

IABC Communication Skills Assessment Tool

by Rich Young

Measuring Your Skills for Professional Development

As a profession, Communication has evolved over many years from what was called “publicity” to a wide range of activities that now includes such things as: Public Relations, Internal Communication, Marketing Communication, Events, Brand Management, Analyst Relations and Advertising.

While other professions have developed skills competency models, very little has been done to identify the many and varied skills that it takes to be an effective and successful Communication professional. Because of the lack of standards, guidelines and defined skills, the profession has suffered.

Until now...

At IABC, we continue to push toward establishing more professionalism in the industry, as demonstrated by the IABC Accreditation Program and the many resources that we have developed over the years for our members. The Communication Skills Assessment Tool is another way we can help you in your professional development.

Assessing your skills is key for your development in Communication. The Skills Assessment Tool will help you measure your communication skills—determining where you are strong and where you need strengthening.

The Skills Assessment Overview

The Skills Assessment will help you to

- ✍ Identify skills that you are strong in and using well
- ✍ Identify skills required to enhance a current position or prepare for a future position
- ✍ Identify your focus or priorities in your current position
- ✍ Prepare a professional development plan for skills enhancement.

The first step in assessing your skills is to determine your level of attainment in each skill category. Do this by ranking the specific tasks listed under each category. Rank your level of attainment with each of the tasks and then compute the average for the overall skill category. Once you complete the assessment, determine the relative priority for each skill category.

There are many options to improve skills that need work, including taking courses, attending seminars, Webinars, local IABC Chapter programs and using the many resources offered by IABC, including the annual IABC International Conference.

Where appropriate, work with your manager as part of your individual development planning to ensure that you have a clear understanding of your strengths and how they are applied. If you do not have a manager, get input from a peer or a friend who knows your capabilities.

Calibrating Your Skills

To accurately assess and maintain information on your skills, you need to validate them with your manager or a peer. The accuracy of the skills information is critical and dependent on the validation process. (You may want to review your assessment with a colleague prior to reviewing it with your manager.) Develop a plan designed to help you enhance your existing skills and develop the new ones needed to reach the skill level that you are targeting. Remember, the validation process should continue throughout your Communication career.

General Process for Completing the Skills Assessment

Step 1 Plan enough time to complete your assessment at one sitting. This should normally take about 30 to 45 minutes.

Step 2 To assess your skill level, use the criteria for determining skill level below.

Step 3 In order to arrive at an appropriate level for each skill, evaluate your experience, knowledge and ability based on your judgment. (This is not intended to be a “mathematical science.”) You should also ask a peer, your manager or a recognized local expert to provide you with an external view of your skills.

Criteria for Determining Skill Level

Skill Level	Description
0	None (No skill)
1	Limited Limited awareness or practical experience, some idea about application but no training.
2	Basic Experience participating on a limited basis in planning and implementation, familiarity with application, but limited experience, conceptual knowledge and little training.
3	Intermediate Experience demonstrating skill in many situations, performing effectively in most situations, providing some assistance to others, general knowledge of and training in skill.
4	Advanced Experience performing effectively and consistently in all situations without assistance, providing guidance to others and some mentoring, well trained in and able to apply knowledge.
5	Expert Experience giving expert advice and leadership to others in project execution or performance, extensive and/or competitive experience, comprehensive knowledge, demonstrated skill in all areas

