



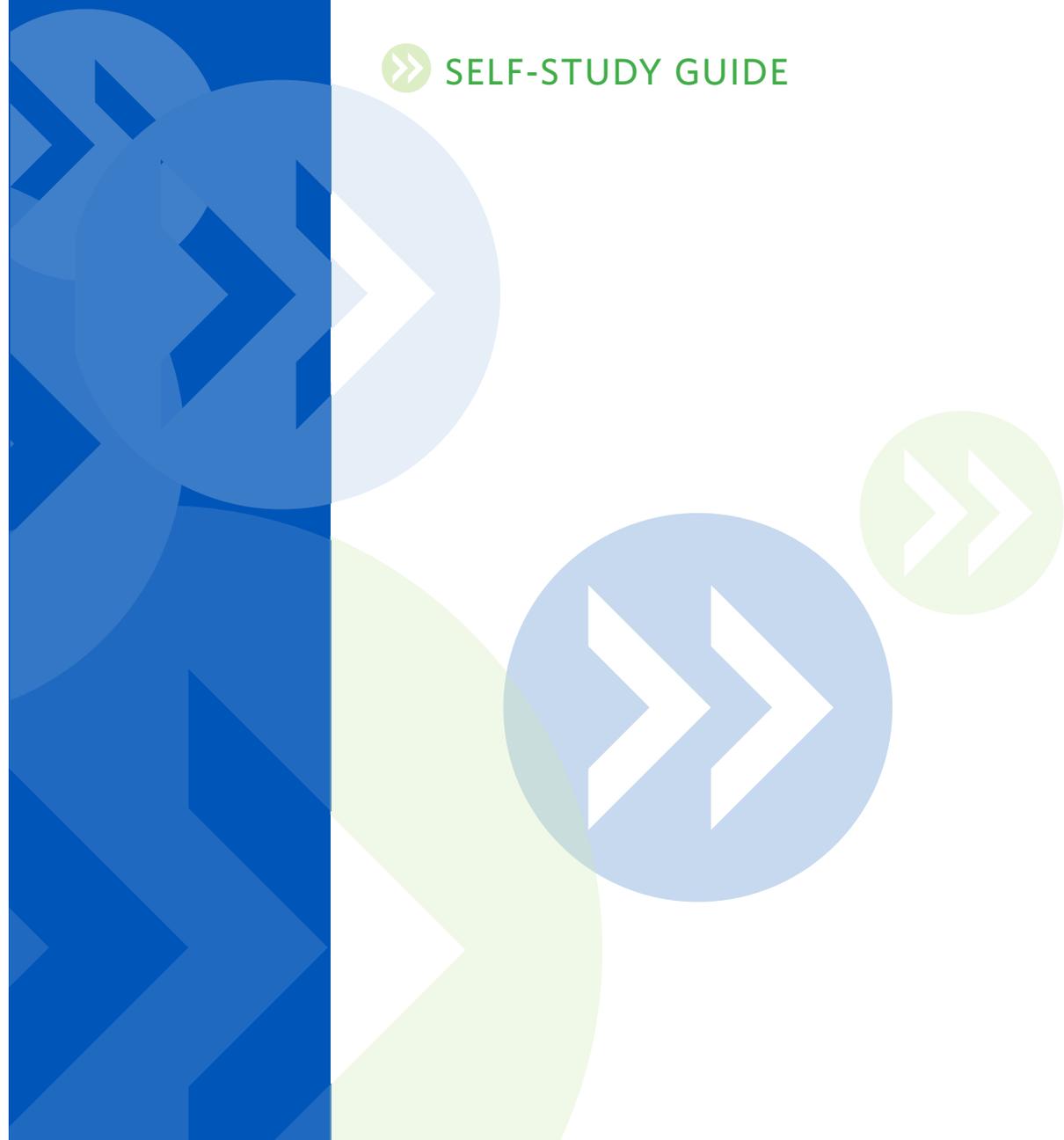
SPEECH SKILLS

Building On Small Successes (BOSS)

The BOSS Checklist



SELF-STUDY GUIDE



Building On Small Successes (BOSS) Checklist

One of the best ways to develop your confidence is through “a series of small wins.” When it comes to your communication skills, the BOSS Checklist offers you a set of incrementally more difficult tasks to help you create a history of success.

