



Effective Communication Skills for Law Students

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ABSTRACT

In the demanding field of law, the ability to communicate effectively is as essential as legal knowledge itself. This paper examines the multifaceted communication skills required by law students to succeed academically and professionally. Emphasizing both written and oral forms, the study delves into the importance of clarity, persuasion, negotiation, public speaking, interpersonal communication, and active listening. Furthermore, it investigates the often-overlooked role of nonverbal communication and the increasing significance of networking in legal practice. Despite the strong theoretical foundation provided by law schools, students frequently lack practical communication training, which impacts their ability to apply legal principles in real-world scenarios. The study argues for the integration of comprehensive communication modules into legal education to better prepare students for diverse professional settings. Ultimately, strengthening communication competencies enhances legal practice, fosters professional relationships, and contributes to the overall effectiveness of legal advocacy.

Keywords: Legal Communication, Oral Advocacy, Legal Writing, Active Listening, Negotiation Skills, Public Speaking, Legal Education.

INTRODUCTION

Beyond learning the law, students must develop essential skills for legal practice, with communication being crucial for success in law school and careers. Effective writing is foundational for both students and legal practitioners, requiring correct language use to convey meaning. However, good writing extends beyond grammar and mechanics; it involves clarity and depth in conveying messages. Students should grasp the subject matter before writing, clearly articulating what they wish to communicate. They must view writing as a communicative event, considering the audience, topic, and purpose, which are vital factors influencing how the message is expressed. Proficiency in speaking is equally important for success in legal studies and firms. While strong writing may lead to job interviews, effective speaking is essential to secure positions. Often, job performance in firms fails due to inadequate speaking skills. Candidates who communicate more fluently tend to be favored over those with superior writing skills. Clear and smooth communication fosters trust and promotes individuals within firms. Proficient speaking encompasses more than just pronunciation; it requires the ability to express thoughts fluently and coherently while engaging with an audience [1, 2].

The Importance of Communication Skills

Professional communication is vital to gaining clients, persuading juries, and winning cases. It also requires the ability to write persuasively. Good communication skills enable lawyers to communicate with clients, exchange documents, examine witnesses, argue motions, make jury arguments, and write opinions, briefs, contracts, pleadings, and memoranda. Becoming a good communicator is an essential part of training for a career in law. The general skill areas for which training is most sought are those associated with written and oral advocacy. Good writing skills are of paramount importance to lawyers, and in the legal profession, as in other professions, the ability to write concisely and effectively enhances both the quality of an attorney's work and the likelihood of promotion, salary increases, and other professional rewards. Writing skills help gain clients in the first place and are also paramount in the preparation of documents to be used in litigation. Good oral advocacy, in both contentious and non-contentious forums, is the other area that may be thought of as central to a lawyer's professional identity and mode of functioning. It is in an oral setting that clients first meet lawyers, that attorneys first encounter opposing lawyers and witnesses, and that lawyers are called upon to persuade strangers within

minutes that a given individual should be arrested, the death sentence revoked, or sufficient jurisdiction established. Oral advocacy is also crucial for the career of many business lawyers. Speaking skills also come into play in quasi-judicial and regulatory settings. The arguments debated and the inquiries posed are common to all oral advocacy situations, but context and focus vary widely [3, 4].

Types of Communication

Formal communication encompasses written and oral announcements, e-mails, voicemails, official memos, letters, phone calls, face-to-face interactions, and news notes, and is consistent with single or double coverage. In contrast, informal communication is primarily spoken and spreads through the grapevine, word of mouth, or hearsay. Verbal communication involves conveying messages through spoken language, necessitating logical organization before delivery to bridge understanding gaps. Clarity in emotions is essential when sharing emotional messages, and members must practice their delivery to ensure accurate interpretation. Each participant should grasp the message's nuances to respond appropriately and avoid conflicts. Addressing misunderstandings can be achieved by paraphrasing and summarizing agreements or disagreements, which helps focus on divergent understanding. Raising questions enhances clarity in discussions, though members may hesitate to interrupt. In such instances, writing down queries for later is advisable. Nonverbal communication encompasses messages conveyed without words, such as facial expressions, posture, and gestures. This form can be challenging since it requires teamwork and observation of individual communication styles. Nonverbal signals can support verbal messages; however, discrepancies may lead to mistrust, as individuals tend to believe the more credible signal [5, 6].