Complete the Skills Assessment Worksheet

1. Estimate your current level (0-5) for each skill within the skill categories. In each category, there is space to enter other skills that may be important to your performance in that area
2. Place this number under “Current” (**CURR**).
3. When you have completed your assessment, determine the average for each skill category. Take a straight average of the levels entered for each skill within a category. Round numbers up or down. For example, a level calculated at 3.56 is a level 4. A level calculated at 3.41 is a 3. If you have assessed your skill level at 4 or 5, provide documentation to support your assessment. Documentation consists of items such as samples from major project plans and client feedback, if available.
4. Discuss your assessment with your manager or a peer and then calibrate the conclusion. That conclusion should be the final entry in the “Current” column. (It may help to have your manager or peer fill out the assessment separately from you, and then compare notes and enter final numbers on a new assessment sheet.)
5. You and/or your manager should also determine a priority ranking for each of the skills categories. Enter that ranking on the form under (**PRTY**).
6. Record the required skill level from the Skills Profile for the position in the “Target” (**TARG**)* column on the Skills Assessment Worksheet.
7. Use the Professional Development Plan format to record future oriented work or activities you could benefit from and a target date for completion. This form can help you anticipate the next steps in your career.

* **Target level provided by manager, where possible.**

Skills Assessment Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Current Position: _____

Skills Essential for All Communicators

Personal Skills

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
General Management Skills	_____	_____	_____
			CURR
1. Thinking strategically			_____
2. Taking a long-term view			_____
3. Envisioning creative changes			_____
4. Translating changes into operational tasks			_____
5. Taking responsibility and accountability for decisions, actions, results			_____
6. Dealing effectively with others while developing trust, confidence and building teamwork			_____
7. Understanding and interpreting individual concerns, motives and feelings, and recognizing strengths and limitations in others			_____
8. Being self-directed by taking needed action before being asked or required, seizing opportunities or doing significantly more than required			_____
9. Demonstrating sensitivity to people from different geographies or cultures			_____
10. Working as part of a team to support and complement colleagues' work			_____
11. Effectively managing communication professionals			_____
12. _____			_____
13. _____			_____

CURR

14. _____	_____
15. _____	_____
16. _____	_____
Total	_____

CURR TARG PRTY

Written Communication _____

CURR

1. Researching to determine the needs of the audience	_____
2. Writing proposals for communication programs	_____
3. Writing communication plans	_____
4. Selecting content to meet communication objectives	_____
5. Writing effectively for all media	_____
6. Presenting ideas and facts clearly	_____
7. Understanding writing styles, grammar, punctuation and editing	_____
8. Making effective, knowledgeable presentations, orally or electronically, appropriate to the needs of the audience	_____
9. Preparing for and conducting effective meetings at all levels	_____
10. Establishing appropriate follow-up steps to meetings	_____
11. _____	_____
12. _____	_____
13. _____	_____
14. _____	_____
Total	_____

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Problem Solving and Consulting	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Putting communication theory into practice			-----
2. Developing comprehensive communication plans			-----
3. Obtaining buy-in for communication plans			-----
4. Developing key messages and strategies			-----
5. Identifying communication deliverables			-----
6. Creating, in one-on-one situations, collaborative environments and achieving lasting commitments			-----
7. Reaching compromises between conflicting parties			-----
8. Effectively managing dialogue between parties to ensure success			-----
9. Adapting to changing environments, people's perspectives and needs			-----
10. Anticipating problems and taking actions to prevent them or minimize their impact			-----
11. Defining a problem clearly and logically			-----
12. Identifying solutions to problems			-----
13. Creating action plans			-----
14. Identifying a variety of sources of critical information			-----
15. Using these sources to clarify problems			-----
16. Taking well-calculated risks to leverage opportunities			-----
17. Generating new and creative ideas to develop new and/or improved approaches			-----
18. Providing and justifying recommendations on communication vehicles			-----
19. _____			-----
20. _____			-----

CURR

21. _____	_____
22. _____	_____
23. _____	_____
Total	_____

CURR TARG PRTY

Technology	_____	_____	_____
-------------------	-------	-------	-------

CURR

1. Demonstrating knowledge of authoring tools such as HTML	_____
2. Using MS Word	_____
3. Using PowerPoint	_____
4. Developing online content	_____
5. Managing online content	_____
6. Re-purposing printed content explicitly for online consumption	_____
7. Utilizing PC and supporting software and databases	_____
8. Using multimedia applications	_____
9. Using video-conferencing	_____
10. Understanding trends in communications technology—print, video, voice, electronic, Internet and Intranet	_____
11. Employing best practices in the use of e-mail	_____
12. _____	_____
13. _____	_____
14. _____	_____
15. _____	_____

