THREE TOP TIPS FOR TEACHING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION SKILLS

KISS – Keep it Short & Simple or Keep it Simple, Stupid!

Don’t overcomplicate things by trying to teach business communication 101. Don’t try to teach using the telephone effectively in one class. Break things down into small easily digestible chunks and remember to give enough time in class for your students to practice and utilise the information you’ve given them. This way your students will get quick wins and they’ll feel that they are really making progress when they walk out of a class with an increased skill level.

Practice what you preach

Would you go on an organisational skills workshop with someone who couldn’t organise a p**ss up in the proverbial brewery? No, I didn’t think so. If you want to come across as someone with credibility to teach business communication skills, you need to act the part.

Keep it Real

There are some excellent business English communication resources out there but nothing is a substitute for the real thing. We all learn better if what we are learning is directly relevant to us. One way to do this is to talk about a particular situation and how they could have dealt with it in a better way, for example a meeting or an interview.

Another excellent way to do this that works really well is to get them to bring to class examples of emails, reports or other documents that they have received or are working on. An additional benefit of using real examples is that it can cut down on your planning time!

Also, don’t restrict looking for materials from the usual teaching sources: there are some fantastic business websites that have some great materials suitable for teaching business communication skills (see list below).

Make sure that your communication with your students is professional and business-like. If you’re sending them an email, use the right structure. If you’re doing a class on presentation structure, use the structure in your class. Review all the materials you’re going to use thoroughly and you’ll probably increase your own communication skills significantly.

If you don’t feel like you’ve had enough business experience to teach business communication skills, in the words of Amy Cuddy, “Fake it till you become it”. If you haven’t already seen Amy’s TED talk, I’d thoroughly recommend it and it makes a great class too! There are some examples of how to use it in a class on the TEDEd website.
**GENERAL BUSINESS WEBSITES**

*Harvard Business Review* has some great blogs and videos on business communication that are often leading edge or from people at the top of their profession.

https://hbr.org/

BBC Capital often has useful and interesting tips and articles if you want a discussion based class around an element of business communication or career development

http://www.bbc.com/capital/

*Barclays Life Skills* is a free website (although you do have to subscribe) designed for young people to teach them the skills they need to succeed but there are some really useful tools

https://www.barclayslifeskills.com/

*Enterprise Zone* is a free website designed to assist teachers teaching life skills under the UK curriculum but the teachers’ toolkit has some easy explanations of some of the standard strategic tools like SWOT and PEST. There is also a good template on how to design a questionnaire and the corporate decision making template. In my experience most Spanish students LOVE tools and models. The lesson plan on communication with customers is also a great ready to go lesson with a case study.

http://www.enterprise-zone.co.uk/teachers/

*Skills You Need* is another free life skills website. http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ It doesn’t have any lessons but has lots of information on areas like communication skills and writing skills together with examples. You can cut and paste the information and build a class fairly easily. There is lots of information on communication and interpersonal skills and if you invest the time in reading it through, you’ll sound less like a business English teacher and more like a business skills trainer. Some good examples I like are how to write a press release or how to write a LinkedIn profile.

http://www.skillsyouneed.com/write/linkedin-profile.html

*Mindtools* is a subscription website with a HUGE amount of business communication resources and videos. It’s not cheap to subscribe but there are some good videos on their You Tube Channel

https://www.mindtools.com
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQMAg3OSqIKZTbYuRvYVsyA

*Forbes* often has relevant articles and videos too. / http://www.forbes.com/

- 10 Questions you should ask in a job interview http://www.forbes.com/video/435437968001/

*TED* – if you’re not already using TED talks in the classroom you must have been hiding under a rock for the last few years. Some of the best business communication talks to plan a class around from the last 12 months or so are:

- As work gets more complex, 6 rules to simplify
- Got a wicked problem? First tell me how you make toast
- The Secret Structure of Great Talks
- Got a Meeting? Take a Walk
- Talk Nerdy to Me
- How to Save the World from Bad Meetings

*Linguahouse* has a lesson plan for this video http://www.linguahouse.com/esl-lesson-plans/business-english/055a424b-4d49-01d4-clcd-7e190e9df7ba/bad-meetings.html
Sometimes it can be worth investing in a couple of good business communication teaching books as you'll find yourself using them time and time again and they can also inspire you to create your own materials. Some of the best books out there are:

- Successful Meetings, Oxford
- Successful Presentations Oxford
- Dynamic Presentations, Cambridge
- International Negotiations, Cambridge
- Communicating Across Cultures, Cambridge
- Writing for Impact, Cambridge
- The Business English Teacher, Delta Publishing

Again, don’t just focus on EFL books. There are some excellent business communication books written for native speakers that, if you’re interested in the subject, you can utilise ideas from.
Some great fun videos that you can use in a class on teleconferences and videoconferences:

Phone tips  A Conference Call in Real Life  A Video Conference Call in Real Life

They work really well as a warmer or just to elicit what the problems are in teleconferences/videoconferences and to highlight to students that it isn’t just non-natives that find them difficult! Wherever possible, get students to actually use their phones. If you have a large enough room or use more than one room you can split them into groups for activities.

Some good, simple activities for telephone communication:

Signs and symbols used in email addresses  NATO alphabet

You could follow this up by having students swap real or fictional contact information. Fictional is better because you can make it really difficult!

• Act it Out – Get two students at the front of the class and other students shout out situations and the two students at the front have to roleplay the telephone conversation.
• Voicemail in English – Get them to write and record their voicemail in English.
• Request for information – Get them to look at a website of an English speaking company and then call the company to request some specific information (eg, calling a store and asking for the opening times or calling a hotel and asking for information about facilities).
• Real Life Situation (good for confidence building and 1-2-1 classes) – Get your student to bring a real situation to class where they have to make a telephone call in English. Discuss it with them prior to making the call and sit with them while they make the call. After the call go through any errors they made or language that could be improved.

