



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS IN GRADUATE WORK: WHY?

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Why are you here?

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- No specific reason; wanted to if there were any gaps in my knowledge of communications strategies?
- I want to leverage communication strategies to improve my graduate experience?
- I wanted to share my experience about communication strategies with other like minded individuals.
- I thought there would be free food, but now I'm trapped and I can't leave !



How do you define communication?

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The ability to convey information effectively

i) Verbal

-Oral presentations, good writing skills (thesis and papers); graphical presentations (figures and posters); digital communications; discussions (what might be difference between a discussions and oral presentations)

ii) Non-verbal

-body language, listening, team work, work ethic/attitude, initiative



Communications skills are of primary importance to employers?

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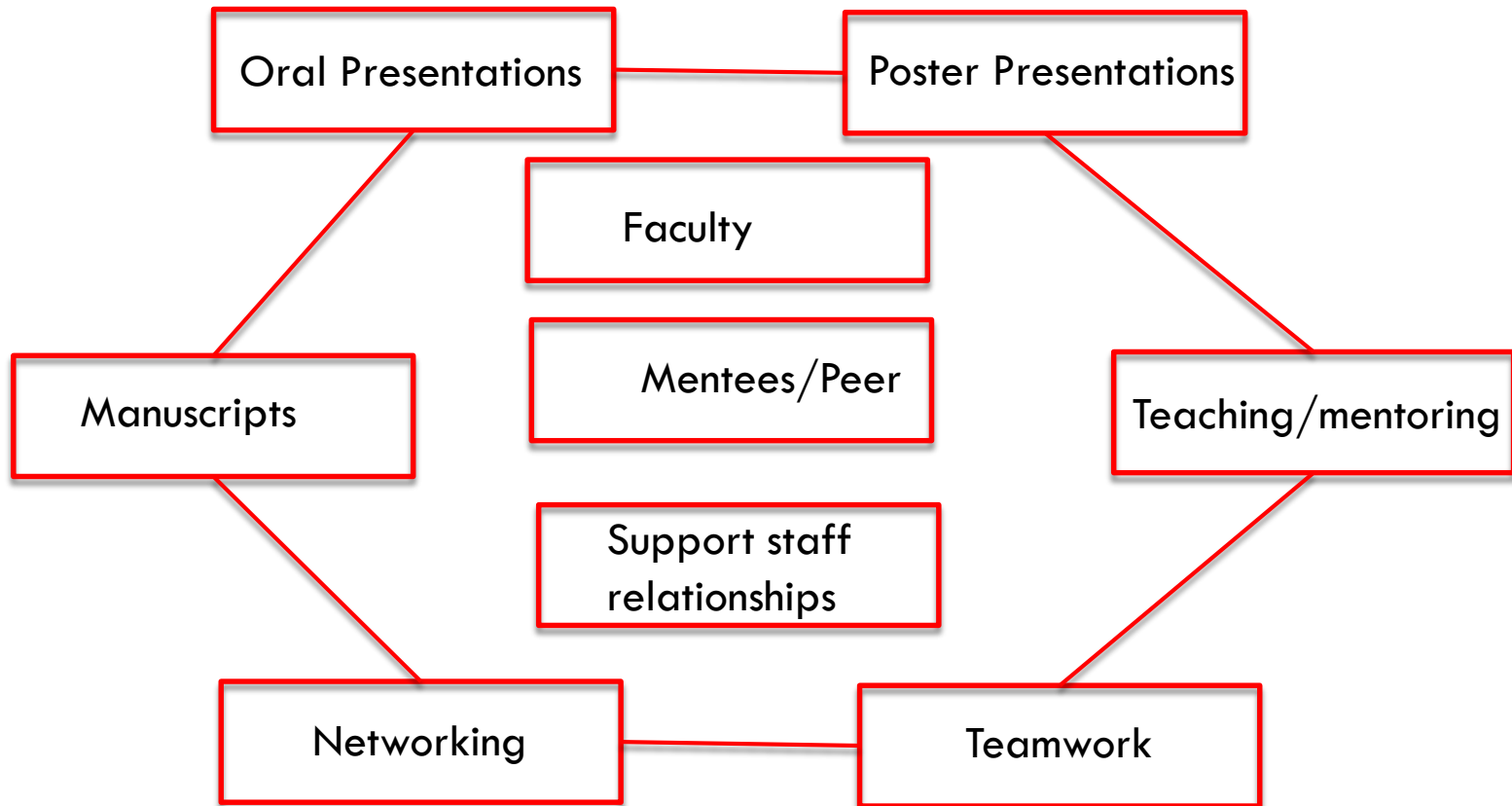
National Association of Colleges and Employers. Nov 2017

<https://www.nacweb.org/about-us/press/2017/the-key-attributes-employers-look-for-in-students-resumes>