All of the drills presented in this checklist will require you to talk to or interact with other people, starting with simple one-on-one scenarios and moving progressively toward formal presentations. The checklist is ranked from easiest to hardest according to what typically triggers speaking anxiety. However, every person is different, so feel free to reorder the list according to your personal triggers.

Be deliberate about completing every item on the checklist, even the “easy” tasks. Since the goal is to gain experience managing your adrenaline responses, by all means start with those tasks that will assure a positive outcome.

Remember: It’s often the planning and anticipation of a communication task that creates the anxiety—even with normally relaxed interactions. For example, very few of us have trouble spontaneously asking a question, but sitting in your chair *planning* to ask a question can cause your adrenaline to rise.

To this end, you may only check off a specific communication task if you do it intentionally. Realizing in retrospect that you completed a task is not at all the same thing as planning and completing the task *on purpose*.

Every item on the checklist has several steps: Choose the task, anticipate it, and be present while doing it. When it’s over, there’s one final step: celebrate it! You might even do a little happy dance in your head. Acknowledging the win is what reinforces your confidence in the future.

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ASK A QUESTION

- Ask a question of a librarian, a hotel concierge, a museum docent, or a person at an information desk.
- Ask questions of people in authority, especially if they look intimidating. Approach and ask for information from the security guard at the airport, a police officer at the mall, or a stuffy maître d'.
- Ask a question from the audience at back-to-school night, on a walking tour, or at an art lecture.
- Ask a question of someone you respect (or someone who intimidates you) such as a senior partner or top executive at your company. Raise the bar by also giving this person some feedback—either a compliment or a constructive comment.
- Ask a question or make a comment at a public meeting or other large gathering—a school board meeting, a public policy session, or a town hall lecture. This type of environment should be big enough that the audience is required to speak into a microphone.

ASK FOR SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

- Ask for special treatment at a restaurant. (Some ideas include: ask for a different table, check with the bartender about turning down the TV volume, ask the hostess to adjust the room's lighting or temperature, request a unique preparation of your meal.)
- Return something without apology. (Some ideas include: return an item to a retail store; ask for something to be taken off your bill at a restaurant if it wasn't up to par; try a new item at the grocery store and return it if you don't like it.) You should be pleasant but resist the urge to apologize.
- Ask for a discount. Think of a reason that you should get a discount on something you are purchasing and ask for it. (Some ideas include: being a local customer or an out-of-town visitor, buying more than one, being a first-time buyer, remaining a loyal customer, mentioning that it's your birthday month. You might also simply ask if the company or store is offering any specials or coupons you don't know about.)
- Ask your boss, teacher, or manager for a simple accommodation. (Some ideas include: ask to leave an hour early, change your schedule, purchase a unique office supply, defer a deadline, work from home for the day, or swap one task for another.)
- Contact someone who is an established expert and ask to have a conversation over the phone or over lunch. This should be someone you don't know personally but admire, such as an author, a professor, an artist, or other thought leader.

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DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS IN ANONYMOUS SITUATIONS

- Make phone inquiries to get more information on a product or service. Ask lots of questions. If possible, record your end of the conversation and listen to yourself afterward.
- Go on a time-share or new condo tour or visit several open houses. Ask lots of questions but resist the urge to apologize for not buying.
- Go to a craft fair, farmer's market, convention, home show, or festival and start conversations with as many vendors as possible.
- Work a booth at a convention or pass out flyers at a mall or festival to experience the environment from the vendor's point of view. Greet and make eye contact with everyone who passes by. Be willing to handle their rejection or avoidance.
- Go to a networking meeting outside of your field to practice introducing yourself with confidence. Practice leading the conversation—jump in, introduce others to each other, and intentionally add new topics to the conversation.
- Take a one-day seminar through a university continuing education program and choose to be a vocal, engaged student.
- Go on a cruise or vacation and practice being a dynamic, magnetic personality. Allow yourself to be a social butterfly; make it your job to assure that everyone else feels good about themselves.

