

I Ain't No English Teacher!

Abstract

The promise of articulate engineers able to construct concise papers directing their audiences to exact interpretations is the wish of all engineering departments. Engineers who are both well versed in their areas of expertise and able to convey this information have been a goal of colleges of engineering for decades. English departments on every campus in the country have performed the task of giving information on writing and sometimes presentation skills to engineering students on a one or two class basis. This one-time basis has constituted an engineer's indoctrination into communication skills (mostly attached to skills oriented to the arts and letters). Once this internship is over, the experience (whether good or bad) is placed behind (usually on a cold back burner), and the engineers immerse themselves in their technical study, usually devoid of communication skill concern. The time has arrived for a simple fact to be made known. The most important role models in the area of communication skills are individuals who have always been in the engineering student's sight, the engineering professors. Professors in the engineering departments, as in most majors, are the focal point of their students, and their words far outdistance comments from individuals outside the major area. By uniting the faculty in a concerted effort to explore and improve communication skills, both engineering students and the world in general will profit. By analyzing what is done in each course in the engineer's major, by creating a continuum of communication skill instruction and evaluation in every department, and by utilizing in-place (through careful discussion) technical assignments to emphasize needed communication; the engineering student will be more willing to accept and investigate the need for communication skills.

It is important to note the need for members of all engineering departments to express to their colleagues the various ways in which they use written and oral communication techniques in their courses. There is also an equal responsibility for department chairpersons to further the dissemination of communication skill information to their department members. Individual faculty members should also think beyond the assignments that are given to students to issues that are raised in their own writing and speaking. These activities are important to students so that they can see the necessity of communicating well for their future success. Students will more readily accept the premise that communication is a vital part of an engineer's life if they are given that information along with their technical material and in the context that college professors have to spend a great amount of time writing, too.

As we look at the variety of writing activities that faculty members are engaged in and the absolute necessity for new assistant professors to create text that will present their research to funding agencies, it is easy to see a connection between what the engineering faculty does in the world of text production. Spending a small amount of time explaining to one's classes what is required of the faculty member in the area of writing can have great benefits for the student population.