Pathways to Communication Careers in the 21st Century
Careers in Fields Related to Communication

It's a fact: strong communication skills are desired not only in the fields directly related to communication but also in all professional realms. So, even if you don't plan to pursue a full-blown career in communication, it's probably a good idea to consider taking a communication course or two. If possible, you might even choose a double major or minor in communication. Here are just some of the career fields and occupations in which communication is essential.

Business

Many national studies indicate that the skills most needed to get a job, to succeed, and to be promoted are primarily communication skills. You need to understand the operations of any business and the skills related to your particular job in any organization. But equally important is to be able to communicate interpersonally, in groups and teams, and with your superiors and subordinates. It is fair to say that success in business is directly related to being able to communicate effectively and appropriately.

Careers in business and communication include: Sales representative, executive manager, personnel manager, public information officer, industrial and labor relations representative, negotiator, director of corporate communication, customer service representative, newsletter editor, communication trainer, human resources manager, mediator, and buyer. (Also see Law, Media, and Public Relations and Advertising.)

Communication subjects that can enhance a business career include: Public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to mass media, business and professional communication, organizational communication, small group communication, and interviewing.

Education

A teacher of any subject has to effectively organize and deliver course material and information to students. Communication skills are necessary to facilitate understanding no matter whether the subject is math, science, reading, or English. Great teachers are also great communicators. Besides teaching, there are many other education-related careers that would be enhanced by learning to communicate effectively.

Careers in education include: Teacher (elementary and secondary), school counselor, educational researcher, audiovisual specialist, educational administrator, school/university information specialist, director of college news, director of a collegiate information center, educational tester, development officer, educational fund-raiser, alumni officer, college placement officer, college admissions director, and college recruiter.

Communication subjects that can enhance an education career include: Oral communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, communication theory, communication research methods, communication

"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said."

Peter F. Drucker, World-Renowned Business Guru and Author
"Poor communication has been the root cause of many medical errors. As the industry begins to address these errors and look for solutions, the ability to communicate effectively and use specific communication tools and techniques is critical."

Mary Jo Gorman, M.D., MBA, Chief Medical Officer, Advanced ICU Care

in the classroom, intercultural communication, teaching language, arts, linguistics, sociolinguistics, nonverbal communication, small group communication, performance studies, forensics, family communication, conflict resolution, argumentation, communication ethics, rhetorical theory and criticism, listening, persuasion, and communication disorders.

**Government/Politics**

Communication skills are essential to address and articulate the complex issues that challenge political leaders and our systems of government. Communication is the basis for gaining understanding and making decisions when people hold different perspectives on social and political problems. It is through communication that political leaders can discuss similarities and effectively settle disputes.

*Communication and government/political-related careers include:* Public information officer, speech writer, legislative assistant, campaign director, research specialist, program coordinator, negotiator, lobbyist, press secretary, and elected official.

*Communication subjects that can enhance a government career include:* Public speaking, journalism, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, mass communication, communication theory, communication research methods, organizational communication, argumentation and debate, rhetorical theory and criticism, political communication, persuasion, media performance, listening, communication ethics, performance studies, and acting.

**Health Careers**

Health-care providers must communicate effectively with clients and patients in order to prevent illness, diagnose disease, and manage treatment and patient care. Communication is necessary for developing and maintaining trust between provider and client, their families, and other health care providers. Equally important in health careers is the use of communication to educate and train a population in behaviors such as nutrition, sexual health, and family planning.

*Careers in health and communication include:* Health educator, school health-care administrator, medical grants writer, hospital director of communication, clinic public relations director, health communication analyst, research analyst, medical training supervisor, communications manager for federal health agencies, health personnel educator, medical center publications editor, hospice manager, drug rehabilitationist, health care counselor, activities director, marketing director, and health facility fund-raiser.

*Communication subjects that can enhance a health career include:* Health communication, interpersonal communication, family communication, interviewing, business and professional communication, public speaking, research methods, small group discussion, conflict resolution, public relations, listening, nonverbal communication, persuasion, and communication ethics.
International Relations and Negotiations

International relationships and negotiations are communication-centered. Understanding the effect of internationalism and how it affects communication is fundamental to dealing with others in the world arena. In an increasingly diverse and electronically connected world economy, essential communication skills include using electronic technologies, problem-solving, speaking, listening, writing, analyzing information, and interacting among multiple and diverse cultures.

Careers in international relations and negotiations include: On-air international broadcasting talent, corporate representative, translator, student tour coordinator, diplomat, foreign relations officer, host/hostess for foreign dignitaries, and foreign correspondent.

Communication subjects that can enhance an international relations/negotiations career include: Intercultural communication, international communication, nonverbal communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to mass communication, communication theory, language and social interaction, public relations, political communication, and conflict resolution and negotiation.

Law

Law is a profession that is essentially about communication. It involves establishing meaning and community through language. With a field so steeped in verbal and nonverbal skill requirements, a background in communication can serve as an effective beginning to a career in law. Communication training, or a degree in communication, can be useful for admission to law schools, as well as providing skills for use during and after law school. It is also valuable to paralegals and legal secretaries.

Careers in law and communication include: Public defender, corporate lawyer, district attorney, public interest lawyer, private practice lawyer, legal researcher, mediation and negotiation specialist, paralegal researcher, legal secretary, legal reporter, and legal educator.

Communication subjects that can enhance a legal career include: Public speaking, interpersonal communication, legal communication, media law, media regulation, argumentation and debate, listening, small group communication, conflict resolution and negotiation, persuasion, interviewing, communication ethics, nonverbal communication, performance studies, and acting.