Active Listening Techniques

Legal professionals require logical thinking and analytical abilities alongside communication skills like fast reading, note-taking, public speaking, persuasive writing, and conversing effectively. However, relying on conventional methods to acquire and convey information can lead to ineffective communication, resulting in misunderstandings. Active listening is crucial; it involves genuinely hearing and understanding what is being said without interrupting or judging. Superior listeners enhance their skills in evaluation, interpretation, and retention. When lawyers fail to listen, clients often feel rejected. Clients typically prefer discussing issues directly related to their lawsuits, viewing lawyers as problem-solvers. Lawyers must actively probe the conversation, allowing clients to fully express their thoughts, and should use reflection by paraphrasing points to ensure comprehension. This technique involves summarizing details logically rather than in the original order presented. Some students and new lawyers resist learning these communication skills, deeming them unnecessary, but many lawyers are now managing large firms or their practices. Effective communication remains vital as lawyers spend extensive time resolving complex issues, analyzing documents, formulating questions, and developing arguments to advance their cases [7, 8].

Public Speaking for Law Students

“Law schools teach law, professors teach at law schools, law students study law.” This is a basic Corporate Theory. It does not necessarily mean that law students learn what their professors teach them. One of the explanations for this is precisely that the didactic procedures are traditional – plenty of theory, little practice, and less information about students’ “soft skills”. Five years in a Law School, courses do not only include topics that deal with law, such as “Introduction to Law”, “Labour Law”, “Law, Society and Culture”, these are complemented with “hard skills” training, namely “Legal Writing” and “Public Advocacy” for instance. These are equally important for any lawyer. This is about the importance of Public Advocacy in Law Schools, how to teach it, and how to make classes. A recent study confirmed that Law Graduates feel an (extremely) deep knowledge of legal institutions and domestic law, but lack understanding of how to utilize such knowledge pragmatically, and knowledge about International Relations or Sociology was not included in the subjects studied in Law School. A need was perceived to teach how law acts in practice, through simulation sessions, introducing other expert professionals in the classes. On another note, quick research on the training that lawyers go through has shown that focus on communication training is scarce throughout this process. It is either a few years of formal training and separate training offered throughout the career, or simply none. It is believed that better training would positively affect work and personal environments. A workshop was elaborated, designating tasks to be accomplished beforehand, and splitting it into five modules that deal with the basic structure of a speech. In sum, teaching Public Speaking at Law Schools is something to think about [9, 10].

Negotiation Skills

Negotiation is a skill set that every lawyer will use in their professional and personal life. It is a skill set that lawyers will hone throughout their law career, as constant communication in the attorneys’ lives

leads to a constant impetus to negotiate with other parties. Many law schools teach negotiation and related dispute resolution topics. These courses are generally not required, but it should be mandatory for all law schools to teach a negotiation course. In law school, students are taught about torts, contracts, and real estate agreements. Students are required to take a legal writing class along with a traditional class in civil procedure, criminal procedure, evidence, and other substantive courses. Yet, no class is taught on the negotiation process. Critical skills and perspectives related to the science and art of negotiation should be built into the curriculum of all law schools. Ultimately, negotiation skills lead to a better law practice and a better life. Everything in life is negotiated, whether it be sleeping arrangements at a music festival or a work engagement that calls for more than standard work hours. Understanding the negotiation process helps address conflicts from both a legal and creative perspective. Good negotiators are born, not made. In a corporate setting, team leaders are recruited for their negotiating skills, but to assume that law firms hire lawyers based on their ability to negotiate is not the case. Most law firms operate like a performance organization, similar to an accounting firm or the performing arts. They are more interested in quantifiable skills like research, writing, and legal analysis. Good negotiation, like good writing, is very difficult to quantify. As a result, on average, law firms start new lawyers with little or no negotiation training [11, 12].

Persuasion Techniques

The disciplines of law and diplomacy share significant similarities, leading professionals in both fields to face comparable challenges. The dynamic nature of their work makes it difficult to gain mastery over their respective disciplines, as theories can seem incomplete or overly abstract. Lawyers often experience frustration linked to local rules and procedures, mirroring the complexities faced by diplomats. Persuasive techniques in legal discourse are frequently overlooked, leaving law students unaware that persuasion is a distinct skill requiring specific techniques. Unlike diplomats, law students may not fully grasp this aspect, putting them at a disadvantage. Only after extensive study do they begin to view persuasion as a recognizable discipline. The teachings of persuasion reveal how it can be limited by ethical values, such as preserving attorney-client privilege or rejecting certain tactics deemed inappropriate. Practical applications teach students the legality and transparency of various strategies, highlighting the complexity of seemingly simple questions and their relation to social behavior. This can evoke strong reactions from legal audiences, who may struggle to reconcile conventional views of argument with the sobering realities of legal practice [13, 14].

