



Client Communication: Skills Practice

This activity is designed to reinforce an introduction of the core communication skills. Dividing students into groups of three provides an opportunity for each student to practice skills as well as evaluate others.

SKILLS PRACTICE

Time: 20 minutes

Group Size: 3 students/group

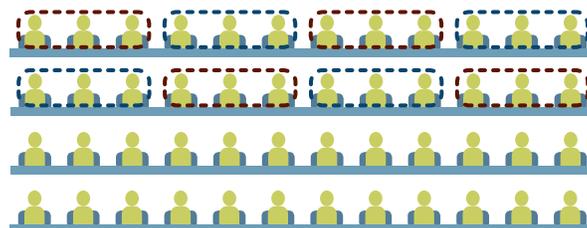
Materials Needed: Computer/projector

Display a list of communication skills on the screen using the provided PowerPoint (or software of your choice) so students may reference it during the activity. You may alter this activity as needed, depending on your classroom setup.

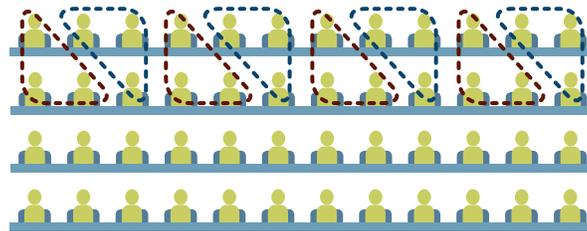
Traditional classroom with rows of desks

Dividing groups up for communication exercises can seem a daunting task when the configuration of the room is designed for a lecture. A few possible configurations are listed below.

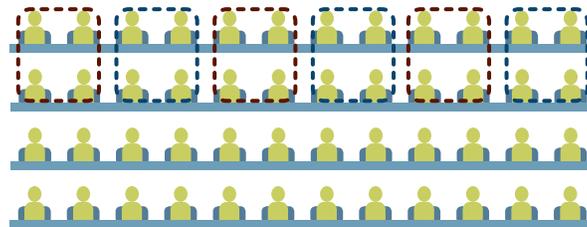
Student Configuration	Advantages	Disadvantages
Lines: Three adjacent students grouped together	Simple method; minimal time spent grouping students	The student in the middle will generally have her back to one member of the group



Student Configuration	Advantages	Disadvantages
Triangles: Two students on a row paired with one student on another row	Best visibility of group members; no group members are excluded	More complicated division; student confusion forming groups could waste time



Student Configuration	Advantages	Disadvantages
Squares: Two students on a row paired with two students on another row	Simple method; good visibility of group members; no group members are excluded	The larger group size means that 2 students will observe the encounter, providing less opportunity for participation



Flexible classroom with mobile seating

If your classroom allows for flexibility with seating arrangement, simply ask the students to form groups of three. It is recommended that they have space to stand or sit, and can maintain enough distance from adjacent groups so that conversations overlap as little as possible.

1. Student A will start as the conversation initiator. Student B will be the conversation responder. Student C will be the observer.
2. The students will hold a conversation (see examples below), focusing on the skills discussed in the online module (OEQs, reflective listening, empathy, etc.).
3. After a short time, stop the conversations to enter the feedback phase of the activity. The observer in each group will provide feedback to the students on their communication skills.
4. The students should then rotate roles, and initiate a second conversation. If your curriculum has discussed non-verbal proxemics (angles of facing, interpersonal distance, and vertical height distances), the initiators should vary these during the conversations.
5. After a short time, stop the conversations and begin feedback. The observer in each group will provide feedback to the students on their communication skills. The conversation responder should also provide feedback, particularly on the non-verbals.
6. Rotate once again, as time permits.
7. Facilitate a discussion to debrief (10 minutes)
 - a. What communication skills worked well during your conversation?
 - b. What communication skills did you find difficult to use?
 - c. In regards to non-verbal skills, what felt comfortable for you? What felt uncomfortable? How have you seen these used in veterinary practices?

Practice Scenarios

Depending on when this activity is used during the curriculum, you might wish to vary the scenarios. For use early in the curriculum (when it is less likely that the students know each other well), consider utilizing non-veterinary “small talk” scenarios. Scenarios that pertain to material being taught in concurrent veterinary courses can be used at any point in the curriculum to help reinforce other concepts and provide relevance to the students.

SAMPLE SCENARIO: INTRODUCTION TO AN EMPLOYER

Initiator: The potential employee – Introduce yourself as if you are at a professional meeting and this is someone you want to work for next summer. Ask an open-ended question about this employer’s business. Follow with reflective or summary statements that allow the employer to know you heard them.

Responder: The potential employer – Ask an open-ended question that will allow you to gain more knowledge of this potential employee. Follow with reflective or summary statements that allow the student to know you heard them.

Observer: Observe, document, and provide feedback regarding the core communication skills that were utilized.

SAMPLE CURRICULUM SCENARIOS SETUP

Initiator: Student A – Ask your partner an open-ended question about a topic that you are learning in a concurrent veterinary course. Follow with reflective or summary statements that allow the student to know you heard them.

Responder: Student B – Respond to the student by answering their question. Pay attention to your non-verbal language during the encounter. Allow time for the initiator to respond with reflective or summary statements.

Observer: Observe, document, and provide feedback regarding the core communication skills that were utilized.

Sample Curriculum Scenarios

Examples might include:

- Have a conversation about the passive stay apparatus of the horse.
- Have a conversation about the relationship between hypotonic saline and the volume of extracellular fluid.
- Have a conversation about what vaccinations a 12-week old puppy might need.