ATTRIBUTE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Communication skills (written)	82.0%
Problem-solving skills	80.9%
Ability to work in a team	78.7%
Initiative	74.2%
Analytical/quantitative skills	71.9%
Strong work ethic	70.8%
Communication skills (verbal)	67.4%
Leadership	67.4%
Detail-oriented	59.6%
Technical skills	59.6%
Flexibility/adaptability	58.4%
Computer skills	55.1%
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)	52.8%
Organizational ability	43.8%
Strategic planning skills	38.2%
Tactfulness	25.8%
Creativity	23.6%
Friendly/outgoing personality	22.5%
Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker	16.9%
Fluency in a foreign language	11.2%

Importance of good communication in graduate studies ?

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General Considerations



Know your content well!

- Be sure you have a clear understanding of the topic area
- Do additional research based on your audience makeup so you are prepared for potentially difficult questions
- If appropriate, bring some support materials with you
- Use effective examples to connect your points to the audience

Respect your audience and believe in what you are saying: Oral communications

- ❑ Do not use inappropriate humour or language
- ❑ Be on time; for presentations-start on finish on time
- ❑ Have quality presentation materials
- ❑ Be confident in your presentation style
- ❑ Speak in a positive and projecting manner
- ❑ Use caution and respect in answering question. Don't be dismissive or sarcastic with answers.
- ❑ Do not “talking down” to your audience. Use great care in selecting your words. Non-expert audiences should never feel like they are being patronized

The Scientific Presentation



Three key questions for all presentations

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- How do I deliver my message clearly?
 - ▣ What is my message?
- How do I deliver my message appropriately?
 - ▣ Who is my audience?
- How do I deliver my message persuasively?
 - ▣ What parts of message would most interest my audience?

Develop a clear storyline

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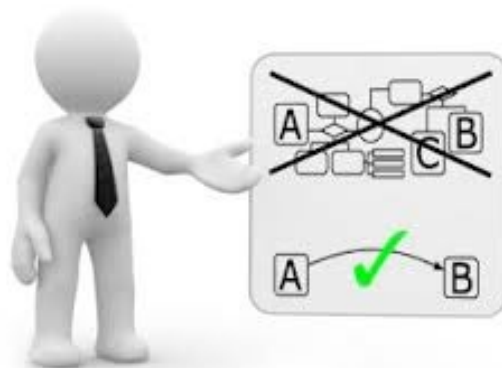
- Pick a clear storyline or thread in your research and discuss that and show the data that supports a single facet of your research
- Get to the focus of the presentation right at the start; clarify the impact of your work; don't be too detailed about the procedure-lead your audience
- If possible use a figure to clarify complex objective or methods



Posters should be simple and clear

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- People generally don't spend more than 2-3 min per poster
- Don't try to explain your entire thesis in your poster. Use the KISS principle → keep it short and simple
- **Important Lesson → keeping it simple is a good research communication**



Make the poster easily “viewable”

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- Don't make your title too long or too cute. **A concise informative title is best.**
- Make sure your poster is easy to read
 - ▣ Consistent font and size
 - ▣ Font size is large enough to read from 1-2 metres away
 - ▣ Bars and axis on graphs are consistently labelled
- Be cautious of “over-using” colour. Avoid using a dark background (personal preference)

Business Style Presentation

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- Always lead with the take home point/conclusion
- Make your take home points decisive
- Keep the justification short and justify with numbers where ever possible (dollars, disease stats etc...)
- End your presentation with actionable items



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Additional learning to extract from your communication experiences



Utilize the full potential of a poster

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- Have a 2-3 min talk regarding your poster prepared
- Make sure the flow and clarity of the poster is such that it can be understood even if you are not explaining
- Utilize the networking opportunities in a poster → ask for suggestions to improve your work; *exchange contact information* (Business cards etc....)
- Will teach you how to customize the delivery of your research to each person that visits your posters...**Learn how to advertise your research**

(McNutt, M. 2015. Science 347: 1047)



Skills learned from manuscript preparation

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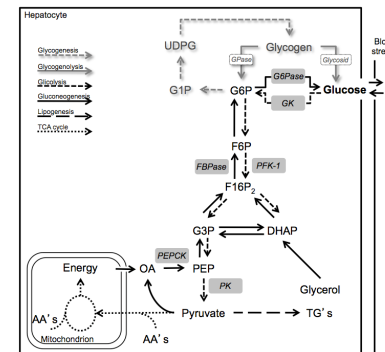
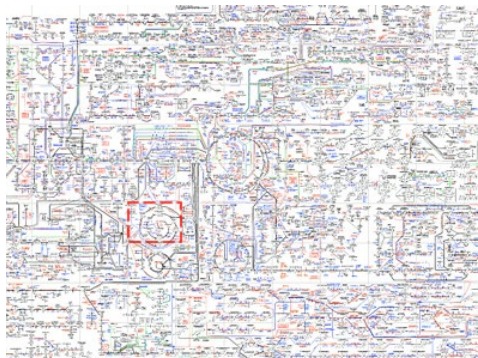
- Practice the details of accurate communication, especially with methods and results
- Good place to hone writing skills using clear, engaging language. Writing skills are critical for employers
- Learn how to contextualize your research and build questions for future projects