Writing Skills for Legal Professionals

Law school writing classes fulfill the curriculum requirement by teaching legal analysis and writing. Students learn to identify the rhetorical contexts of legal writing, considering purpose, audience, and implications when creating documents. They develop skills to assess facts, navigate policy options, craft recommendations or arguments, and represent clients professionally. Miscalculations in document creation can lead to significant consequences, making it vital that documents aid tasks and accurately convey facts. Opportunities to create various professional documents enhance relevance and productivity compared to traditional assignments. For instance, documenting client conduct should be done in a client memo rather than a bulleted list. The curriculum should challenge students with complex facts and competing policies, as these writing assignments better reflect the rhetorical choices lawyers face. A structured legal writing requirement can achieve multiple goals, with assignments integrated throughout the curriculum. The first year includes traditional writing classes that complement substantive coursework, where a focus on legal reasoning prepares students for more independent assignments in advanced classes [15, 16].

Interpersonal Communication

The primary tool of communication is language, which has limitations. Why did Adam speak in tongues rather than use a universal language? Written communication is less effective due to its one-way nature and the gap between writing and reading. The neglect of non-verbal communication within the Law School curriculum is unfortunate, as body language is crucial for persuasively presenting cases to a jury. Challenges arise when lawyers with excellent writing skills struggle to communicate in the courtroom, causing juries to grapple with thick accents or difficult handwriting despite sound arguments. Ignoring nonverbal communication is impossible. The minimal attention given to body language in legal literature presents a unique opportunity for law students. Shy students can impress friends with spontaneous speeches, not merely by avoiding situations. Language's reverence has diminished its profound aspects, potentially relegating them to despised areas. Language extremes may involve numerous writers and PR firms. Communication may provoke boredom or tantrums, but it is still vital. Gestures have gained prominence, though their effectiveness varies. A father's teasing uses gestures, yet differing

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communications are limited. Many gestures lose meaning or fail to be adopted; for instance, some are misunderstood internationally. Knowledge of physical signals can create confusion, risking misinterpretation in vital scenarios. Language failure doesn't arise from unfamiliarity but from the inability to think within it without translation [17, 18].

Networking and Professional Relationships

Networking skills may advance students' careers in meaningful ways. Law students should look beyond just teachers, professors, and employers as sources of connections. A wide variety of professionals in legal practice or related careers can be great sources of advice, contacts, and opportunities. It's better to cast a wide net than to have too small a circle. Names of lawyers and others may be logged from public places, networking events, or online. It's best to reach out with an explanation of how the recipient's experience is of interest, and to ask for a meeting or phone call. Good initial emails will be short, friendly, and non-judgmental. Have a set of questions in mind to guide the conversation, and thank them afterward by email and offer to connect on LinkedIn. Developing a group of contacts will take more time than sending out initial emails and waiting for responses. Attending events, reaching out to professionals, and making use of all resources are necessary for successful networking and establishing good, lasting connections. Maintaining contact with those connections is equally important. Use social media to stay connected regularly, and remember to reach out occasionally to professionals who have been in contact before. Speaking of social media, the internet is a great way to network, especially for those who are shy. LinkedIn and online forums, and groups can be great avenues for both meeting experts and other students. Networking happens naturally as people get to know one another through clubs, activities, classes, or social occasions. There is a positive correlation between social ties and job opportunities, so simply being social can develop valuable contacts. Having contacts is one thing; knowing how to use them is another. Most people are happy to set up a phone call or meeting to talk about the law or even just what school is like. It's also worth it to ask for advice on starting a legal career or seeking career advice generally [19, 20].

Cultural Competence in Communication

The increasing diversity among clients and practitioners in the legal field highlights the need for enhanced cultural competence in communication. Cultural differences in presentation styles, values of time, roles of lawyers, and conflict resolution have been recognized. A study on Hispanic children's views of the legal system indicated that their concepts of rights and justice often differ from the dominant culture, where community rights may be secondary to fair hearings and maintaining relationships. Lawyers' top-down legal culture can clash with clients' culturally appropriate ways of expressing issues. Children saw the justice system as a formidable force, leading to concerns that lawyers could not stabilize problems. Law schools should prioritize teaching cultural competence by exposing students to diverse perspectives and examining their own culture. Cultural competence can shape client representation significantly. For instance, one lawyer would not handle Catholic clients' divorces without church approval. There can also be subtler cultural tensions, like clients' preferences for negotiation versus lawyers' adversarial training. Lawyers from cultures that value relationship-building might conflict with those trained to prioritize immediate solutions. Culture, shaped by shared beliefs and values, influences behavior, attention, understanding, expectations, and evidence observation. While full cultural competence is unattainable, steps can be taken to identify and address cultural differences in legal representation [21, 22].

