LISTENING AND SPEAKING

- Direct your attention to the speaker by keeping eye contact. Avoid taking phone calls or sifting through mail when in a conversation.
- When confronted with a position with which you disagree, force yourself not to respond. Continue to listen and don’t begin formulating your response before the speaker has finished.
- In all communication exchanges, avoid thinking about what you are going to say next while the other person is speaking.
- Listen for the total message & try to view the speaker’s thoughts and ideas from his/her perspective.
- Pay attention to the speaker’s nonverbal messages. Body language such as facial expressions and hand gestures will convey a part of the message as well.
- Your body language should convey interest in and concentration on the speaker's message (e.g., leaning forward, moving from behind your desk, etc.)
- Even if you think you know where a message is going, avoid finishing sentences for others.
- Use acknowledgment responses such as a nod or an "uh-huh" to show understanding.
- Paraphrase what the speaker has said to ensure your understanding of the total message.
- Listen more than you speak in casual conversations.

WRITING

- Keep a dictionary and a thesaurus at hand when writing.
- Build your vocabulary with the "word-a-day" calendar.
- Always have someone proofread your correspondence for grammatical errors, spelling, sentence structure, and clarity (beware of spell check).
- If you need the recipient of your written correspondence to do something, get to the point early in the writing and emphasize it (underline or bold the requested action and due dates).
- If possible, set correspondence aside after writing it and go back to it later to re-read and edit it.
- A "picture tells a thousand words"; use graphs, charts and tables.
- Summarize key points and requests again at the end of your writings.
- Avoid the use of unexplained technical jargon by having a novice read your work.
- In business writing, short and to the point is preferred over lengthy explanations. In all writing avoid long, compound sentences which will make your writing easier to read.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

- Mentally outline your thoughts before speaking to improve clarity.
- Don’t be afraid to pause and collect your thoughts when asked a question.
- Use a tape recorder to provide yourself feedback on the quality of your speaking (e.g., loud enough, clear, concise, absence of rambling and/or stuttering, etc.).
- Speak with enthusiasm; it makes up for a lot small “technical” deficiencies.
- Maintain appropriate body language when speaking (e.g., eye contact, erect posture, gestures).
- When presenting information to someone for the first time, start with the big picture; bore down into the details only after establishing understanding at the broader level.
- Look for opportunities to practice impromptu speaking (e.g., Toastmasters Club, professional organizations, etc.).
- Ask others for feedback on your speaking style, particularly things you could improve upon. Paint word pictures, using metaphors, analogies, examples, and so forth, to liven up your message.