PRACTICE IN LOW-RISK ENVIRONMENTS

- Set up a video camera in your living room or spare meeting room and capture a sample of yourself answering impromptu questions or delivering a prepared business message. Even if no one is present, you'll learn a lot about your personal speaking style. (You can raise the stakes by sharing the video with others to get their feedback.)
- Talk to yourself while driving, showering, cooking, and/or walking the dog. Use these moments to perfect your professional elevator pitch or to practice speaking without filler words.
- Play board games (Charades, Balderdash, Guesstures, Apples to Apples, Taboo) with friends while focusing on your speaking skills.

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PRACTICE IN LOW-RISK ENVIRONMENTS *continued*

- Read to your kids. Practice being a dynamic storyteller. Take your performance up a notch or two from your usual style.
- Focus on your communication skills while enjoying a meal with friends, coworkers, or family members. Work on holding eye contact, speaking with optimal volume, and listening actively.
- Join a Speaking Circle or Lean In Circle and be sure to contribute something at every meeting.
- Sign up to receive our *SpeechSkills SoundBites* daily impromptu questions via email. Or buy the boxed set and practice at your leisure. Create the discipline of doing one communication drill a day, even if it's only for two to three minutes.
- Create your own practice group at your work place. (Use *Lifestories*, *TableTopics*, *Chat Pack*, or *SpeechSkills SoundBites* cards for impromptu questions.)

PRACTICE IN REAL-WORLD ENVIRONMENTS

- Volunteer to be the information desk person or greeter at a school fund-raiser, professional organization, or charity event.
- Speak up at meetings. Make it a matter of discipline to contribute a question or comment at every meeting. Do some homework if necessary to be prepared with a contribution.
- Start a round of "Happy Birthday" at a restaurant even if no one in your party is having a birthday. Try to encourage other patrons to join in.
- Give a toast. This can be as simple as at the family dinner table or at a public venue like a restaurant birthday party, wedding, retirement dinner, or other celebration you might attend next.
- Be the one to suggest that people introduce themselves at the top of a meeting, back-to-school night, neighborhood association gathering, networking breakfast, or other event that finds you interacting with strangers.
- Invite someone you've never socialized with before to join you for coffee or to accompany you to an event. This can be a brand new colleague or an attractive acquaintance you've always wanted to spend more time with.

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SIGN YOURSELF UP TO BE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

- Join a volunteer program to read to kids at schools, community centers, or bookstores.
- Volunteer to make announcements at your work, religious organization, gymnasium, dance class, school, community theater, networking meeting, or any other group gathering.
- Sign up to be a teaching assistant for a continuing studies class in your field. Be sure that your duties include making announcements or giving instructions on the teacher's behalf.
- Teach a class or be a guest lecturer for another instructor at your local college or community center.
- Take an improvisation or singing class. Look for one that includes a recital or performance at the end of the session.
- Join Toastmasters International and go through the organization's ten-speech *Competent Communication* program.
- Offer to give a short talk about your hobby or area of expertise. Venues for your talk might include your child's school, a networking breakfast, a charity event, a retirement home, an open enrollment Learning Annex, or a youth support center.
- Schedule yourself to give a presentation or project update at work. Try to choose an opportunity for which you will need to stand at the front of the room.
- Sign up to be the emcee or host of a talent show, Halloween costume contest, business rally, award program, or fund-raiser.
- Create a keynote address in your area of expertise and volunteer to deliver it at a conference or large group gathering of your peers.

For more free resources and info about our training programs, visit speechskills.com/free.