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Unambiguous Communication: Introduction

Communicating clearly, coherently, unambiguously and regularly is the “glue” that holds the entire process of curriculum planning, learning, teaching, online engagement, assessment feedback, evaluation, and reflection. Before you ask, there is a difference between communication and teaching. Communication is the broader concept of exchanging information, ideas, or messages between various stakeholders including lecturers, course convenors, administrators, the head of the department and students, while teaching is a specific type of communication that has the deliberate aim to impart knowledge, skills, or values in a more structured and intentional approach.

Why is communication so important?

- Communication begins before the course commences with the details in the relevant Faculty Handbook so that students have access to the necessary information to make informed decisions about their studies.
- Students need to understand how to interact with various stakeholders, including lecturers, tutors, peers, fieldwork mentors, and alumni, to build a supportive network that fosters their learning and success.
- A well constructed curriculum provides key information about the type of graduates to expect from a course for future employers, professional associations, regulatory bodies, as well as the university, cognate course and of course the students themselves.
- Communication binds together all the teaching and learning activities and creates a learning community.
- Language, style and tone of communication can help to create an inclusive environment.
- Communication must be two-way - plan for the feedback and listening as well as the information and instructions.

Principles for unambiguous communication:

- **Use simple language**
 - Should be clear and use easy to understand language (See [web accessibility guidelines](#))
 - Avoid technical jargon or complex terminology that may be unfamiliar to some students
 - If jargon is unavoidable, provide a ‘Glossary of Terms’ and/or ‘List of

Abbreviations and Acronyms'

- **Use inclusive language**
 - Use gender-neutral language and acknowledge diverse identities, avoiding biases and stereotypes
 - Allow for [translanguaging](#)
 - UDL Considerations: [Address biases in the use of language and symbols](#) and [Challenge exclusionary practices](#)
- **Use multimodal communication**
 - Pick one main channel for communications, but provide alternatives (for example, sending a weekly announcement which is posted on the learning platform and sent by email)
 - Mix up audio, video and text forms of communication but make sure to provide alternatives for accessibility.
- **Create channels for student voice, feedback and engagement**
 - Make it explicit how students can engage
 - Provide multiple opportunities for student voice

Table 1: Strategies for unambiguous communication

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	UDL CONNECTIONS
Pre-design a communications strategy	● Pre-design a communications strategy for the course and let students know how you intend communicating with them	Use multiple media for communication
Use multimodal communication in course documents ● Handbook ● Course outline	Use a combination of written, diagrammatic and verbal communication methods to convey course aims, objectives, outcomes and requirements effectively. This can include ● Simple, clear & concise text in the Handbook ● Clear & unambiguous text (with styles so that headings can be automatically read by screen readers) and visuals (e.g. mind maps, tables, diagrams, photos) in the Course outline ● Multimedia presentations such as narrative presentations that provide, text, visuals, and voice to explain the course information ● Present the course aims, objectives, outcomes and requirements in person	Support opportunities to customize the display of information Support multiple ways to perceive information Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning Illustrate through multiple media Use multiple media for communication

		Address biases related to modes of expression and communication
Consolidate communication	• Consolidate communications to reduce attention demands on students - for example, send one announcement with several points rather than multiple messages • Develop a consistent approach to assist students manage information overload – for example, let students know the rhythm of communications and mode in advance (for example, make one announcement weekly on a given day via one platform, with an alternative for accessibility)	Organize information and resources
Coordinate a common communication approach	Collaborate and coordinate with other co-teaching staff and tutors to develop a common communication approach. This could include using a shared document for collecting key information for sharing	Organize information and resources
Use instructional text	Clear instructions on your course site to signal to students what is required.	Organize information and resources
Clarify communication expectations	Establish clear policies regarding communication expectations, including response times for inquiries, preferred communication channels, and guidelines for professional and respectful interactions. Communicate these policies regularly and ensure that they are consistently applied.	Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning
Feedback mechanisms for improvement of communication	Implement mechanisms for collecting regular feedback from students about their learning experiences and the effectiveness of communication practices. Use this feedback to identify areas for improvement and make	Organize information and resources

	adjustments to the communication strategy accordingly using: • Quick polls during in-person or online sessions • Mid-course survey • End-of-course survey	
Encourage students to ask questions	Encourage students to ask questions and seek help when needed	Enhance capacity for monitoring progress
Listen actively	Employ active listening strategies (See Active listening by lecturers/tutors)	Support multiple ways to perceive information
Opportunities for peer to peer engagement	Create a culture of collaborative communication practices amongst students through peer-to-peer support networks, group discussions, collaborative projects	Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning

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