was relevant.

Poor: The teacher is unable to perform this skill or has only very limited ability to perform it.

Fair: The teacher is unable to perform this skill in an acceptable manner but has some ability to perform it.

Good: The teacher is able to perform this skill in an effective manner.

Excellent: The teacher is able to perform this skill in a very effective manner.

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Titles of the National Center's Performance-Based Teacher Education Modules

Category A: Program Planning, Development, and Evaluation

A-1 Prepare for a Community Survey
A-2 Conduct a Community Survey
A-3 Report the Findings of a Community Survey
A-4 Organize an Occupational Advisory Committee
A-5 Maintain an Occupational Advisory Committee
A-6 Develop Program Goals and Objectives
A-7 Conduct an Occupational Analysis
A-8 Develop a Course of Study
A-9 Develop Long-Range Program Plans
A-10 Conduct a Student Follow-Up Study
A-11 Evaluate Your Vocational Program

Category B: Instructional Planning

B-1 Determine Needs and Interests of Students
B-2 Develop Student Performance Objectives
B-3 Develop a Unit of Instruction
B-4 Develop a Lesson Plan
B-5 Select Student Instructional Materials
B-6 Prepare Teacher-Made Instructional Materials

Category C: Instructional Execution

C-1 Direct Field Trips
C-2 Conduct Group Discussions, Panel Discussions, and Symposiums
C-3 Employ Brainstorming, Buzz Group, and Question Box Techniques
C-4 Direct Students in Instructing Other Students
C-5 Employ Simulation Techniques
C-6 Guide Student Study
C-7 Direct Student Laboratory Experience
C-8 Direct Students in Applying Problem-Solving Techniques
C-9 Employ the Project Method
C-10 Introduce a Lesson
C-11 Summarize a Lesson
C-12 Employ Oral Questioning Techniques
C-13 Employ Reinforcement Techniques
C-14 Provide Instruction for Slower and More Capable Learners
C-15 Present an Illustrated Talk
C-16 Demonstrate a Manipulative Skill
C-17 Demonstrate a Concept or Principle
C-18 Individualize Instruction
C-19 Employ the Team Teaching Approach
C-20 Use Subject Matter Experts to Present Information
C-21 Prepare Bulletin Boards and Exhibits
C-22 Present Information with Models, Real Objects, and Flannel Boards
C-23 Present Information with Overhead and Opaque Materials
C-24 Present Information with Filmstrips and Slides
C-25 Present Information with Films
C-26 Present Information with Audio Recordings
C-27 Present Information with Televised and Videotaped Materials
C-28 Employ Programmed Instruction
C-29 Present Information with the Chalkboard and Flip Chart
C-30 Provide for Students' Learning Styles

Category D: Instructional Evaluation

D-1 Establish Student Performance Criteria
D-2 Assess Student Performance: Knowledge
D-3 Assess Student Performance: Attitudes
D-4 Assess Student Performance: Skills
D-5 Determine Student Grades
D-6 Evaluate Your Instructional Effectiveness

Category E: Instructional Management

E-1 Project Instructional Resource Needs
E-2 Manage Your Budgeting and Reporting Responsibilities
E-3 Arrange for Improvement of Your Vocational Facilities
E-4 Maintain a Filing System
E-5 Provide for Student Safety
E-6 Provide for the First Aid Needs of Students
E-7 Assist Students in Developing Self-Discipline
E-8 Organize the Vocational Laboratory
E-9 Manage the Vocational Laboratory
E-10 Combat Problems of Student Chemical Use

Category F: Guidance

F-1 Gather Student Data Using Formal Data-Collection Techniques
F-2 Gather Student Data Through Personal Contacts
F-3 Use Conferences to Help Meet Student Needs
F-4 Provide Information on Educational and Career Opportunities
F-5 Assist Students in Applying for Employment or Further Education

