

Communication in the Workplace
12-week course for limited English speakers

offered by the CCS Adult Learning Center

CCS Adult Learning Center
1000 Preston Ave., Suite D
Charlottesville, VA 22903
434-245-2817
www.charlottesville-esl.org

Goals

To increase participants' understanding of American workplace culture
To improve participants' speaking and listening, or reading and writing skills
To develop participants' "soft skills" such as team work, problem-solving, and decision making via project learning methodology

Specific, measurable, and observable objectives will be determined for each course offering, based on specific needs of the employer and participants

Content Overview

To be effective workers in the United States, people need 1) an understanding of how the organizational system works; 2) an understanding of one's assigned roles and responsibilities and how they relate to the bigger picture of the organization; 3) an ability to communicate and work effectively with others; 4) an ability to do one's work and learn new skills.

Communication in the Workplace is designed for limited English speakers. It is student-generated, meaning that as it covers language skills and basic workplace competencies it is also open-ended and reliant upon student input. While the instructor is an expert in the areas of teaching and language, the students are likely to know more about their workplace – the routines, processes, tasks, and challenges – than the instructor. As a result, the students are instrumental in identifying needs, problems, and solutions. The instructor's task is to help the students learn what they need to communicate effectively in the workplace.

The course integrates workplace content with English language instruction. Participants explore the culture of work and compare the U.S. work culture to the culture of work in their native countries with an eye to ways they could adapt to function effectively in the U.S. They explore the organization in which they work and how they fit into that broader context. They focus on communicating in the workplace context. Finally, participants decide and follow through on their own workplace communication-related project. The project is presented to members of the larger workplace community.

Given that the course is only 12 weeks (24 hours) and language development is a long process, specific objectives are identified via a needs assessment prior to the first class. The needs assessment would include discussions with management and an assessment of participant language performance levels and needs. It is important to have the assessment prior to the course start date so that the most appropriate activities and materials can be selected without wasting limited class time.

NOTE: Each unit includes multiple implementation ideas. The instructor should select only those that are appropriate based on the needs and English level of ability of the participants. It is not expected that all the ideas will be implemented.

Getting Started: Needs Assessment (3 hours)

Employees are assessed for English language skills. The assessment tool used is determined by the focus of the course. A focus on verbal skills means employees will be assessed primarily on verbal (listening and speaking) abilities and needs; a focus on literacy skills means employees will be assessed primarily on reading and writing skills and needs.

Supervisors and managers are consulted (one-on-one conversations or in a focus group) to determine specific objectives and areas of improvement.

Unit 1: The Culture of Work (4 hrs)

Objectives:

- ⇒ To define “work culture” or “culture of work”
- ⇒ To identify common and accepted work practices within the organization
- ⇒ To compare these practices with practices in one’s native country
- ⇒ To identify how one’s work fits into the broader picture of organizational aims

Key Vocabulary:

Culture	Responsibilities
Teamwork	Tasks
Decision-making	Duties
Problem-solving	Roles
Supervision	Job titles as appropriate

Implementation Ideas:

Lower Levels

- Have students individually create communication maps: have students put themselves in the middle and identify (draw) other people they communicate with at work, what about, in what way (speaking/listening, reading, writing), and how frequently. Have students share maps and add to them as appropriate. Ask the following questions: Can others accomplish their work without the work you do? Can you accomplish your work without the work of others? Who do you go to when you have a problem or question? Why that person?
- Have students complete chart or simple form with the following information: name, job title, responsibilities, duties or tasks, tools/equipment. Students can do this for job in native country, current job, and/or job they would like to have. Students can do it for themselves or interview a partner. Discussion questions can include: How do you know what to do each day? How did you learn what to do? What happens when there is a problem (something goes wrong)? What do you do? What does your supervisor do? What happens when everything goes well?
- Use pictures and/or photos to teach vocabulary related to students’ jobs (action words, nouns, prepositions, adjectives). Pictures and words can be made into flash cards for matching activities (matching word and picture) and for games (e.g. go fish).
- Use English at Work: A Toolkit for Teachers – photo cards, workbook exercises as appropriate.

Higher Levels

- Mapping activity (as above) or further discussion of how work fits into the wider context of life in their native countries and in the US. Questions for discussion may include: How many hours, on average, do people work? Do they work more than one job? What else do they do with their time? In the US, when we first meet someone, we often ask: ‘what do you do?’ (i.e. what is your job?); is that true in their countries also? Etc.

