

Effective Academic Communication

Session Description



How do you express your ideas in an academic setting? How confident do you feel navigating some of the unique traits of academic communication? Join us and learn some simple techniques to help you explain your ideas in terms your peers and tutors understand. We will focus on online and distance communication, and share tips to help you avoid misunderstandings and reach your full potential.

First thoughts word cloud



- Using the option to type in where it says enter word here say **What is the main thing you find challenging about academic communication?**
- Note use up to three words and if you want to reinforce something written, you can duplicate it.

Enter word here

First thoughts communication 1



If you could choose any method to communicate with someone you know well which method would you use? Select one answer from the poll and have a look at what others have chosen

- Face to face
- Phone
- Text
- Social media
- Email
- Letter

First thoughts communication 2



Now, if you could choose any method to communicate with someone you don't know well, e.g. for employment, study, finance which method would you use? Select one answer from the poll

- Face to face
- Phone
- Text
- Social media
- Email
- Letter

Differences



- If there were differences in your chosen communication method from the previous 2 questions - please give any reasons you might have for that in the short answer poll.
- Then have a look at what others suggest

Academic communication



- Can be done ad hoc but some planning is a good idea to ensure you communicate what you need / want to and that it is appropriate to the situation
- This is particularly the case if you need to evidence something

Communication...



- Communication (verbal and written) is what marks humans out as intelligent beings and there are a variety of types.
- Part of your skills development in Higher Education is to work out which types of communication are appropriate and develop these in a way that supports your study goals.
- The end aim is to ensure the knowledge you have carefully understood during your studies can be communicated effectively and you can demonstrate that understanding.

Poll time - feelings



How are you feeling right now communicating in this setting?

- Really relaxed and chatty
- I like this format of giving my views
- I feel part of a big group / community
- I feel what I am saying is helpful to others
- I feel like what I have to say matters
- People say the same things as me so I am not alone 😊
- Others seem to find this easier than me!
- I'm not always sure what to say
- Overwhelmed by the choices!
- Some people seem more popular than others
- Feel a bit anxious than I am going to be tested
- I'm not chatting because I am worried people may think I look foolish.

We are chatty 😊



- One of our main remits in these online workshops is to build community
- Interaction is important
- We are passionate about skills development
- Sessions can be very busy
- We are probably quite different from tutorials
- We do recognise this can be scary
- Do what you feel comfortable with

Why different?



- We (Rob and those within SHL) are different from tutorials as these are workshops, but we are the same people as we run tutorials too
- Different settings have different norms
 - Communicating with someone you know really well at home / work / on social media may well be different than communicating with your GP
- Similarly communicating online depends on the setting and scenario

A note of clarification



- Academic communication within assessment and modules needs to use evidence effectively to support points.
- Academic communication is objective, which means it is not personalized or emotional.
- It is for a purpose and therefore needs to be considered.

Other writing sessions



SHL run workshops on:

- Essay planning (beginners / advanced / expert)
- Essay writing (beginners / advanced / expert)
- Critical thinking (beginners / advanced / expert)

Please see the main <https://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/> details of workshops as they are announced and sign up to the mailing list to be the first to know.

Academic communication poll



Academic communication has various forms (not including assessment such as essay writing)

- Please use the short answer poll pod to say who you may need to communicate with academically and the purpose of the communication (make sure you answer both parts of the question before pressing return, otherwise it won't make sense).

Communication - our ideas



- Tutor – discussing study, feedback, tutorials – usually semi formal for clarity and courtesy
- Peers on module – discussing specific activities / assessment – smart casual
- Peers on module – discussing general points such as progress, tutorials, feedback etc – polite casual
- Support teams in the OU e.g. student support / disability team – usually semi formal for clarity and courtesy

Clarity and courtesy 1



- When communicating with those working within the university you want something (usually)
- Unless you are clear about what you want and why the person you are contacting is likely to be able to provide it, then you may not get be successful

Clarity and courtesy 2



- Example email sent to tutor as follows:
To tutor@ou.ac.uk
From chocolatefan@email.com
I want help with my module. What am I supposed to do?
- Please use the short answer poll to suggest what could make this more clear to the tutor.

My suggestions



- Which module and who is the student to begin with?
(no indication of the module code or the student's name – just a random email)
- What part of the module?
- What have they already done?
- What are they specifically looking for from the tutor?

