

OCEAN BRIDGE DIRECT ACTION

Communicating Your Experiences

You've learned some new things, you've worked with a new organization, and you've met some new people. How will you tell your stories?

1) Connect the Dots

The first step is to connect the dots between your life, your work, your learning, and the world around you. This places your experiences in context, like plotting dots on a map. The better you understand where you fit in the bigger picture, the richer and more coherent your communication will be.

Think about your experience in relation to other work you've done. Think about it with regards to your personal interests, friendships, and goals. Consider other projects or organizations that are doing similar work – how does your project compare? Think about what skills and passions you brought with you, and what skills and passions you're taking to your future endeavors.

There are a few techniques to help you with this process. Look through your journals or photos to recall specific experiences or events. Build a mind-map to highlight themes – is your mind-map mostly personal impressions or feelings? Do you notice specific themes coming up more than others? Do you talk about connections to your past or to your future? These can all become part of your message.



2) Find Meaning

The most compelling stories we tell are ones we care about, ones we are personally connected to. Listeners notice when our eyes light up or when true interest shines through our words. Find what speaks to you and speak that to others. Here are a few questions you might ask as part of your introspective research.

- What stands out from your placement?
- What did you enjoy, what challenged you the most?
- Why and how did you get involved in the Ocean Bridge Direct Action program?
- Are your passions now the same as they were when you started?
- What have you learned about yourself/ocean health/aquatic & marine research/communities?
- How do you think you made a difference / how do you want to make a difference going forward?

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3) Identify Your Audience

Answer the simple question: Who are you speaking to? If they're an academic English professor, ask: To whom are you speaking? Your audience might be one person or many, formal or informal, face-to-face or virtual.

Put yourself in their shoes. Think about their expectations, their worldviews, their perspectives, and their context. Do they have time to sit down and read? Is it crucial to get the facts exactly right, or is it more important to keep the flow of the story going? What might make your message stand out to them?

Here are a few questions you might ask yourself:

- Is this a professional setting, like a job interview?
- Are you writing an article for publication?
- Are you telling your story to friends or family over dinner?
- Are you making small-talk at a work party or a conference?
- Are you reminiscing on social media?

4) Identify Your Medium

Now that you know **who** you're addressing, it's time to figure out **how**. The medium (or media) you choose can vary widely depending on your audience – think about the best way to reach them. In some cases, it's very obvious: if you're applying to a job, you're likely going to use writing in the form of a cover letter and resume.

Maybe a combination of media will help you get your message out there. For instance, if you are interviewed for an article or a broadcast (or maybe you've written one yourself!), posting to your social media means that a broad audience, probably of peers, can see your story. Posting to specialised social networks, like LinkedIn, will focus your audience to a more professional contact group.

If you're reaching out to someone new for the first time, an email is often a safe bet, but perhaps a follow-up phone call, coffee meeting or interview will give you a chance to speak about your experiences face-to-face.

Always think about the situation from your audience's point of view. How can they most easily access your message? What media will make them pay attention? Equally important is considering what media you are most comfortable with: know what kind of communicator you are and play to your strengths when you can.

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5) Frame Your Message

Remember all that talk about connecting the dots? This is where it comes into play. Framing is really about how you present your story, how you connect your audience to the material. Just like framing in art, framing in communication draws your audience to specific elements of your message. It highlights the meaning they should see. The context you create around your story tells readers or listeners how they should interpret it.

Is it a call to action? A request, or an order? A story of beauty, or inspiration, or sadness? Are you strictly sharing facts, or trying to stir emotions? Is it a story about you, or a story about them? Point of view can drastically change how a message is framed. Framing can also be positive or negative. Think about messages or articles you've encountered yourself and how they affected you.

It's important to remember that framing, while important, is the cherry on top and will only work if you already have a clear, concise message. If you're not sure what you're trying to say, go back and revisit the meaningful highlights that stand out to you from your experience, be they good or bad.