- From above mapping activity, identify areas of difference between here and one's native country and areas where they have difficulties or challenges.
- Discuss with students the purpose or aim of the organization and how they contribute to this purpose or aim. Read together relevant pieces of employee manual. Have students compare what is written with their own perspectives and experiences.
- Mapping activity for 'work culture' – have students brainstorm associated ideas. Then have them put those ideas in the context of the workplace. Define "work culture" as "the customs, beliefs, and work styles that characterize a company or work group". Discuss differences and similarities between work culture here and in native countries. As students discuss, chart on board characteristics such as
 - Working together (teams) vs. alone
 - Decision making and problem solving (managers/supervisors only vs. workers too)
 - Listening and acting on instructions vs. contributing suggestions
 - Being OK to ask questions vs. not OK
 - Workers being expected to speak at meetings vs. workers being expected to listen at meetings
 - Having specific duties vs. general responsibilities
 - Receiving specific instructions and watched over by boss vs. being monitored in a general way
 - Being given positive feedback and praise vs. being given criticism when something is done wrong
- View Workplace Essential Skills video, unit 6 (Ready for Work); workbook exercises as appropriate.
- Have students write about any of the discussion topics above, either in class or as homework. Have students share their writings with each other. Use the writing to identify grammar points to teach.

Unit 2: Communication at Work (8 hours)

- Select one: Focus on Listening/Speaking
 Focus on Reading/Writing
 Focus on Non-Verbal Communication

Objectives:

- ⇒ To understand the ‘circle of communication’ and identify the roles of listener (or reader) and speaker (or writer)
- ⇒ To acquire key vocabulary and common phrases needed to communicate at work
- ⇒ To develop literacy skills
- ⇒ To identify and practice ways of demonstrating understanding (or lack of) and ways of asking questions

Key Vocabulary:

Verbal and Non-verbal Communication
Gestures and Body Language

Implementation Ideas:

Focus on Listening/Speaking

Lower Levels

- Practice correct pronunciation of key vocabulary and phrases (word-level and rhythm of sentences).
- Have students identify key words used at work (equipment, instruction words, etc.). Have them match pictures and words and/or create sentences using words.
- Have students role play typical work dialogues, identified here and in Unit 1.
- Identify and practice ways of showing understanding or lack of (excuse me, can you repeat that, slower please, I don’t understand, etc.).
- Teach and have students practice specific tenses and time indicators as appropriate; discuss why tenses matter.
- Use English at Work: A Toolkit for Teachers radio show for listening practice.
- Depending on interest and need, address such workplace communication topics as
 - Schedules
 - Pay and benefits
 - Responsibilities and tasks
 - Safety and health
 - Directions and instructions
 - Work problems
 - Customer service
 - Applying/interviewing for a new job/promotion

Possible materials to use include English at Work: A Toolkit for Teachers (beginners); Workplace Plus (beginners through high intermediate), Make Your Mark series (Hotel Industry, Health Service, Food Service, or Retail) (advanced).

Higher Levels

- Diagram 'circle of communication' and discuss with students the roles of speaker and listener and purposes of speaking and listening. Purposes may include: to convey and receive information, to share ideas/opinions, to persuade, to entertain, to instruct and learn, to request, etc. Discuss also elements of speaking and listening.
- Have students practice asking questions (direct and embedded); review correct word order, verb tenses and time indicators.
- View English for All (episodes 1-4 pertain to work). Select episodes or vignettes based on other specific content or grammar interests. Have students discuss: What did they do well or not do well? How could they improve the communication?
- Depending on interest and need, address such workplace communication topics as
 - Schedules
 - Pay and benefits
 - Responsibilities and tasks
 - Safety and health
 - Directions and instructions
 - Work problems
 - Customer service
 - Applying/interviewing for a new job/promotionPossible materials to use include English at Work: A Toolkit for Teachers (beginners); Workplace Plus (beginners through high intermediate), Make Your Mark series (Hotel Industry, Health Service, Food Service, or Retail) (advanced).
- View Workplace Essential Skills units 9-12 as appropriate (The Language of Work, Communicating with Co-Workers and Supervisors, Working Together, and Communicating with Customers).

Focus on Reading/Writing

Lower Levels

- Review alphabet and reasons for needing to know it, sentence structure, paragraph structure, as appropriate for the students' level.
- Have students practice dictionary skills.
- Have students practice filling out sample forms used at work.
- Identify types of workplace materials commonly used or where students have difficulties.
- Have students practice reading/writing as needed and appropriate such documents as pay stubs, benefits information, instructions (written and/or pictorial), memos, charts and diagrams, forms, time cards, messages and notes, signs, labels, job descriptions, want ads/job postings, etc. Possible materials to use include English at Work: A Toolkit for Teachers (beginners); Workplace Plus (beginners through high intermediate), Make Your Mark series (Hotel Industry, Health Service, Food Service, or Retail) (advanced).

