



### ***Knowing What to Say and How to Say It***

Communication is complicated and the competition for attention is fierce. With so many sources sending us messages by mail, media, print, and handheld devices it is critical to consider how communication in your course is delivered and received. Reflect on the following as you prepare to deliver oral and written communication.

- Keep your purpose in mind. Stick to your message and deliver it as simply as possible. Some people may write like they talk with a lot of extemporaneous information, which becomes noise. Sometimes bulleted lists keep your communication clean and can act as a checklist. Remember that students may not be as skilled at separating the wheat from the chaff in written form.
- Listen first, act second. Oftentimes, students just need to talk. They may not even want your advice. In a world of telling, there is a limited amount of listening. When they do want to get your ideas, it may take them some time to formulate what they really want as they may be struggling with concepts and vocabulary. Be patient and guide them to form the correct question. By listening to others, you have time to think about the response you want to give them. This helps you to be your best. Less-experienced faculty may think they need to answer students to show them how much they know. There is plenty of time to do so, once the student has spoken. Ask students additional questions to help them discover possible solutions to their own challenges. One phrase to get students to expound on their ideas is, "Say more about that."
- It is OK to say you don't know. It is better to give a good answer than an uninformed answer. If you aren't sure how to answer, let them know you will contact them in a day or two with an answer. In that time you can get the correct information, speak with others who may have similar experiences, or provide them with resources. Students will appreciate your intention to find out the best answer, and be sure to follow up with them as quickly as you can so they know you are serious. You may want to put a reminder in your phone calendar to get back to the student.
- Sarcasm can be very dangerous. Many of us can remember a time when we got a sarcastic answer from someone we respected. It can change a positive relationship into a negative one very quickly, and it takes a long time to regain the trust lost.
- On a similar note, watch your use of humor. What is funny to some, is not funny to others. Humor is more about the ways people receive it than the way it is intended. Be enthusiastic and energizing. Students respect that. As with sarcasm, a misplaced joke can ruin respect and relationships. Additionally, in culturally diverse situations, humor does not necessarily translate and may only exacerbate confusion and feelings of intimidation.

You may only get one chance at delivering great communication with students before they develop an impression. Often, the communication may not come at what is the best timing for



you where you have time to prepare, so keeping these strategies in mind can help you as a leader with strong communication skills.