

ALC Tip Sheet #6 FAQ about Communication

What does the Board of Ed mean by “communication” in the ALC?

The Board of Ed has yet to specify what “communication” should entail. We are *choosing* to deal with that lack of specificity as a good thing. It frees us to reflect the kinds of communication that truly express what is important in your specific major.

What’s the best way to decide the scope of communication that we should address?

Think about the kinds of communication that make the most sense for students who graduate from your program. Do the jobs that they move toward help you get a sense of what kinds of learning experiences you should providing to produce those skills. Commit to the modes of communication that best capture what your major should be able to do.

Is there an expectation about how many modes of communication we should include?

Not really. It is best to think through what the baccalaureate trained student in your area might reasonably be expected to do following graduation.

Should writing be included as a core communication requirement?

Probably it should. The State of Florida requires students to be involved in significant amounts of writing linked to the Gordon Rule. Although this rule specifies the quantity of writing, we hope that giving closer attention to writing as a specific competence can foster more consistent feedback to help students develop this important skill.

For defining a writing outcome, think about the kinds of advanced writing projects that get assigned to your students in the later parts of the major. Those should correspond to the kinds of work students may be required to do in graduate school or employment after graduation. If your major has a capstone course that requires writing, that becomes the ideal vehicle to assess how much the student has internalized about professional level writing during the undergraduate experience.

Even greater coherence in students’ writing development can be achieved by designing and adopting a “style sheet” that identifies criteria that constitute good writing for your discipline. For example, there are some common characteristics of good writing—regardless of major—that can provide a framework to facilitate evaluating student papers. Typically, good papers should follow the directions, engage the reader, be well organized, contain a clear thesis, show good writing conventions, use discipline concepts accurately, cite evidence, and so forth. Specific types of writing (e.g., lab reports, business letters) may have even more specific parameters that can be spelled out ahead of time but with some collaboration in the department, you may be able to have a department “rubric” for writing that will facilitate consistent feedback.

Must we include speaking as a required communication mode?

It isn't a requirement. However, if your capstone course or advanced course requirements depend on oral presentation of content, these become natural vehicles to evaluate students' oral skill. Currently, UWF does not require a speech class in general education so many of our students may not have significant experience in crafting and delivering speeches before they face sophisticated speaking demands in their advanced coursework.

If your department wishes to include speaking as a communication outcome, then you need to work in the department to foster giving feedback not just on the quality of the content addressed in the speech but how effective the speech was as well.

Good speaking has some common characteristics that might lend themselves to a speaking "style sheet" for the department: engaging the audience, stating a clear purpose, supporting the speech with appropriate visual media, using expert resources, having a sound structure and logical development, engaging delivery, and so forth.

What about technological "literacy?"

Many departments may want to address the specific kinds of technology that students are expected to use in the major. For some students, technology may be computers and presentation media. For others, technology might involve more specific instrumentation in science or music. What technology should your students be able to operate upon graduation? Would this domain be a good place to articulate your commitment to helping students learn these skills?

What about quantitative literacy?

This focus will vary according to the major as well. Some majors have little to do with numbers beyond the basics that are required in general education. If that is the case, then there is no need to specify quantitative measures at this stage of our planning. On the other hand, if your major depends on numbers, it may be useful to articulate to the students the kinds of quantitative systems in which you will expect some facility. Think about the use of numbers as a means to communicate. Does your major demand these abilities in your students? Can you describe what kind of quantitative skills students will need in the major so that it will help them understand the emphasis you may place on numbers?

What about interpersonal communication?

If it is central to the success of the major, it may be useful to include an interpersonal communication goal as a separate outcome. Keep in mind that if you specify interpersonal communication as a necessary skill, you are saying that these kinds of skills will be both taught in your curriculum and more formally assessed as well. On the other hand, you may be able to address the interpersonal dimension of communication by embedding this skill set in project management, which will be the focus the next tip sheet.

What might communication outcomes look like?

- creates and delivers effective oral presentations
- executes effective written communications in different modes appropriate to the discipline
- uses visual communication (e.g., graphs and charts) effectively
- operates technology related to the study of ___X___
- interacts effectively one-on-one and in groups

What is the simplest path you can recommend?

Look at the communication requirements you have for students in their most senior classes, especially the capstone course. What you are asking students to do to communicate their knowledge becomes a natural vehicle that can be used for specifying learning outcomes in this domain. Limit your outcomes to those communication activities that you are already doing competently. You can always revisit and add other outcomes down the road if your department agrees to go that route.