Small Talk

A lesson plan on small talk from Linguahouse

Other ideas for classes on small talk:

• Networking – give your students fake identities or ask them to create a fake identity for themselves and encourage them to find out about one another.
• Find Someone Who – Get your students to write down something that none of their fellow students knows about them. They then have to mingle and try and discover the information but without asking directly, just by using small talk.
• Get your students to come up with the 10 rules for small talk
http://www.realsimple.com/work-life/work-life-etiquette/manners/10-big-rules-small-talk

This area gives you the opportunity to introduce many other communication skills, like body language, empathy and emotional intelligence, rapport building.

There is some good information these areas available on Skills You Need

Travel

There are a great range of lessons on business travel on Business English Pod:

https://www.businessenglishpod.com/category/travel/

Another great idea is to get students to write down different travel situations and scenarios and then get students to roleplay the situations.
A fun video to highlight mistakes we make with email is "Email in Real Life"
You can use this to help elicit some tips for writing effective emails.

A great class on writing emails I use time and time again is the structure of an email from The Business English Teacher book. I usually elicit the structure first, then some key phrases for each section. Student end up with is a useful template they can use for writing emails in English with some key vocabulary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject line:</th>
<th>Agenda for meeting on 24 February</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salutation:</td>
<td>Dear Mr. Smith, Dear Bob, Hi Janet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>Introduction – giving the reason for writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm writing to confirm/to ask/to give/to request/to attach/to apologise/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm writing about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regarding your email of 6 February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I received your details from X and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details:</td>
<td>Main body – giving further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My main questions are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The current situation is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My proposal is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please find attached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action:</td>
<td>Final sentence – stating what future action is expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please respond to me by Friday 20 February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please call me on my direct line/mobile on Tuesday to discuss these points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I need the information by Wednesday. Therefore, I would appreciate it if you could get back to me by then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would be grateful if you could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure:</td>
<td>Kind regards, Yours sincerely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A more serious video on writing effective emails is from Mindtools
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjgWiJnGS5g

Other ideas for email classes are:

- Get each student to bring an email they've received and get them to swap emails with another student and write a reply.
- Elicit from students a list of different types of email they would write, eg, asking a supplier for a quotation, requesting information on a conference venue etc, and get them to write an email.
- Give them a poorly structured email and get them to explain what is wrong with it and how they would improve it.

Tips for writing good emails:

http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/e-text/email/

When covering emails, it is usually a good time to cover the differences between formal and informal writing. There are a heap of ideas for covering this here:

https://tefltastic.wordpress.com/worksheets/writing/e-mail/formality/
The best way to teach skills needed for successful interviews is to practice them.

You could break down job interviews into several different classes around the communication skills needed throughout the whole process, for example:

Writing a good LinkedIn Profile   Writing a CV/resume   Writing a Cover Letter

Body Language   Interview Do's and Don't's

Interview Questions: You could get students to imagine they were interviewing someone for their own job and write a list of questions which they could then roleplay in pairs (reviewing question structure if needed).

There is a great list of 100 interview questions on Monster

The important thing with all of this is to make sure you get the students to practice by writing their LinkedIn profile, CV, covering letter, having an interview, etc.

Some other useful related resources:

What not to do in an interview
10 questions you should ask in an interview
How to answer the 31 Most Common Interview Questions

A good simple guide to writing a report is here.

Get your students to bring examples of reports they have received in English. If this is not possible, you can find some examples online.

Again, practice is everything. Reports can take a long time to write, so break the report down into the various different sections and concentrate on them one at a time.

Give your students simple business scenarios and ask them to write a report, eg, to write a report on the training and development available to employees in the company including current opportunities, an assessment of how effective these are, recommendations for change and anything else they consider relevant.

It is essential to cover linking words and phrases. This is a really comprehensive guide:
http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/1.33.htm

The book Writing for Impact dedicates a couple of paragraphs to report writing.
REPORT LAYOUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title Page</th>
<th>The name of the report, date, writer and version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>What you will find in the report, page numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>A briefing on the main points of the report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>What the report is about, why it was written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Where the data is from, how it was found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>The results of the research carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>A summary of the report with final remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>The writer’s suggestions, based on the findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>Extra, detailed information, charts, graphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>A list of sources used in the writing of the report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...MEETINGS

A fun starting point to get students discussing behaviour in meetings is this video:

Every Meeting Ever

Again, don't try to teaching meetings in one or two classes. Some ideas for classes for meetings are:

• What makes an effective meeting, best and worst meetings ever attended
• Phrasal Verbs for Meetings
• Agendas
• Language for different functions, eg, clarifying, interrupting, questioning, expressing opinions, summarising
• Softening and diplomatic language
• Chairing Skills

Alternatively, if you don’t have time to plan, you can access a full range of ready-made lesson plans for all areas of meetings and negotiations for B2 and above, here.

In addition, the old BBC Learning English had a useful section on meetings here.

Linguahouse has a few lessons on meetings, some are free but some you have to subscribe for (around 3€ a month). Here are the free ones:

Bad Meetings (using TED talk)
Chairing a Meeting
Vocabulary for Meetings

Here are some extra resources for meetings:

Mindtools has a good little video on questioning techniques like open & closed questions, funnelling, etc.

Worksheets for roleplays and additional activities available for free online.

Lots of ideas to use in the classroom for meetings.
TtMadrid hosts Ongoing Professional Development (OPD) training every Saturday, from 10am to 1pm, with professional business trainers and teaching experts.

For a full list of TtMadrid's OPD courses, click here.