

Article

Essential Attributes of Professional Communication Educators

Sylvia Sim Swee Choo

National University of Singapore, Singapore

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Abstract

In the search for suitable educators to teach professional communication courses, it is essential to recognize the importance that these teachers assume in preparing graduates to thrive in today's dynamic workplace. This analysis examines the attributes of effective professional communication educators. Insights from the professional communication teaching team from the Centre of English Language Communication (CELC) at the National University of Singapore offer perspectives on the qualities to prioritize when evaluating candidates for these roles in the hiring process.

Keywords

Professional communication, search, attributes, educators, competence, workplace relevance

1 Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving global economy, professional communication skills have become indispensable for successful organizational operations. Effective professional communication is shaped by soft skills defined as the interpersonal and behavioural skills required in the workplace (Kantrowitz, 2005). These are universally applicable across jobs and industries, serving as a foundation for empathy, collaboration, team building, resilience, and agility, thereby transforming organizations. (Lepeley, Beutell, Abarca Melo, & Majluf, 2021). A recent survey by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG, 2022) underscores the importance of integrating soft skills with technical expertise, highlighting how this combination is essential for professional achievement across diverse roles. Looking ahead, Lee and Jaidev (2025) suggest that emerging research will emphasize key issues such as the impact of artificial intelligence on workplace communication, inter-generational dynamics, and well-being. As these factors complicate the workplace landscape, organizations must adapt. To prepare undergraduates for this environment, it is essential to equip them with strong soft skills. Navigating complex challenges and diverse interactions requires proficiency in effective, contextually aware communication across various platforms and stakeholders. Such skills are vital for individual career advancement and overall organizational success.

Universities increasingly recognize the importance of integrating soft skills into their curriculum to better prepare students for today's workforce. As early as 2017, Moore & Morton argued that universities

were falling short in this regard, citing surveys and studies on employer satisfaction. To address this gap, universities have been redesigning their curriculum to prioritize soft skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and adaptability (Litchfield et al., 2010), supported by various studies (Majid et al., 2019; Taylor, 2016; Raitskaya et al., 2018; Tang, 2019). By strategically integrating these skills, universities aim to align education with real-world expectations, enhancing graduates' job readiness and overall employability.

The Centre for English Communication (CELC) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) aims to boost students' workplace readiness by fostering proficient English language and communication skills, facilitating their development into effective communicators. Specifically, CELC's professional communication courses aim to bridge the gap between theoretical academic knowledge and practical skills needed in dynamic workplaces by equipping students with communication skills essential for professional settings. CELC's strategic initiatives underscore its commitment to optimizing learning experiences for students. Through the progressive integration of blended learning methodologies, the implementation of twinned and embedded course structures, and the strategic use of technology, the centre enriches the quality of education. Majid et al. (2019) suggests that academic institutions should embrace various approaches to instil soft skills in their graduates.

In such diverse learning contexts, the teacher's role is pivotal in maximizing learning outcomes. Knobloch (2003) recognizes the significant role educators play in assisting students to bridge this gap. Lam (2025) argues that as professional communication needs in Asia evolve, it is crucial to select teachers who possess both industry-relevant knowledge and adaptable teaching skills to ensure that students are effectively prepared for the modern workplace. Acting as facilitators, guides, and mentors, they cultivate an environment where students can maximize learning through active participation, thereby nurturing essential soft skills. Within CELC, these soft skills are developed to enhance the effectiveness of students' professional communication capabilities. This study explores the responsibilities shouldered by educators involved in teaching professional communication courses and aims to identify the specific qualities that the search committee at CELC should prioritize when assessing potential candidates. These findings will provide valuable insights to the committee as they strive to identify appropriate talent to meet their mission of preparing students for the demands of the contemporary workplace in the 21st century.