Feedback and Self-Reflection

The connection between communication and reflection is crucial, particularly in today's challenging world, as it fosters students' interpersonal awareness and skill development. Law school curricula are already dense with writing and speaking practice to prepare students for communication-intensive careers. However, integrating opportunities for reflection into this training would be ideal. Almost any form of communication can provide useful insights on skill improvement and personalized feedback, aiding students in their transition from college to career. Professors could require reflection papers after moot court drafts, group presentations, or appellate briefs. Additionally, voice memos responding to practice recordings can enhance feedback immediacy, particularly relevant in extended competitions. Gathering 360-degree feedback on communication skills can further stimulate reflection, offering valuable peer insights alongside faculty input. Research indicates that journal use is both effective and manageable, requiring less time than grading work products. However, instructors often overlook the reasons behind their critical comments. Students consistently emphasize that communication is the most vital skill for their careers. Reflecting on their learning experiences would significantly increase the value of the extensive time already dedicated to skill development [23, 24].

Technology In Communication

The American Bar Association requires law schools to teach a basic understanding of technology, so that graduates are not only able to 'operate' the technology but are cognizant of how the technology governs communications. Technology per se does not greatly alter how one communicates – the organization of communication is similar across media. However, communication with clients is complicated by the realities that electronic communication is both more ambiguous in terms of variables that can cause miscommunication and less prone to subtle communication that can aid clarity. In addition, contemporary communication technology creates a much more complex set of variables; reliance on various forms of cloud applications can call the security of communication into serious scrutiny. Far more modes of communication exist, and many have infrastructure that can complicate crafting and preserving necessary context. Knowledge of these variables is critical to the development of effective communication. The Communication Competencies recommend that law schools include instruction regarding the use of technology in client communications. Such a course might include issues such as: Using technology to communicate regarding extremely sensitive matters; Using technology to communicate with the client who does not use technology effectively; Using technology to communicate with a client who uses a device or system that third parties can access; Using technology carelessly, such as by not scrutinizing the recipient list or not checking the document carefully for metadata; Using technology without understanding the service provider's policies regarding confidentiality and data retention; Using unsecure mobile devices or public Internet connections when communicating with a client or working on confidential client information; Continuing to use technology to communicate with a client even when the electronic communication is not producing the information the lawyer needs to provide competent representation. This list is not exhaustive; as technology evolves, so too must understanding of its impact on effective communication [25, 26].

Case Studies and Practical Applications

Though graduates of law schools must develop superior written and oral communication skills, an all-too-common complaint voiced by students is that they develop at least an active disdain and perhaps even hatred for a significant portion of the written communication aspect of these skill sets. In an attempt to ameliorate this situation and improve student attitudes towards the written communication issues under study, we have created more contextualized and practical applications of material covered in earlier classes. This paper will illustrate the design and implementation of such applications, which have met with some success not only in ameliorating student attitudes, but in improving the level of attention/engagement with the material and also in improving student performance on the writing portion of the final exam. Legal writing texts often override or even displace the various course texts adopted for law school communication courses, but the practical application this paper describes can be adapted for various levels of legal writing stylistic knowledge, and the written communication aspect can be criticized as being somewhat trivial/pedantic for particularly experienced practitioners. Of course, there also exists the often-lamented problem of a shortage of time due to other course commitments and an overburdened syllabus, but with foresight and planning, there generally exist a good deal of opportunities for legal writing instructors to incorporate exercises and simulations from outside textbooks into their syllabi. In a world where the English language is becoming more and more a common communication tool, law schools are teaching it to keep up with the new developments and realities of the law. Teaching a foreign language is a separate, yet universal problem. One of the practical issues that all law schools face is how to effectively deliver a course in English to students who are not sufficiently proficient in it. Master 's-level law students have presumably reached a level of pre-intermediate in their English language acquisition, yet the simultaneous learning of specialized law terminology and theory makes comprehension of this obligatory class difficult to say the least, when one has to search for alternate explanatory ways to express the same terms [27, 28].

CONCLUSION

Effective communication skills are indispensable tools for law students, not only for academic excellence but also for long-term professional success. The legal profession demands clarity, persuasion, empathy, and the ability to convey complex ideas both verbally and in writing. Despite the emphasis on doctrinal learning, many law schools neglect to provide structured training in essential communication areas such as public speaking, negotiation, and active listening. This creates a gap between theory and practice, often leaving graduates underprepared for real-world legal interactions. By embedding communication-focused modules into the curriculum, law schools can cultivate well-rounded legal professionals who are capable of advocating powerfully, negotiating strategically, and building meaningful professional relationships.

As the legal landscape evolves, communication remains the cornerstone of legal practice, and its mastery should begin in the classroom.

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