



Strengthening Communication Skills of Agricultural Students:

Using Real-World Examples to Meet
Industry Employment Needs

Module 1: Asking Effective Questions

Employees must know when and how to ask questions because asking effective questions solves complex problems, increases productivity, and decreases confusion. Further, employees must be attentive to the task at hand to ensure they ask useful questions to complete the task correctly. They must also know how to ask questions and gather more information to solve problems and understand others. Asking questions can offer clarity, increase interest, and encourage further thought on a topic. Critical thinking often involves a decision tree of questions, and students need to understand how to work through this process.

This module will provide you an overview of how to ask effective questions. You will be provided two interactive, conceptual maps and two written scenarios. You must choose the questions you would ask. Your selection will lead you to an explanation of why the answer you chose was correct or incorrect. You will repeat this exercise until you have worked through the problem and found a solution. At the end, you will receive a summary of your answers and an overall evaluation of your questions. After identifying effective questions, you will create additional questions that center on fact, judgement, and preference.

Learning Outcomes:

- Identify effective questions.
- Develop questions of fact, judgment, and preference.



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Module 2: Communicating Accurately and Concisely

Accurate and concise information is important in the decision-making process. Without accurate and concise information, scientists cannot conduct research and make recommendations based on the findings. Essential to communicating accurately and concisely is interpreting facts and scientific findings for non-scientific audiences. A majority of the global population are not active members of the science community and do not have the knowledge to understand the complexities of science. Yet, many of them still seek scientific information they can understand and use.

This module will provide an overview of how to communicate science accurately and concisely. You will be provided with three scientific, evidence-based reports. You will read the reports and provide an interpretation of the report in a one-page, executive summary. The one-page summary must be accurate and concise, providing only the necessary factual information. Additionally, you will analyze and critique two reports published in academic journals within your discipline.

Learning Outcomes:

- Interpret arguments in scientific, evidence-based reports for a general, non-science audience.
- Analyze arguments in scientific, evidence-based reports.
- Critique arguments in scientific, evidence-based reports and make recommendations on how the author could improve his or her argument.





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Module 3: Communicating Appropriately and Professionally Using Social Media

When using social media for personal or business use, students must remain professional, factual, and open-minded. Many individuals believe social media is a factual source of information. However, much of the information found on social media platforms is biased and not fully explained in the appropriate context. Therefore, it is important for students to properly assess information on social media, understand how to appropriately respond to comments or feedback, and manage agricultural issue campaigns for both personal and business accounts.

This module will cover communicating appropriately and professionally using social media. Within the module, you will find examples; strategies on creating, presenting, and evaluating information for social media platforms; and key elements to remember when professionally replying to other social media users. You will read two agricultural scenarios, take a stance on the two issues, and prepare a response as to why the issue is or is not factual. You will also analyze real examples of arguments within agricultural issues that occur on social media and explain why the arguments are or are not factual.

Learning Outcomes:

- Defend agricultural issues and prepare a response for delivery on social media platforms.
- Analyze agricultural issue arguments on social media and provide written responses to refute the arguments.





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Module 4: Communicating in Writing

Writing in the workplace is an important component for all industries because all positions within an organization require employees to write. Effective writing includes social context, discourse knowledge, content knowledge, cognitive processes, confidence, critical thinking, and the writing process (Leggette, Rutherford, & Dunsford, 2015). Poor writing is frustrating to the reader and often leads to misunderstanding among the constituents. Thus, employers seek employees who can write effective messages and who can deliver an accurate message in a compelling way (Selingo, 2017).

This module will provide an overview of best writing practices. Within the module, you will find multiple issues. You need to choose two. For one issue, you will provide a written evaluation of the issue. For the other issue, you will provide a written report explaining the positives and negatives of the issue. You will be assessed on your ability to apply written communication concepts in a way that is clear to the reader and provides a sound argument.

Learning Outcomes:

- Write an evaluation of a complex agricultural issue.
- Explain in detail the positives and negatives of an agricultural issue.



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Module 5: Communicating Orally

Presentation and oral communication skills are important attributes of new graduates, and students are often expected to deliver presentations as part of course assignments. From speaking to a future employer in an elevator to presenting research at a conference and from conducting a workshop to speaking to a news reporter on a local issue, agricultural scientists need to understand how to communicate orally. Being exceptional scientists is not enough—they must also learn to communicate beyond the lab.

This module will provide you with foundational skills to increase your effectiveness when communicating orally. You will learn strategies for comparing and contrasting agricultural issues to help you create and conduct effective oral presentations. You will then be provided with two complex, agricultural issues to compare and contrast in an oral presentation, which will be evaluated by your peers.

Learning Outcomes:

- Communicate effectively through oral presentation.
- Compare and contrast two complex agricultural issues.



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Module 6: Communicating Pleasantly and Professionally

Communicating in a positive and productive manner is critical in the workplace. When new graduates enter the workforce, they will encounter many situations in which their views do not align with others' views. In situations of conflict or opposing ideas, pleasant and professional communication is a key skill to be an effective employee. Communicating in difficult situations, both planned or unplanned, can be a learned skill in the classroom and used in the workplace. Non-verbal communication, such as body language, is also part of communicating pleasantly and professionally. Positive, non-verbal communication can benefit both internal and external climates of an organization.

This module will cover skills to communicate pleasantly and professionally. You will be provided with scenarios and asked to create pleasant and professional communication. A series of video clips will depict three conversations (e.g., two coworkers in a discussion, an employee talking with a customer, and company colleagues in a discussion). You will respond to questions and write explanations regarding the pleasantness and professionalism of the main character.

Learning Outcomes:

- Create pleasant and professional communication using a variety of mediums (e.g., emails, voice mails, letters, etc.).
- Apply non-verbal, communication concepts to a workplace scenario.





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Module 7: Listening Effectively

Listening is a key to communicating with others, but listening is not the same as hearing. Effective listening includes attentiveness, thinking critically about the information discussed, head nodding, and watching non-verbal movements and cues. Without effective listening, messages can be misunderstood. Therefore, employers look for potential graduates who can listen effectively and identify keywords and concepts needed to make informed decisions.

This module will cover the basic fundamental skills of effective listening. Within this module, you will listen to three audio/video clips that will present case studies of complex issues faced during industry conversations. You will take notes while listening to the case studies. After listening to the case studies, you will explain the issue and solution, identify keywords and concepts of the case study, and articulate questions to ask the speaker about the issue.

Learning Outcomes:

- Apply critical thinking skills by listening for keywords and concepts in oral discussions.
- Solve complex agricultural issues using keywords and concepts from oral discussions.



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