

MENTORING **SPARK**

Quick ideas to light up your doctoral conversations.

► COMMUNICATION



SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Successful communication requires all people involved to send and receive messages clearly and to verify comprehension; gaps can occur when one or both parties are not adequately engaged. Poor communication can be misinterpreted as not caring, being rude, as well as other perceptions that can lead to frustrations, anxiety, and self-doubt.

In the haste of quick communication, people often leave out specificity, allowing for confusion or possibly giving an impression of importance (*or lack thereof*) that does not match their intent. Speaking or writing with consideration for the people receiving the information takes added thought and time, but often saves time and frustration by reducing miscommunications.



FACULTY FYI

This **Spark** is intended to support students' ability to ensure that the sending and receiving of information is in alignment and sufficient to promote next steps. With the number of acceptable professional communication modes expanding to include texting, instant messaging, Slack, Teams, etcetera, in addition to verbal and email/letters, effective communication is more complex than ever.

Good communication is important for the advisor/advisee relationship and for lab efficiency. The time spent modeling and supporting students with their communication skills will pay dividends in the long run.



► LEVEL 3

LEVEL 1: COMMUNICATION MODES

LEVEL 2: UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

LEVEL 3: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Discuss with students how and when different types of information sharing are helpful. For example, there are verbal, nonverbal, written, and visual types, and within each type there are variations; no one type is always best.
- Help students think about the communication channel – the medium used to convey information – such as email, instant message, face-to-face. Note that multiple types of communication can be used with these different channels. For example, pictures can be shown during a face-to-face, or attached to an email. Consider which channel is preferred in which types of situations.

In the haste of quick communication, people often leave out specificity...





DIGGING DEEPER

- **Update/Feedback acronym: F.A.S.T.**

F = FREQUENT

A = ACCURATE

S = SPECIFIC

T = TIMELY

- Groups such as **Toastmasters** provide a friendly platform to practice speaking and see good practices.
- Use the **6Cs method** for providing information:
Clear, Concise, Concrete, Courteous, Complete, and Correct.

*Please visit the **RDI Mentoring Sparks** website for examples and links to these tools and resources!*



EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. For giving clear, concrete directions: during a research group meeting, have a bucket and two/three objects that can be dropped into the bucket. Blindfold one person, move the bucket somewhere in the room, and give directions on how to get to the bucket and drop in the objects (*for added complexity, have multiple people give directions at the same time and/or task someone with being vague on purpose*).
2. For clarity: have someone verbally describe a picture while others draw what they are hearing. Discuss the variation in drawings.
3. Have students volunteer to review other's work, a paper review, conference proceedings, etc. Have them use the 6Cs method.



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Discuss what a technical presentation looks and sounds like for different audiences, e.g., *people who are less technical but control granting money; audiences who will implement the research findings, but are not researchers; and peers.*
- Model effective communication by switching roles between listening and speaking and ensuring accuracy of what was said and what was heard. Use the tools suggested in the first two communication Sparks.
- Model effective communication by providing feedback in a timely manner that is specific and accurate. Keep the feedback non-judgmental/neutral by avoiding telling them what they meant, but rather what you heard and how you received it.
- **GOAL Setting:** Agree on a goal for the student related to clarity of a message and/or how it may be different for different audiences.



REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

Student and Faculty: How can communication improve between the advisor and advisee?

As a next step, consider a joint faculty/student co-created set of communication norms and expectations early in the advising relationship to reduce misunderstandings and strengthen trust throughout the PhD journey.

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