6) Craft Your Message

By this point, you know the core of your message, your audience and your frame, or your approach to communicating your story. Now it's time to put it all together! Remember what kind of communicator you are and play to your strengths.

Write. Draw or paint. Imagine that you're the one receiving the communication: what would you want to see? Lead by example. Will photos or video enhance your communication? If you're creating a cover letter or resume, try designing a basic header with a logo, font or colour that people will remember. For social media, *pictures or it never happened*. Does your audience speak emoji? A picture says a thousand words, they say.

Leave space for your audience to take in your story. If you're speaking, breathe. If you're writing, use paragraphs or tabs to create blank space. Think about the most important parts of your message and stick to them – it's much harder to say something concisely than to say it with a lot of words, but it's worth the time.



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7) Practice

Practice is often the last thing on the list and it's very easy to say, "I don't have time." However, a bit of polish can make all the difference, especially in professional situations. Five minutes are better than none!

For written communications, read it out loud. Your cat or dog won't care, we promise.

PROOFREAD, PLEASE. Help exists for things like spelling and grammar. Notice where you stumble or lose your place and edit to smooth out those areas – your audience will notice. If you will be speaking out loud or making a video, this is especially important! It can help to leave your work for a couple of hours, then come back to it.



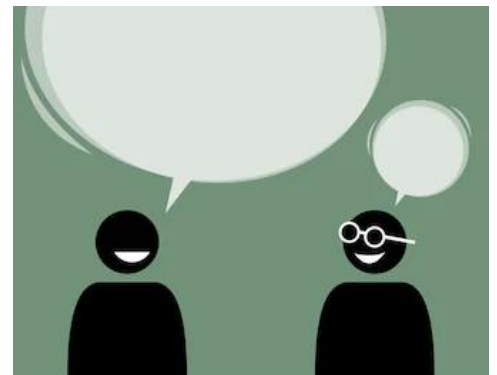
Interviews can be stressful, but practicing helps your brain to form recognition patterns that can keep you going on instinct even when your lack of conscious memory is making you sweat. Build confidence about items in your cover letter and resume by reading them out loud. Another suggestion is to use a competency matrix (an example is on the last page of this document) to map out answers to common interview questions that, no matter how many interviews you do, always seem to catch you off-guard.

Finally, we highly recommend writing an elevator pitch for yourself. Use it with friends, family, work, or when you're networking at an event. *What did you do last year?* You know exactly what you did and what it meant to you. You've clearly thought about it, practiced and polished, so go ahead and welcome follow-up questions.

8) Network

Finally, find excuses to tell your story. Get your name out there. This kind of self-marketing comes naturally to some, and can be very uncomfortable for others, but it's a skill you can work on in small steps.

Maybe make a point to post to LinkedIn or other social media once per month, or once per quarter (4 times/year). If anyone responds to your post, follow up with them. Think about contacts you've made and reach out to them – maybe frame it as a holiday greeting, or maybe a recent event reminded you of your time with them. The hardest part about networking is maintaining contacts that are important to you. It takes effort, but it's much easier to approach somebody with an ask (a reference, a question, or a meeting) if you've already built a relationship with them.



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You don't need to do this with everyone you meet. You'll know who matters to you. Review your contact list regularly to make sure the people on it are relevant, and actively keep in touch with those that matter.

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PERSONAL COMPETENCY MATRIX

Name: Date:		Lived Example	
		Positive	Negative
Competency	<i>Example: Managing conflict, diffusing high-stress situations</i>	<i>When I worked selling camping equipment, one customer was very unhappy with their tent. They wanted the manager, who wasn't available. I stayed calm and listened to their concerns, I could see where they were coming from. I told them I understood, and I offered to teach them how to properly set up the tent.</i>	<i>When I worked in health & safety mgmt., one client was very complex – the program we were responsible for implementing kept expanding and the client was unhappy with our service. I knew my company didn't have the resources for the new scope, so on my next client call I brought my director in for support and decision-making.</i>