“Communication in a global environment is everything. What is happening now with technology is enabling a lot of global work but the outgrowth of that is people are relying more and more on technology to develop communication but they don’t know how to engage the audience. The importance of the professional communicator is therefore profound. If you can’t communicate, people won’t follow.”

Greg Terk,
Global Communications Manager,
Chevron Global Lubricants
Social and Human Services

Social workers, counselors, and other similar professionals must be effective communicators. The way human services are communicated can affect how people use, evaluate and respond to those services.

*Careers in social and human services include:* Public administrator, social worker, recreational supervisor, human rights officer, community affairs liaison, park service public relations specialist, philanthropic representative, religious leader, and mental counselor.

*Communication subjects that can enhance a social services or human services career include:* Public speaking, business and professional communication, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, family communication, discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication, organizational communication, listening, relational communication, small group communication, communication ethics, crisis communication, and nonverbal communication.

Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility

Sustainable development is a field that is growing exponentially at a global level. Sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." Increasingly governments, corporations, universities, and development agencies are incorporating sustainability strategies, those that consider a triple bottom line of economic, environmental, and social criteria in its decisions. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) integrates the issues of the workplace, the community and the marketplace into core business strategies. As the demand for increased transparency and accountability in the corporate sector grows, the CSR field is expanding to keep pace. One exciting advantage of these interrelated fields is their diversity that includes professionals in communication, business, engineering, health, environmental sciences, and others. They encompass those working in developing countries developing solutions to provide safe drinking water or renewable energy for small villages, as well as corporate executives rewriting the way their companies conduct business. Communication training is essential to present effective education, facilitate diverse stakeholders, conduct conflict resolution, and to be successful with persuasion.

*Careers in sustainability and corporate social responsibility include:* Sustainability analysts, environmental specialist, energy engineer, outdoor environmental education instructor, executive director, development director, energy manager, university sustainability director, sustainable business manager, recycling supervisor, consultant, university faculty, socially responsible investment manager, public relations, reputation manager, compliance monitor, environmental health and safety manager, renewable energy analyst, architect, green building project analyst, politician, writer, and many others.

*Communication subjects that can enhance a career in sustainability and corporate social responsibility include:* Business and professional communication, public speaking, print communication, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, listening, interviewing, ethics of communication, persuasion, visual communication, nonverbal communication, small group communication, facilitation, and conflict resolution, risk and crisis communication, health communication, communication and emerging technologies.
Technology Industries

The link between computerization and communication has become the subject of extensive research by communication specialists. Many departments of communication offer a specialization in information sciences, human information theory and processes, or in communication technologies, often dealing with communication by computer, compressed video, and teleconferencing.

Careers in technology and communication include: Trainer for communication technologies, closed-circuit television producer/director, systems analyst, technical copywriter, language specialist, speech synthesizer, cognition researcher, audio and visual computer display specialist, and performance assessor.

Communication subjects that can enhance a technology career include: Oral communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, communication research methods, communication theory, listening, communication ethics, organizational communication, and communication and emerging technologies.
Landing Your First Job in Communication

Until recently you could show up to class, hand in your assignments on time, get decent grades, and easily land your first big job after graduation. Unfortunately, it doesn’t quite work that way anymore. Although there are a number of fun and exciting communication positions, communication is quickly becoming a competitive industry. In today’s world you need a leg up.

That’s why prior to graduation, students must put their studies into practice. Your first job search will be much more successful if you already have a track record for using your newly acquired communication skills in a professional setting.

And when it’s time for your first job search, don’t rely only on Monster.com listings. Your search should include reading want ads, visiting the college or university career center, listing yourself with an employment agency, and networking with professionals and professional organizations, as well as using online job search engines.

Below is a list of tactics that will help you enhance your first job search:

- Become a member of the National Communication Association and take advantage of Interfolio, Inc., an online credentials management service. Interfolio provides a comprehensive and flexible service for NCA members in the job market. Members can place their credentials in an online file that may include transcripts, writing samples, teaching philosophy, as well as a vita and letters of recommendation. When Interfolio clients indicate membership with NCA, their outgoing files include a cover letter identifying the applicant as an NCA member. A list of opportunities within the communication discipline also appears in the classified section of Spectra, the monthly NCA newsletter, and up-to-date listings may be found in the NCA Career Center, in the Members’ Area of NCA’s website. To learn more about NCA’s job services, and Interfolio, visit www.natcom.org.
- Be proactive and land internships, part-time jobs, and volunteer positions that are in your area of study in the communication discipline. The experience you get while a student will be very valuable later in your career. It will also lead to future job opportunities. These positions build networks in which you get to know people who hire or know of possible openings. It is strongly recommended that communication majors acquire a position, whether paid or voluntary, which allows for “hands-on” experience before graduation.
- Speak with your teachers and your department’s instructors about prospective jobs and internships. They often are aware of job opportunities.
- Join professional or student organizations that will help you use your academic skill set in a practical way. If your grades allow, join an honorary society on your college campus such as Lambda Pi Eta (the communication honor society for four-year schools) or Sigma Chi Eta (the communication honor society for two-year schools)
- Participate in informational interviews. Make appointments with people in your field who hold positions similar to your career desires. Ask them to describe the path they followed to obtain their position.
- Build a portfolio. While studying for your degree, assemble information that will showcase your talents. A portfolio of writing samples, audio and videotapes, and copies of reports and group projects, can all be valuable in displaying your abilities.
• Get to know your professors well enough so that they will be able to write recommendation letters for you that contain personal information.
• When asking anyone to write letters of recommendation, provide them with the documentation they will need to write about you with examples and illustrations. At a minimum, give them a résumé, which lists your school activities, work record, and other information that they may not have about you.