Untangle your own research

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- Place your research in context and simplify in the presentation → practice how to predict the next step



- Graphically express your hypothesis → leads to greater understanding and retention
- Develop a story that has a impact factor

Get feedback on your research

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- Solicit suggestions on your research, especially in a friendly environment
- Take the time to reflect on suggestions and critically evaluate each one





What is the value of a presentation to your career development?

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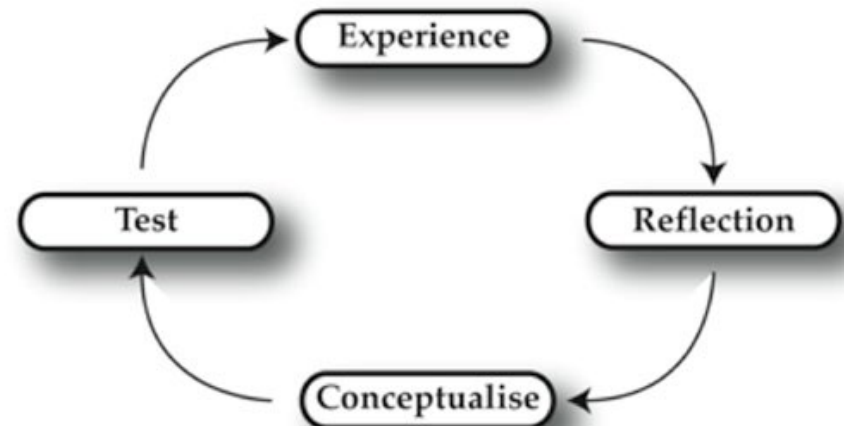
- ❑ It is far more than just “√” on your CV
- ❑ Use your presentation to learn how to sell your research and your self...it's a interview. The more you do, the better you will become!
- ❑ Just like in an interview, learn how to be engaged and how to engage...



What can you learn from other researcher's presentations?

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- Study different delivery and layout styles
- Challenge your critical thinking ability by attending presentations immediately outside your area of research
- Learn how to engage people outside your area of research - an extremely valuable entrepreneurial skill



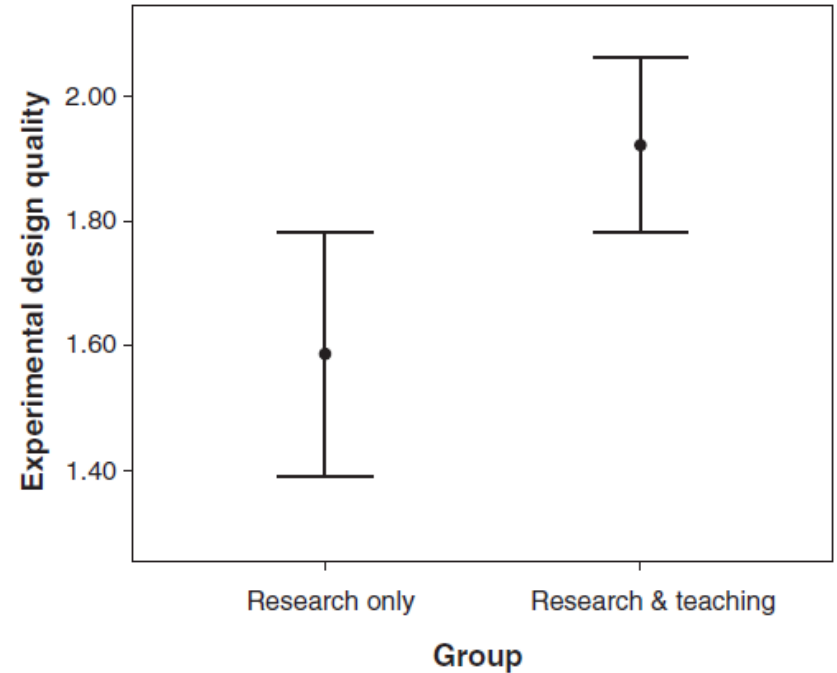
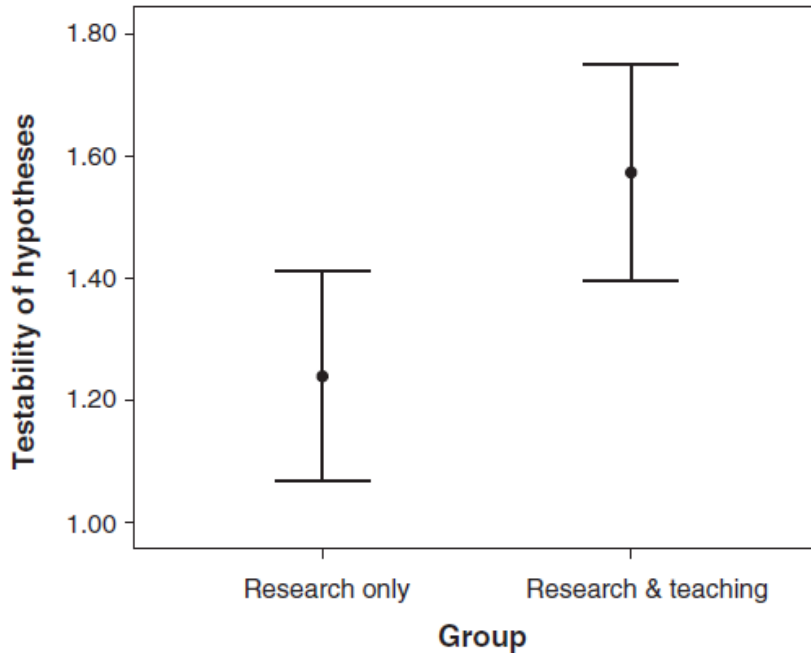
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Value of Teaching