2 The Search for Effective Professional Communication Teachers

The challenges of preparing graduates for the modern workplace highlight how important it is for educators to bridge the gap by connecting academic knowledge with real-world skills. To keep pace with evolving workplace demands, instructors must continuously update their teaching and maintain curriculum relevance. At CELC, creating a learner-centred environment (Weimer, 2002) is key to maximizing student outcomes. By fostering a supportive classroom and encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning, educators empower students to actively shape their own learning journeys. To meet these demands, it is essential for CELC to build a strong teaching team that engages and motivates them to actively participate in a collaborative learning community, thus nurturing meaningful learning experiences.

The search committee in CELC oversees the recruitment of faculty members for its professional communication programs. The committee's responsibilities include reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and evaluating candidates based on teaching skills, research achievements, industry background, and potential to contribute to the centre's programmes. It ensures that the hiring process aligns with institutional policies and meets departmental goals. The committee's primary objective is to expand CELC's talent pool and recruit educators capable of inspiring and educating students effectively. To achieve this, candidates are taken through a rigorous five-stage selection process comprising CV

screening, an initial interview, a case study analysis, a teaching demonstration, and a final interview. The recruitment process is tailored to identify and enlist competent candidates with the skills to teach, collaborate, and conduct research, and ensuring that they are a good fit for CELC's needs.

3 The CELC Search Experience

Finding a candidate who fulfils all the above criteria is not an easy task. To assist the search efforts, it is crucial that the current team of professional communication educators in CELC share their views and give inputs on what they consider to be essential attributes of a professional communication teacher. By leveraging the collective wisdom and experiences of the team, CELC will gain insights to optimize hiring by refining the search process and adjusting hiring criteria to better meet students' diverse needs and prepare them more effectively for workplace demands.

An online survey was administered to nine CELC colleagues who had taught professional communication courses at CELC. All except one had experience designing and coordinating such courses. Respondents provided qualitative responses to the following five open-ended questions:

- Which specific communication skills and abilities do you believe are crucial for a teacher specializing in professional communication?
- What are some key indicators or behaviours you would look for during an interview to assess a candidate's ability to effectively communicate and engage with students in a professional communication?
- What qualifications and specific teaching/learning experiences would give a candidate for a professional communication teaching position an advantage. Please explain.
- If interviewing such a candidate, what would you prioritize e.g. teaching vs industry experience? Please explain.
- In order to evaluate a candidate's ability to tailor their teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse needs of learners in a workplace communication setting, what kinds of interview questions will be helpful?

4 Faculty Inputs

The responses of the nine participants are collated and are presented in the following 4 sections. These components need to be considered holistically to accurately assess a candidate's overall suitability.

4.1 Qualifications and teaching experience

There was consensus amongst all respondents that a candidate should possess at least a master's degree in English or Applied Linguistics. Other communication-related qualifications in disciplines such as mass communication and media studies may be considered when the candidate has sufficient relevant English teaching experience. There is because there is a strong emphasis on language use in CELC's course material.

4.2 Skills

Respondents' views have been organized into these three main skillsets:

4.2.1 Language skills and competencies

- Being clear and concise, delivering straightforward and unambiguous explanations.
- Providing relevant, specific, and appropriate illustrations.
- Being concrete and logical in execution.
- Being eloquent, displaying confidence and articulacy with a controlled demeanour and tone of voice.
- Being able to think and speak spontaneously, responding to questions with examples and offering alternative explanations to reinforce learning.
- Using words carefully and appropriately, with the ability to nuance meaning.
- Pitching language at the appropriate level.
- Asking questions to stimulate thinking and encourage various points of view.
- Possessing good listening and observation skills to maximize learning opportunities during interactions.
- Synthesizing students' responses and connecting varying opinions to highlight key learning points, demonstrating good observation skills.

4.2.2 Interpersonal and intercultural skills

Candidates should possess interpersonal and intercultural communication skills to effectively engage with a wide range of learners in a respectful, competent, and professional manner. They need to demonstrate an understanding of the diverse needs, backgrounds, and opinions of students and address them without condescension or undue compromise. These skills are also required as they gear their teaching approach more towards facilitation and less on traditional teacher-centred communication.