Category G: School-Community Relations

G-1 Develop a School-Community Relations Plan for Your Vocational Program
G-2 Give Presentations to Promote Your Vocational Program
G-3 Develop Brochures to Promote Your Vocational Program
G-4 Prepare Displays to Promote Your Vocational Program
G-5 Prepare News Releases and Articles Concerning Your Vocational Program
G-6 Arrange for Television and Radio Presentations Concerning Your Vocational Program
G-7 Conduct an Open House
G-8 Work with Members of the Community
G-9 Work with State and Local Educators
G-10 Obtain Feedback about Your Vocational Program

Category H: Vocational Student Organization

H-1 Develop a Personal Philosophy Concerning Vocational Student Organizations
H-2 Establish a Vocational Student Organization
H-3 Prepare Vocational Student Organization Members for Leadership Roles
H-4 Assist Vocational Student Organization Members in Developing and Financing a Yearly Program of Activities
H-5 Supervise Activities of the Vocational Student Organization
H-6 Guide Participation in Vocational Student Organization Contests

Category I: Professional Role and Development

I-1 Keep Up to Date Professionally
I-2 Serve Your Teaching Profession
I-3 Develop an Active Personal Philosophy of Education
I-4 Serve the School and Community
I-5 Obtain a Suitable Teaching Position
I-6 Provide Laboratory Experiences for Prospective Teachers
I-7 Plan the Student Teaching Experience
I-8 Supervise Student Teachers

Category J: Coordination of Cooperative Education

J-1 Establish Guidelines for Your Cooperative Vocational Program
J-2 Manage the Attendance, Transfers, and Terminations of Co-Op Students
J-3 Enroll Students in Your Co-Op Program
J-4 Secure Training Stations for Your Co-Op Program
J-5 Place Co-Op Students on the Job
J-6 Develop the Training Ability of On-the-Job Instructors
J-7 Coordinate On-the-Job Instruction
J-8 Evaluate Co-Op Students' On-the-Job Performance
J-9 Prepare for Students' Related Instruction
J-10 Supervise an Employer-Employee Appreciation Event

Category K: Implementing Competency-Based Education (CBE)

K-1 Prepare Yourself for CBE
K-2 Organize the Content for a CBE Program
K-3 Organize Your Class and Lab to Install CBE
K-4 Provide Instructional Materials for CBE
K-5 Manage the Daily Routines of Your CBE Program
K-6 Guide Your Students Through the CBE Program

Category L: Serving Students with Special/Exceptional Needs

L-1 Prepare Yourself to Serve Exceptional Students
L-2 Identify and Diagnose Exceptional Students
L-3 Plan Instruction for Exceptional Students
L-4 Provide Appropriate Instructional Materials for Exceptional Students
L-5 Modify the Learning Environment for Exceptional Students
L-6 Promote Peer Acceptance of Exceptional Students
L-7 Use Instructional Techniques to Meet the Needs of Exceptional Students
L-8 Improve Your Communication Skills
L-9 Assess the Progress of Exceptional Students
L-10 Counsel Exceptional Students with Personal-Social Problems
L-11 Assist Exceptional Students in Developing Career Planning Skills
L-12 Prepare Exceptional Students for Employability
L-13 Promote Your Vocational Program with Exceptional Students

Category M: Assisting Students in Improving Their Basic Skills

M-1 Assist Students in Achieving Basic Reading Skills
M-2 Assist Students in Developing Technical Reading Skills
M-3 Assist Students in Improving Their Writing Skills
M-4 Assist Students in Improving Their Oral Communication Skills
M-5 Assist Students in Improving Their Math Skills
M-6 Assist Students in Improving Their Survival Skills

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Student Guide to Using Performance-Based Teacher Education Materials
Resource Person Guide to Using Performance-Based Teacher Education Materials
Guide to the Implementation of Performance-Based Teacher Education
Performance-Based Teacher Education: The State of the Art, General Education and Vocational Education

For information regarding availability and prices of these materials contact—AAVIM, American Association for Vocational Instructional Materials, 120 Driftmier Engineering Center, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602, (404) 542-2586

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