Teaching helps research

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95 early career graduate students were evaluated, at two time points, for the quality of hypothesis and experimental design for their thesis proposals (accounting for previous research training).

Feldon et al. Science 333, 1037 (2011)

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Teamwork Skills



Leadership and collaborative skills?

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- ❑ These are highly valued by employers
- ❑ Involves both verbal and non-verbal skill sets
- ❑ Learning how to empower people and support colleagues
- ❑ Teamwork doesn't mean silent obedience
- ❑ Take these opportunities to develop your skills in recognizing talent





**The role of
the mentee**

The communication skills to practice in your role as a mentee?

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- Demonstrate a strong work-ethic – practice/organization
- Develop creativity – read the literature and develop ideas
- Demonstrate initiative – explore the possibility of acting on ideas
- Learn how to actively listen and value the opinions of others. Don't look bored and unengaged in conversations and meetings.



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The support staff



The communication skills to practice with support staff?

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- Courteous treatment and consideration of other peoples time. Try to look at requests from the other persons point of view.
- Consider other peoples timelines; things cant always be done immediately (on your timeline).
- Invest time in a relationship: Find out what they do, you'll be surprised how that knowledge will come back to help you
- Offer to help when opportunities arise

Your Supervisor

A word cloud centered on the slide, featuring various terms related to mentoring and supervision. The words are arranged in a cluster, with some larger than others. The colors used are black, red, and grey. The largest words are 'mentoring' and 'guiding'. Other prominent words include 'teaching', 'learning', 'relationship', 'coaching', 'work', 'inspiring', 'experience', 'responsibility', 'collaborating', 'advising', 'directing', 'supporting', 'motivating', 'helping', 'investment', 'training', 'rewarding', and 'journey'.

journey rewarding work inspiring experience
mentoring
coaching responsibility collaborating
teaching training advising
investment directing supporting
learning relationship motivating helping

Communication with your supervisor; why is this complicated?

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- Remember this is a relationship: layout expectations
- Expect professional “give and take”-its not only about you getting a degree (thesis based projects).
- You have to consider how you will manage disagreements-best strategy is usually clear and open communication
- McMaster Resources:
 - ▣ Getting the Relationship off to a good start
 - ▣ https://gs.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/resources/supervisory_relationshipjuly_222016.pdf



Resources on Campus

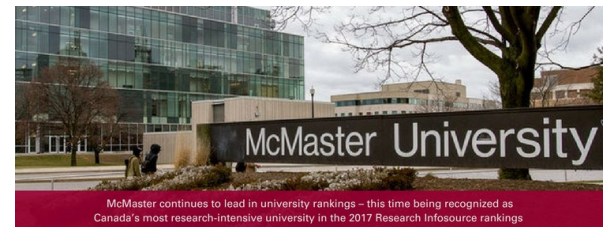
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□ McPherson Institute

- EDUCATN 700: Essential Skills in Teaching and Learning (II)

□ Centre for Continuing Education

- Coaching and Mentoring (ESS-902)
- Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback (ESS 834)
- Delegating that Works (ESS 806)



Discussion ?

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“If the speaker sends a message that the receiver does not understand – then who needs to change?”



“Presentation ability is not a talent – it is a skill.”