4.2.3 Digital skills

In today's dynamic educational landscape, characterized by technology-enabled learning environments, being tech-savvy is increasingly crucial. Respondents indicate that potential educators must be able to adapt and utilize various digital tools and platforms effectively to enhance teaching and learning experiences. The ability to integrate multimedia elements, interactive presentations, and online collaboration tools into their teaching practices is needed in today's learning context.

4.3 Qualities and dispositions

Genuine commitment to professional communication within a workplace context should be ingrained in their core values. In the context of CELC, fostering a strong community of inquiry among teaching teams is paramount and this requires candidates who are

- approachable
- engaging, both to students and peers
- willing to work in a team
- open minded – willing to explore
- possesses intercultural sensitivity
- energetic and passionate
- empathetic
- genuinely interest to impart skills

4.4 Workplace knowledge and experience

Candidates should have some industry exposure, not just academic experience, to provide valuable insights when engaging students in class and when designing authentic learning scenarios. They need to be able to speak knowledgeably about communication practices and share insights about workplace challenges.

Candidates may compensate for a lack of industry experience with a willingness to learn new strategies and adapt to different professional contexts. One respondent considered varied experiences such as living abroad or working outside educational institutions as beneficial, and another shared that experience in stage performance and public speaking is a bonus.

Two respondents indicated that candidates should be role models for students, displaying awareness and understanding of real-world professional settings to bridge the gap between school and work effectively.

Essentially, successful candidates should be able to guide students to connect classroom experiences with practical workplace demands and ensure that knowledge gained is not only theoretical but also applicable and relevant to their future careers.

To assist the search committee in prioritizing the identified qualities necessary for effective instruction in professional communication, the above list desired skills and attributes compiled based on the findings has been further classified into two categories – one listing general attributes CELC educators need to have and another showing differentiating qualities of professional communication teachers (see Table 1).

5 Analysis

The survey findings were carefully analyzed and categorized into two groups: general attributes that characterize effective teachers in any context, and differentiating attributes that are particularly important for professional communication teachers (see Table 1). When evaluating candidates for educator roles in CELC, the search committee must first determine if they possess the essential attributes to be effective teachers. Hattie and Jaeger (Hattie, 2003) identified five key dimensions that distinguish expert teachers from experienced ones: subject mastery, interactive teaching, guidance and feedback, positive student relationships, and overall learning impact. These dimensions are essential for CELC teachers, who are also expected to prioritize student well-being, demonstrate genuine passion, and foster continuous learning. Survey findings indicate that these priorities are reflected in the general attributes valued for CELC teachers, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Differentiating Attributes for Professional Communication Teachers

Levels	Qualifications, Skills and Disposition
General Attributes required for CELC teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant qualifications - a Masters in English or Applied Linguistics. • Sufficient relevant teaching experience • Clear communication skills • Effective curriculum development • Desired traits like empathy towards students, adaptability to diverse learning styles, and a genuine passion for fostering growth • Core values that foster a strong community of inquiry • Skills to adapt and utilize various digital tools and platforms effectively to enhance teaching and learning experiences

Differentiating
Attributes for
Professional
Communication
teachers

- A solid grasp of communication theory and practices and effectively apply these skills when interacting with students
- Knowledge of emerging workplace trends to gain industry insights and incorporating these into curriculum and practice.
- Innovative teaching approaches that integrate of real-world examples and case studies into curriculum design and learning experiences
- Ability to adapt to different professional contexts and be able to adapt academic principles to professional communication contexts
- Proficiency in technology to stay abreast of emerging trends in digital communication use and social media, and incorporating relevant trends into their curriculum
- Awareness and understanding of real-world professional settings as role models to bridge the gap between school and work effectively.
- Lack of industry experience may be offset by relevant experiences such as living abroad or involvement in stage performance and public speaking. Favourable considerations will be given to candidates with work experience beyond educational institutions.

