

The importance of English communication skills to succeed in the workplace for 2022

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A Scientific American blog about the role of luck in success mentions the popularity of magazines such as *Success*, *Forbes*, *Inc.*, and *Entrepreneur* and argues that we can learn to be successful by reading about successful people:

“ There is a deep underlying assumption... that we can learn from them because it's their personal characteristics – such as talent, skill, mental toughness, hard work, tenacity, optimism, growth mindset, and emotional intelligence – that got them where they are today. This assumption doesn't only underlie success magazines, but also how we distribute resources in society, from work opportunities to fame to government grants to public policy decisions. We tend to give out resources to those who have a past history of success, and tend to ignore those who have been unsuccessful, assuming that the most successful are also the most competent. ”

While not discounting the role that luck, or family inheritance and reputation might have in success, we should consider the massive role that good English communication skills play in success. For example, if you cannot express yourself well, your proposal will be unsuccessful. If your business plan is full of grammar errors, then even if the financials do add up, and you can show a past history of success, you are less likely to be successful in whatever circumstances you find yourself.

Your language skills might be holding you back

Imagine English is not your first language: you were taught English in your mother tongue and never really had to use the language. Now, in the workplace, you are expected to be a proficient English speaker: you have to write emails, proposals and reports or do presentations in English. Imagine your message and tone are misinterpreted, or even called unprofessional, because your English writing and speaking lack the refinement of a first language speaker.

For many South Africans, this is the reality they face daily at work. Many hard-working and enthusiastic people are overlooked when it comes to promotion simply because they cannot write a report or structure an effective presentation, or they make a few grammar or spelling errors when they write emails. The result is a work environment that destroys employees' confidence in expressing their ideas.

There are many daily examples where stronger communication skills could make the difference between success and failure. If a junior data processor bypasses her line manager to ask another manager for help with entering a batch of data in a different format, but is not clear about the batch names, she is unlikely to be successful in getting her job done. Fortunately, this lack of clarity in her emails can very effectively be overcome by improving her business communication skills.



Effective business emails need to be short and to the point, with very specific detail, especially if a request or instruction is given. The reader cannot be expected to do anything if they do not know what is actually being requested. It may be a simple case of giving the label names of the data batches, as in this example, but often managers grumble about staff being incompetent or lazy when the problem is their own poor communication skills and inability to use email effectively.

Increasing emphasis on language

For years, many companies considered language skills to be a 'soft skill' – useful but not specifically necessary for work. However, employees are starting to recognise the importance of better English skills in the workplace and are enrolling in English language classes, not only to improve their own language skills, but also their self-confidence and to increase their promotion opportunities at work.

The solution does not rely on luck: we all have the innate ability to improve our own communication skills. For those who want to improve their communication skills mindfully, there are short courses that take only a few hours a week for a couple of months that will give them insights into well researched theories and techniques so that they can apply these strategically in their personal and professional lives.

Courses to help you

Learn how to write the best cover letter for your CV. Create impressive PowerPoint presentations that will stand out from others. Learn how to structure an objective, detailed and cohesive report. Maybe you want to learn some spelling rules or how to use commas and semicolons correctly? Would you like to improve your pronunciation skills and speak with confidence in front of people? Or learn how to use words effectively to communicate clear messages at work?



The [Wits Plus Language School](#) at Wits University offers various English development and [English improvement courses](#) that are designed for second language speakers. In these courses, you will increase your vocabulary, revise essential grammar rules and learn how to write business documents that are effective, professional and persuasive. Another course offered by Wits Plus is [Effective Business Communication short course](#) (online as [Business Communication Skills](#)) that aims to equip students to make the most of opportunities.

Studies have shown that the most talented people are not the most successful in life, but that luck and opportunity may play an unseen role in that success. Excellent communication skills are key to making the most of opportunities and breaking through to success!

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