

Talk to Me: Secrets to Success

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Context: In-class; First-Year Undergraduate Seminar

Keywords: networking, first-year experience, role-playing, faculty-student interactions, elevator speeches

Student Activity Time: 20-30 minutes in-class

To help prepare students for conversations with faculty members, the students discussed myths, fears, and experiences about communicating with faculty members and prepared an elevator speech for communicating with faculty members.

Introducing the Reflection Activity

In a first-year course on engineering and society, students are exposed to a variety of concepts that are intended to better prepare them for being a successful student and aware of engineering concepts with respect to society. One focus of this course is professional communication, specifically networking. In small groups, students reflected on their experiences working with faculty members, which were facilitated by upperclassmen mediators. Then students practiced elevator speeches they might give to a faculty member to introduce themselves. The purpose of this reflection activity was for students to individually reflect on their experiences (or what they have heard about) working with faculty members; learn from other's experiences working with faculty members; and to prepare for future opportunities to sell themselves.

To start the activity, the educator lectured about some keys to success when talking with other educators—lecture presentation titled “Talk to me.” The purpose of this short 15-minute lecture was to prepare students to engage in small group discussions about talking and working with educators. After this lecture, in small groups students talked about myths, fears, feelings, thoughts, and experiences related to interacting with educators on campus. Then the small groups of students brainstormed strategies for how to form confident connections with educators on campus. These small group discussions were led by upperclassmen mediators. In advance of these discussions, the educator prepped the upperclassmen mediators by providing them with questions that might help guide the discussion. To wrap-up the small group discussions, the educator called on volunteers to share from these small group discussion. The students were asked to think about and write an elevator speech about themselves (i.e. how would they introduce themselves to an educator in less than 2 minutes).

In terms of outcomes, this reflection activity provides students with lessons about the importance of forming a community early in their academic career and the role communication plays in forming this community. Through this reflection activity, ideally students will have tools and confidence to seek out

and form these new relationships. Additionally, from talking with their peers about myths and fears, they can experience comradery surrounding these issues.

Recreating the Reflection Activity

DIGITAL LIBRARY CONTENT	
📁	6.1 Elevator Speech Handout
📁	6.2 Talk to Me Slides

	Description
1	Lecture about communication and interactions with faculty members—"Talk to me" presentation.
2	Prep upperclassmen mediators with guiding questions.
3	Engage students in small group discussions about their myths, fears, feelings, thoughts, and experiences related to interacting with educators on campus. Groups brainstorm strategies for how to form connections with educators on campus.
4	Call on volunteers to share from these small group discussions.
5	Assign written reflection activity—"Elevator Speech."
6	Grade written reflection activity—"Elevator Speech."
7	Debrief students with highlights from the written reflection activity.

In the words of the Educator: Tips and Inspiration

Give students time to think, form responses, and collaborate with the group. The first time I implemented this activity, I talked a lot and rushed through the activity. I realized students needed more time to think and talk with one another. The second time I implemented this activity, I talked less, slowed down, and provided them time to think and talk. The second time it was much more successful!

Engender reflection in your teaching. Because reflection is so valuable to students, I believe it is important for educators to weave it into all aspects of your teaching. In my own teaching, I try to incorporate as many reflection lessons as possible.

Form relationships with students. Forming relationships with students is 100% necessary, especially when professional connections and experience is so important.

Help students see the bigger picture behind the lesson. It is important to help students buy into the reflection activity and to see the bigger picture behind the activity. This will help make the reflection activity more meaningful for the students.

What was the inspiration for the reflection activity? I was originally introduced to this reflection activity by Liz Chapman and Jan DeWaters (both engineering faculty at Clarkson University). Over time we have adjusted the activity to better meet the needs of our students. We have also discussed it with the student success center as a way to share the reflection activity and to get feedback on the reflection activity.