

## SPEAKING SKILLS

### *Communications Domain*

**Speaking skills** are key to effective communication. Speaking is defined as a process of building meaning that includes spoken language and its processing<sup>1</sup>. It is a complex system of communication that uses grammar, sound, vocabulary, and even cultural knowledge<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, the life skill of speaking is one of the most overlooked competency areas in formal education<sup>2</sup>. Speaking can be categorized as transactional or interactional<sup>3</sup>. The former is used to convey information and the latter is to establish and maintain social relationships. Both types of speaking are considered soft skills, which are highly valued in the workforce<sup>4</sup> and are integral to the success of youth-serving organizations like 4-H<sup>5</sup>.

**Transactional speaking** is speaking with the intent of conveying information. It can be dialog between two individuals or among individuals in a group; it can also be used in public speaking, where one individual addresses many others. Transactional speaking can be a one-way dissemination of information or involve multiple back-and-forth exchanges. Examples include ordering food at a restaurant, giving a speech, providing directions over the phone, teaching a class, and debating an issue. As a 4-H volunteer, you must be able to use transactional speaking to communicate about 4-H, program opportunities, expectations, needs, and more.

According to Richards<sup>6</sup>, transactional speaking skills include the ability to:

- explain a need or intention
- describe something

- ask questions
- confirm information or clarify understanding
- justify an opinion
- make suggestions, contrasts, or comparisons
- communicate agreement or disagreement

Before engaging in any type of transactional speaking exchange or event, keep these things in mind:

- Be prepared.
- Organize your thoughts (if necessary, have notes ready to keep on track).
- Reflect on how your statements will be perceived before you say them.
- Reinforce key points.
- Know when to stop talking.

**Interactional speaking** is speaking with the primary intention of building a relationship and making a personal connection with someone. This is typically referred to as small talk. Although not content driven, it can initiate, prolong, or close a conversation. Interactional speaking is not often prioritized as a key skill in need of development until an awkward situation is experienced and the lack of interactional speaking skills becomes apparent. In most cases, interactional speaking helps to put people at ease and/or creates a baseline relationship that can progress into a successful transactional communication exchange.

According to Richards<sup>6</sup>, interactional speaking skills include the ability to:

- Choose topics
- Open and close conversations
- Make small talk
- Use humor
- Recount personal incidents and experiences
- Take turns
- Use adjacency-pairs
- Interrupt or interject
- React to others
- Use an appropriate style of speaking

Interactional exchanges help people to be viewed as friendly and approachable. For some people, beginning and ending an interactional exchange are the most difficult to master. At the start of a conversation, you can engage in interactional speaking by mentioning something pleasant (e.g., comment on the weather, compliment something, mention a current event), seeking input (e.g., ask a question or ask for

an opinion about something noncontroversial), and paying attention to nonverbal cues that will compliment spoken words (see *Communications Domain - Nonverbal Skills*). When a conversation is wrapping up, you can use a conversation closure to support its transition:

- Summarize your thoughts.
- Restate the needs or action items.
- Discuss plans for a follow up
- Remark on the pleasure of the experience.
- Sign off with a personal touch (well wishes for specific event or issue).

As a 4-H volunteer, speaking skills are important for you to communicate effectively. Caring adult mentors can use speaking skills to disseminate information, build relationships, resolve conflicts, motivate youth, ask purposeful questions, and facilitate the development of speaking skills in youth.

---

### **Creating a Sense of Belonging:**

*Understand that culture has a major influence on a person's behaviors and communication style. They might be different than yours and that is okay. Ask questions if you are unsure of cultural differences to build a path of understanding and acceptance.*

---

### **References**

- <sup>1</sup>Brown, D. H. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Prentice Hall Regents.
- <sup>2</sup>Koran, S. (2015). *The role of teachers in developing learners' speaking skill*. Paper presented at the 6th International Visible Conference on Educational Studies and Applied Linguistics (pp. 400–416). Ishik University, Erbil City, Iraq.
- <sup>3</sup>Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the spoken language*. Cambridge University Press.
- <sup>4</sup>Lippman, L. H., Ryberg, R., Carney, R., & Moore, K. A. (2015). *Key soft skills that foster youth workforce success: Toward a consensus across fields*. Child Trends.  
<https://www.childtrends.org/?publications=key-soft-skills-that-foster-youth-workforce-success-toward-a-consensus-across-fields>



# VOLUNTEER

Research Knowledge Competency

<sup>5</sup>Radhakrishna, R., & Doamekpor, P. (2009). Teaching leadership and communications skills and responsibilities: A comparison of 4-H and other youth organizations. *Journal of Extension*, 47(2), Article v47-2a6. <https://archives.joe.org/joe/2009april/a6.php>

<sup>6</sup>Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.

*The original resource 4-H Communications: Speaking Skills (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed in 2010 by Kim Reaman.*

VRKC Fact Sheet Series provided by

**Program Leaders Working Group: 4-H Volunteerism Committee**

**Authors** (September 2022)

T. Ashley Burns, Ph.D., Clemson University

Jen Lobley, University of Maine

4-H is the youth development program of our nation's Cooperative Extension System and USDA. The PLWG encourages all Cooperative Extension programs to adhere to their Land-grant University nondiscrimination policy in the development and delivery of Extension efforts designed to engage all people.