Higher Levels

- Discuss with students the purposes and elements of reading and writing (similar to listening/speaking, as above).
- Have students practice dictionary skills.
- Have students practice filling out sample forms used at work.
- Identify types of workplace materials commonly used or where students have difficulties.
- Have students practice reading/writing as needed and appropriate such documents as pay stubs, benefits information, instructions (written and/or pictorial), memos, charts and diagrams, forms, time cards, messages and notes, signs, labels, job descriptions, want ads/job postings, etc. Possible materials to use include English at Work: A Toolkit for Teachers (beginners); Workplace Plus (beginners through high intermediate), Make Your Mark series (Hotel Industry, Health Service, Food Service, or Retail) (advanced).
- Use written case studies for reading and problem solving.
- Discuss and have students practice reading strategies: identifying main ideas, using context clues to gain word meaning, using pictures, charts etc. to help understanding.
- Have students do journal writing.
- Use Workplace Essential Skills chapters 13 (A Process for Writing), 14 (Supplying Information), and 15 (Writing Memos and Letters) as appropriate.

Focus on Non-Verbal Communication

Intermediate and Advanced Levels only

- Use pictures to identify how a person is feeling and what message they convey.
- Use Workplace Essential Skills, unit 9 (The Language of Work), pages 20-23.
- View video segments (e.g. from Workplace Essential Skills or English for All) with sound off and discuss what message the person is sending by their body language. Then view same segment with sound on and compare words with body language: are they sending the same message?
- Share/compare gestures used in different countries and their meanings; identify areas for miscommunication.

Unit 3: Project Selection (2 hours)

Objectives:

- ⇒ To model and help/encourage students to use a decision making process (brainstorming ideas, evaluating feasibility and interest, pros and cons, and selecting one idea to follow through on)
- ⇒ To determine what needs to be done to accomplish the project, by when and by whom

Key Vocabulary:

Problem
Problem solving
Decision making
Team
Brainstorm

Implementation Ideas:

- Review issues (problems, topics) raised in previous units and results of pre-assessment to identify those of particular interest and concern among students.
- Brainstorm ideas for projects; map ideas on the board, grouping together related ideas.
- For a whole class project, vote on the ideas and select the one(s) of most interest; identify related ideas or components of the same idea.
- For small group or individual projects, allow students to select.
- Determine what students already know and what they need to know.
- Discuss what students would like their co-workers and/or supervisors to know about the issue.
- Share feelings students have about the issue selected.
- Determine what tasks need to be done to complete the project and assign responsibilities.
- Identify resources of information.

NOTE: Projects could be anything from: students presenting their job tasks/responsibilities; students sharing ideas for improvements at work; students giving information about themselves and their cultures; presenting short role plays or dramas; researching and explaining clearly a particular workplace issue such as benefits, health and safety, co-worker relations; creating a bilingual or multilingual vocabulary list or phrase sheet; etc.

Unit 4: Research and Preparation (6 hours)

Objectives:

- ⇒ To develop research skills
- ⇒ To prepare material for written and/or oral presentation

Implementation Ideas:

- Discuss formats for making a good presentation
- Collect information. Discuss how to evaluate sources and encourage students to critique them. Emphasize importance of presenting material in their own words and documenting sources
- Work on student writings, presentations, poster displays, as appropriate (draft, edit, and finalize writings)
- Practice oral presentations
- Invite co-workers, supervisors, and managers as appropriate to the presentation

Unit 5: Presentation (1-2 hours)

Objectives:

- ⇒ To present a final product representing student learning (ideally this would have both an oral and a written component, regardless of focus selected in Unit 2)
- ⇒ To evaluate project and presentation

Implementation Ideas:

- Have students present to audience of co-workers, supervisors, and/or managers as appropriate
- Share written product with others in the workplace, as appropriate
- Display posters
- Have audience complete short evaluation (for oral presentations)

Unit 6: Evaluation (2 hours)

Objectives:

- ⇒ To evaluate students (reaction to course and learning)

Implementation Ideas:

- Conduct post-assessment
- Discuss feelings about/reactions to the presentations
- Discuss next steps in learning
- Hand out certificates of completion