Emails –tutor 1



Some (hopefully obvious) basics for email communication with your tutor:

- Be real – it is not an academic or assessed exercise, but being open and honest is the best strategy.
- Be clear exactly what you are asking about as whilst you might know which task /which TMA / other you are referring to; it might not be obvious to your tutor.
- Clearly identify yourself and your module and remember to check the email for a reply.

Emails –tutor 2



- Some students benefit from a rolling list of questions - very often we find the answer to the question as we progress or when we understand the exact question we are asking.
- It might be helpful to keep a folder of email communication so you can refer back and check answers and instructions rather than asking the same thing multiple times because you have deleted, or can't find, an email.

Tutor group forum communication



In tutor group forums the style can be more 'playful' / casual as it is in a smaller group

- There may well be notices and assessment related information and tasks but chat threads can be there for support and to get inspiration
- One useful idea is to get away from thinking of all written communication as right and wrong, but communication to help you communicate and practice writing
- You could think about ways of exploring ideas and developing your thinking.

If you are new to forum communication we recommend the openlearn course “**Building confidence in using online learning forums**”

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/building-confidence-using-online-forums/content-section-overview?active-tab=content-tab>

This gives some great advice about helping you build your confidence.

Peer communication



- As with tutors, be clear if you are looking for ideas or support
- If you are providing peer feedback be mindful of being complimentary but also constructive – it isn't helpful just to say I liked it – what did you like and why? What can be changed and why?

Larger forum communication



- Be aware about the timing of the message – e.g. if you post at midnight don't repost at 4am asking why no one has responded
- Be realistic about the remit of the communication – sometimes module wide forums are not the best place for long personalised posts
- Check netiquette guidelines and module specific messages – asking for answers is not appropriate as is directly discussing the questions in many cases
- Check if a question has already been asked and answered.

Academic communication overall



- Remember – you are studying in Higher Education so your communication needs to be appropriate for that
- If you have dashed off a quick message along the lines of ‘I don’t understand’, but then read the instructions and are clear – do make sure that you follow up your initial message to avoid the person / people spending time trying to help when there is no longer the need

So...



- So far we've mostly looked at direct and obvious communication elements, e.g. actual messages but communication goes further than that and include assessment tasks (TMA / iCMA).
- Academic English is a whole subject in itself but I'll cover some key aspects now to fit in with the idea of effective academic communication.

Academic English support



- Studenthome help centre – core skills

<https://help.open.ac.uk/developing-academic-english>

- Openlearn course English skills for learning-

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/english-skills-learning/content-section-overview>

Other support links



- Knowing what is required

<https://help.open.ac.uk/understanding-the-question>

- Writing appropriately

<http://www.open.ac.uk/libraryservices/beingdigital/objects/57/index.htm>

- Spelling and grammar <https://help.open.ac.uk/grammar-spelling-and-punctuation>

- Academic specifics like referencing and word count

<https://help.open.ac.uk/referencing-skills> and

<https://www.open.ac.uk/libraryservices/beingdigital/activity/XK1131#page1>

- The good study guide:

<https://help.open.ac.uk/booklets#good-study-guide>

Discussion activity



There will be 2 specific questions in chat pods for you to explore some of the elements we have discussed further.

- Academic communication will work well for me when ...?
- I will improve the way I communicate academically by...?
- You are welcome to add your thoughts and we will then pick up some of the themes and talk through them.
- Chat does have names on but the recording will be anonymised so you will appear as 'user number'

Take home message



- Communication at university level does need to be appropriate for the purpose so is different from common methods such
- as social media
- Hours for courses – communication can vary depending on the platform and remit
- Be clear about what you mean (and who you are if emailing) and carefully read information and answers so you know what to do.

Feedback please



Please use the following link to provide feedback to help the studenthublive team to continue to improve what we do

<https://forms.office.com/e/RMKgYi3dnx>

Upcoming sessions



- 15-Aug 11am Effective note-taking
- 22-Aug 7pm Get well prepared for your final assessment
- 03-Sep 7pm Managing your time better
- 05-Sep 11am Neurodiverse community: starting out effectively
- 10-Sep 11am Managing high-intensity study
- 12-Sep 11am Resilience: planning for success
- 17-Sep 4pm Am I too old for this: age is just a number?

Details and booking information from

<http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/>

Past student hub live online study skills sessions [here](#)

Visit us at <http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/> and subscribe for events as they are announced. Send us feedback at studenthub@open.ac.uk