In evaluating candidates for professional communication courses, the search committee must move beyond the general criteria for effective teaching at CELC. It is equally important to identify distinctive attributes—such as industry awareness, rhetorical sensitivity, and applied communication expertise—that are critical for success in this specialised teaching context. These differentiating qualities are outlined in Table 1. In addition to teaching workplace genres or technical language, educators should help students construct their professional identities by fostering audience awareness, adaptability, and ethical communication (Faber, 2002). A strong grasp of current industry practices is vital for bridging academic learning with workplace demands. As Moore and Morton (2017) and Litchfield et al. (2010) highlight, adopting experiential learning—where students learn through experience, reflection, and application (Kolb, 1984)—enables educators to integrate practical skills and authentic workplace scenarios into their teaching. By guiding students to reflect on real-world experiences and connect them with academic concepts, teachers help develop the intercultural and communicative competencies essential for professional success (Wu & Du-Babcock, 2025).

Effective teachers integrate experiential learning activities into the curriculum, emphasizing real-world relevance and encouraging students to apply theoretical knowledge into practice but they face a significant challenge when teaching undergraduates with limited or no workplace experience. The lack of exposure makes it difficult for students to appreciate the complexities of real-world problems and grasp the intricacies of workplace dynamics. As a result, the relevance of a workplace-based professional communication course may not be immediately apparent to undergraduates. This is where the differentiating attributes of professional communication educators become critical, as they enable teachers to contextualise learning and make visible the real-world value of communication concepts. Teachers need to bridge the gap between academic and professional contexts and facilitate the transfer of communication concepts from the academic realm to practical professional contexts. For example, Toulmin's model of argumentation—a framework often used in academic writing instruction—can be applied in professional communication to help students construct well-reasoned, audience-centric messages. By guiding students to identify claims, support them with evidence, and anticipate counterarguments, educators foster critical thinking and enable students to communicate persuasively and purposefully in workplace contexts (Karbach, 1987). It is therefore essential to select educators

who demonstrate the dexterity to transfer principles from academic writing instruction to professional communication, effectively bridging both domains in their teaching (see Table 1).

Capable educators design curricula that incorporate scenario-based and hands-on activities simulating real-world situations, providing students with authentic learning experiences. By integrating adaptable problem-solving methods and delivering constructive feedback, teachers deepen student understanding, as supported by Hattie (2003). By providing context-based learning, facilitation, and mentorship in a supportive environment, Importantly, as Du-Babcock (2018) notes, effective business communication in Asia demands sensitivity to local cultural norms, linguistic diversity, and organizational hierarchies. CELC helps students build the confidence and skills needed to tackle these workplace challenges. To support this approach, there is a need to prioritize hiring educators who have a strong understanding of workplace concepts and relevant professional experience. These educators are expected to possess strong intercultural and interpersonal skills, as well as the ability to anticipate learning opportunities and respond effectively to students' needs (see Table 1). This comprehensive expertise allows teachers to connect classroom activities to core principles, better preparing students for the complexities of the Asian business environment.

In today's dynamic workplace, where graduates navigate diverse fields and collaborate across disciplines, interdisciplinary communication is increasingly valuable. Universities like the National University of Singapore (NUS) are pivotal in advancing interdisciplinary education to address the complexities of wicked problems ("Strong Interest in Interdisciplinary Learning with High Acceptance Rates," n.d.) This shift prompts NUS to enhance its educational approach, aiming to better equip graduates for the evolving landscape. As globalization and interdisciplinary communication grow, embracing change becomes imperative. Du-Babcock (2006) emphasizes the need to evolve instructional strategies in business communication teaching to meet the challenges of translating specialized knowledge across disciplines and genres. Recognizing this need, CELC has embedded professional communication skills teaching in discipline specific courses. Teaching and facilitating these courses require educators to have diverse backgrounds in both academia and industry. Successful candidates would need to stay current to respond effectively to changes, adapt and innovate to better prepare students to navigate the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary workplaces and address complex challenges collaboratively (see Table 1).

