

# Communication skills for workplace success

Issued by [Wits Plus](#)

17 Apr 2023

A blog in the *Scientific American* magazine argues that we can learn to be successful by reading about successful people and it also emphasises the role of luck in success:

The assumption is that we can learn from them because their personal characteristics – such as talent, skill, mental toughness, hard work, tenacity, optimism, growth mindset, and emotional intelligence – got them where they are today. This assumption often also determines how resources are distributed in society, from work opportunities to fame and government grants.

Resources are often given to those who have a past history of success, thus assuming that the most successful are also the most competent.

The role that luck, or family inheritance and reputation might have in success is undeniable but we should consider the massive role that good English communication skills can play in success. For example, if you cannot express yourself well, your proposal may not be successful. 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.

## **Are your language skills 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. In the workplace, however, you are expected to be a proficient English speaker: you have to write emails, proposals and reports or do presentations in English. What if your message and tone are misinterpreted, or even called unprofessional, because your English writing and speaking lack the refinement of a first language speaker?

Many South Africans face this reality at work every day. Hard-working and enthusiastic people are often overlooked when it comes to promotion simply because they cannot write a report or structure an effective presentation, or they make some 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. A lack of clarity in email messages can very effectively be overcome by improving your 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 don't know what is actually being requested!



### **Language is more than a soft skill**

For years, language skills were considered to be a 'soft skill' in the workplace – useful but not specifically necessary for work. However, more employers and employees are starting to recognise the importance of better English skills in the workplace and realise that relevant training will not only improve their own language skills, but also their self-confidence and potentially increase their promotion opportunities.

The solution does not rely on luck: we all have the innate ability and more options 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.

### **What can you do?**

You can learn how to write the best cover letter for your CV; create impressive PowerPoint presentations that will stand out from others; or learn how to structure objective and cohesive reports. 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? 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 proficiency courses](#) which are designed for second language speakers. Other courses offered by Wits Plus include an [Effective Business Communication short course](#) (online as [Business Communication Skills](#)) that aim to equip students to make the most of opportunities.

Studies have shown that the most talented people are not always the most successful in life but that luck and opportunity may play an unseen role in that success. Improving your communication skills can help you to boost your luck and make the most of opportunities!

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