CURR

16. _____

Total _____

CURR TARG PRTY

Internet/ Intranet Publishing Skills _____

CURR

1. Understanding/using the Internet/Intranet to support business goals _____

2. Maintaining corporate standards _____

3. Transferring brand to Internet/Intranet communications and design _____

4. Integrating corporate messaging/concepts into Internet/Intranet communications _____

5. _____

6. _____

Total _____

Project Management

CURR TARG PRTY

Project Planning _____

CURR

1. Developing a comprehensive and effective project plan _____

2. Explaining a comprehensive and effective project plan _____

3. Executing a comprehensive and effective project plan _____

4. Identifying and determining content, organization, quality and usability project deliverables _____

5. Identifying, defining and estimating the specific activities involved in producing project deliverables _____

CURR

- 6. Translating a proposal and its high-level tasks into a project plan that specifies phases, tasks, etc. in terms of resources, key dates, costs, time and measurement -----
- 7. Maintaining brand standards, trademarks and copyrights -----
- 8. Enhancing brand standards, trademarks and copyrights -----
- 9. Managing the approval process -----
- 10. -----
- 11. -----
- 12. -----
- 13. -----
- 14. -----
- Total** -----

CURR TARG PRTY

Measuring Effectiveness ----- ----- -----

CURR

- 1. Utilizing surveys, focus groups or field testing to gather data -----
- 2. Analyzing quantitative and qualitative results -----
- 3. Refining and adjusting an action plan based on analysis -----
- 4. Identifying key drivers of success and causes of success or failure -----
- 5. Knowing how to establish selection criteria and manage the selection of a research organization -----
- 6. Understanding the validity of measurements and the best use of data -----
- 7. Effectively communicating measurement results -----
- 8. -----

CURR

9. _____

10. _____

Total _____

CURR TARG PRTY

Client Relationship Management _____

CURR

1. Developing personal and working relationships with clients at all levels _____

2. Determining the needs of clients by asking the right questions, listening and confirming before acting _____

3. Seeking input from clients to continuously improve performance _____

4. Understanding a client's relationships with major customers _____

5. Reporting to clients on a timely basis, both in writing and orally, on a broad array of issues relating to the plan or project _____

6. Coaching clients in tools, process and presentation _____

7. Identifying potential problem areas and recommending alternative actions to meet goals _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Total _____

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Risk Assessment	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Defining and assessing factors that could adversely affect the project			-----
2. Making recommendations for a project			-----
3. Demonstrating the ability to weigh costs, payoffs and the likelihood of success			-----
4. Adhering to the guidelines and practices by which qualified vendors are identified, evaluated, selected and placed under contract			-----
5. _____			-----
6. _____			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Budgeting and Cost Control	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Understanding budget planning and processes			-----
2. Demonstrating concern for minimizing costs and time			-----
3. Selecting an approach representing good value for the money or time spent.			-----
4. Managing internal and external resources			-----
5. Having knowledge of departmental budgeting			-----
6. _____			-----
7. _____			-----
8. _____			-----
Total			-----

	CURRE	TARG	PRTY
Time Management	-----	-----	-----
			CURRE
1. Understanding internal and external deadlines and the steps needed to complete projects on time			-----
2. Using time efficiently in terms of project management			-----
3. _____			-----
4. _____			-----
Total			-----