The search for competent educators must also prioritize their proficiency in technological integration, particularly in utilizing technology within the classroom. Effective professional communication instructors should be able to strategically adapt and integrate digital tools and platforms that reflect contemporary workplace practices, thereby enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively in professional settings. They must stay informed about emerging trends in digital communication and workplace social media usage, integrating these developments into their curriculum. The use of generative AI, for example, requires teachers to incorporate innovative teaching methodologies that foster critical thinking and creativity among students, while also ensuring ethical considerations are addressed. This aspect further complicates the search process, as it necessitates identifying candidates who are not only proficient in emerging technologies but also capable of integrating them thoughtfully into their teaching practices. To be successful, candidates must demonstrate the ability to leverage these tools to enhance effective professional communication in diverse contexts, navigating both challenges and opportunities presented by new emerging technologies.

A growth mindset is fundamental for effective educators, as it fosters continuous learning and improvement. In professional communication education, this mindset encourages educators to engage with the latest research, apply evidence-based strategies, and adapt their teaching to meet industry demands. Research and practice are closely linked: research provides proven methods and theories, while classroom practice tests and refines these approaches. By staying informed about both current research and emerging workplace trends, educators can design curriculum and teaching methods that are both

relevant and practical. Reflective practice, paired with a commitment to growth, enables educators to integrate new insights from research and their own teaching experiences, resulting in more meaningful learning for students. This ongoing process not only strengthens educators' professional development but also ensures that students are well-prepared for real-world communication challenges.

Hence, the selection process necessitates an assessment of candidates' potential for continuous advancement and contribution to the sustained excellence of teaching. CELC fosters a culture of peer support and collaborative professional development among educators, supporting their continual professional development, and encouraging the adoption of innovative teaching strategies. It is important to evaluate a candidate's capacity to engage in the communities of practice within CELC. These communities serve as collaborative forums wherein educators actively engage by drawing from and sharing scholarly insights and experiential knowledge, thereby augmenting overall proficiency and development within CELC.

The search for an ideal candidate to be part of a teaching team for professional communication courses in CELC is not a simple task. As shown in the discussion above, the search committee needs to find talent who possesses general as well as differentiating attributes listed in Table 1. While the list may not be exhaustive, these indicators provide important guidance for identifying candidates who demonstrate both the core competencies required for effective teaching and the distinctive qualities needed to address the specific demands of professional communication education in the CELC context. Accurately assessing a candidate's long-term potential to evolve within a rapidly changing field adds to the challenge. The present process of interviews and teaching demonstrations offer only a surface-level assessment and may not be sufficient to capture the extent of experience and expertise needed. In interviews, candidates may tailor responses, hindering the distinction between genuine beliefs and rehearsed answers. Subjectivity in evaluation and the challenge of predicting future adaptability add layers of complexity to the process. While teaching demonstrations offer insights into teaching abilities, these are at best a snapshot. Often occurring in a controlled environment with time constraints, performances during teaching demonstrations might not accurately reflect an educator's long-term adaptability or their capacity to handle diverse classroom dynamics. As the demands of the workplace evolves, there is room to refine the selection criteria and processes to provide a more holistic understanding of a candidate's adaptability and potential to grow within the nuanced and evolving field of professional communication education.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the effectiveness of CELC's efforts to prepare students for the demands of the modern workplace is closely tied to its rigorous recruitment and deliberate selection of professional communication educators. By prioritizing candidates whose qualifications and values align with the department's mission, CELC not only enhances the impact of its support and resources but also ensures that educators are well-equipped to adapt and succeed. Effective educators foster a nurturing environment where students can build confidence, articulate their ideas, and develop the skills and mindsets needed to become abled communicators who are ready for today's dynamic professional landscape. Ultimately, by combining robust hiring practices with ongoing support and professional development, CELC strengthens its ability to impart essential communication skills that empower graduates to thrive in the diverse and evolving workplaces of the 21st century.

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Sylvia Sim is a lecturer at the Centre for English Language Communication in the National University of Singapore. She has over twenty years' experience designing and teaching language and communication courses in higher education. She is a strong advocate for innovative curriculum design that develops the professional competencies and adaptability undergraduates need to succeed in today's rapidly evolving workplaces. Her teaching integrates real-world applications and critical thinking to better prepare students for the complexities of modern professional environments.