Organizational Knowledge, Culture and Politics

	CURRE	TARG	PRTY
Strategy	-----	-----	-----
			CURRE
1. Maintaining understanding, insight and involvement in the organization's vision for the future and how success will be measured			-----
2. Establishing a communication strategy to achieve short-term and long-term goals, based on the overall business strategy			-----
3. _____			-----
4. _____			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Planning	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Clarifying and focusing on what must happen to achieve the organization's goals and objectives			-----
2. Establishing specific tasks and measurements to achieve the organization's goals			-----
3. Displaying total commitment to quality			-----
4. Meeting various constituents' needs			-----
5. _____			-----
6. _____			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Management Systems and Organization	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Understanding the organizational structure of the company			-----
2. Understanding formal and informal lines of communication and reporting			-----
3. Understanding management systems and processes			-----
4. Utilizing effective methods to motivate and facilitate implementation of a communication strategy within the organization			-----
5. _____			-----
6. _____			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Business Processes	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
Understanding key business processes List key business processes below			
1. -----			-----
2. -----			-----
3. -----			-----
4. -----			-----
5. -----			-----
6. -----			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
General Knowledge	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Understanding the overall marketplace			-----
2. Understanding total market opportunities in terms of customer spending, growth and environmental factors			-----
3. -----			-----
4. -----			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Competitive Environment	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Understanding major competitors, their strategies and objectives			-----
2. Analyzing an organization's strengths, weaknesses and competitive position in the marketplace			-----
3. _____			-----
4. _____			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Marketing Strategies and Trends	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Explaining near- and long-term business strategies			-----
2. Discussing corporate goals and the company's current economic status			-----
3. Understanding and supporting the organization's vision, purpose and strategies			-----
4. Explaining key company and industry trends and directions			-----
5. Understanding and assessing the organization's current position in the marketplace and strategies for leadership			-----
6. Understanding general business trends and their impact on the company's business			-----
7. _____			-----
8. _____			-----
9. _____			-----
Total			-----

	CURR	TARG	PRTY
Product and Services Offerings	-----	-----	-----
			CURR
1. Demonstrating knowledge of major offerings			-----
2. Explaining major organization alliances and partnerships			-----
3. Describing major client offerings			-----
4. Explaining major client alliances and partnerships			-----
5. _____			-----
6. _____			-----
Total			-----

Communication Skills Inventory Form

Skills Category

Personal

Current Target Priority

General Management	-----	-----	-----
Written Communication	-----	-----	-----
Problem Solving and Consulting	-----	-----	-----
Technology	-----	-----	-----
Intranet/Publishing	-----	-----	-----

Project Management

Current Target Priority

Project Planning	-----	-----	-----
Measuring Effectiveness	-----	-----	-----
Client Relationship Management	-----	-----	-----
Risk Assessment	-----	-----	-----
Budgeting and Cost Control	-----	-----	-----
Time Management	-----	-----	-----

Organizational Knowledge, Culture and Politics

Current Target Priority

Strategy	-----	-----	-----
Planning	-----	-----	-----
Management Systems and Organization	-----	-----	-----
Business Processes	-----	-----	-----
General Knowledge	-----	-----	-----
Competitive Environment	-----	-----	-----
Marketing Strategies and Trends	-----	-----	-----
Product and Services Offerings	-----	-----	-----

Professional Development Plan Format

Name:

Date:

1. Assessment of Career Potential and Individual Interests

- Are you in the type of work you want to do? If not, what do you want to do?
- Do you want to be a manager, an individual contributor or an independent consultant?

2. Development Goals

- What are the skills you want to target for strengthening?

3. Planned Activity and Timing

- What activity do you have planned to strengthen each targeted skill?
- List a timeframe for each activity.

4. Actual Results with Completion Dates

- Record what you accomplished as a result of your planned activity and when it was completed.

5. Future Development Goals

- What are your goals for five or more years into the future?

Rich Young is a Communications Skills Consultant with Communications Skills Associates. He offers skills assessment models for Internal Communications, Public Relations, Marketing Communications, Brand Management and Events Management. He can be contacted at RIYcomm@aol.com or 617-332-3081.