

The CARE-ACC Framework

A teaching and evaluation model for communication competence — and how to assess your own learning environment

Most communication training teaches what to say. This framework is about developing the competence behind the saying. **CARE is the environment that makes genuine learning possible. ACC is the proof that it actually happened.** I use this across all of my courses — and you can use it the other way: to evaluate whether any learning environment you are in is actually set up to make you better, or just to measure you.

PHASE ONE

CARE

The four conditions required for genuine learning. Without these, instruction produces compliance, not competence. A student can pass every test and still be unable to perform under real conditions.

PHASE TWO

ACC

The three outputs that confirm competence has developed. Observable and specific. A student who can describe a skill and a student who owns it are not the same student.

CARE — THE FOUR CONDITIONS

Each element is shown from both sides: what it looks like when applied, what it feels like from the learner's position, and a self-check question to use right now.

C Clarity of Purpose — the learner knows not just what but why

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Purpose is not stated once — it is returned to across the whole learning sequence. The learner can connect what they are practising to a real professional situation before the instructor tells them to.

FROM THE LEARNER'S SIDE

You can answer "why does this matter outside this room?" before anyone asks you to. If you cannot, clarity of purpose has not been established. You can ask for it directly.

SELF-CHECK

After this session, can I connect what I practised to a real professional situation I will face? Yes or no. If no, something is missing — and it is worth naming.

A Authentic Context — practice close enough to the real thing to produce transfer

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Simulated audiences. Real briefs. Genuine stakes. The closer the practice context to the application context, the higher the transfer rate. If every exercise feels safe, the context is probably not authentic enough.

FROM THE LEARNER'S SIDE

The scenario feels real enough that you are slightly uncomfortable. That discomfort is not a problem — it is the authentic context doing its job. Comfort in practice often predicts difficulty in application.

SELF-CHECK

Would I be embarrassed to perform at this level in front of a real employer or client? If yes, that feeling is useful information — not a reason to stop, but a reason to practise harder.

R Responsive Feedback — tells you how to improve, not just how you did

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Feedback names exactly where the performance broke down and what a stronger version would look like. A grade tells you how you did. Responsive feedback tells you specifically what to change next time.

FROM THE LEARNER'S SIDE

After receiving feedback you know what to do differently — not just that something needs to be better. If feedback leaves you with a grade and no direction, it is evaluative, not responsive. Ask for more.

SELF-CHECK

Can I write down three specific things to change in my next attempt based on feedback I received? If I cannot, I need to ask a more specific question before moving on.

E Embodied Practice — performing the skill, not describing it

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Writing, presenting, negotiating, pitching — under conditions close enough to the real context that the performance reveals genuine capability rather than a rehearsed response. Production over description.

FROM THE LEARNER'S SIDE

You are actually doing the thing, not watching it done or discussing how it should be done. If most of your learning time is spent listening rather than producing, embodied practice is underweighted.

SELF-CHECK

What percentage of this learning experience involved me actually producing something? If under 40%, the ratio is probably wrong for a communication skill that must be performed under pressure.

ACC — THE THREE OUTPUTS THAT CONFIRM COMPETENCE

A Articulation — can you explain your reasoning without a script?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The learner explains what they understand and why they made the choices they made. Not reciting what they were taught. I call this the screenless defence: put the slides away and tell me what you actually think.

FROM THE LEARNER'S SIDE

You can explain what you did and why without looking at your notes. If you need the slides to explain the slide, the knowledge is memorised, not owned. These are not the same condition.

SELF-CHECK

Close everything. Explain what you just learned to someone who was not in the room. If you cannot do it in plain language, find what you are still fuzzy on before you move forward.

C Consistent Application — does the skill appear in new contexts?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The skill appears across contexts, not only in the specific scenario it was practised in. Transfer is the evidence of genuine competence. One strong performance in a familiar situation is not sufficient proof.

FROM THE LEARNER'S SIDE

You notice yourself applying the skill somewhere you were not told to apply it — in a meeting, an email, a real negotiation. That unprompted transfer is the signal the learning has actually landed.

SELF-CHECK

Where have I used this skill outside the practice context this week? If the answer is nowhere, I have practised it but not yet integrated it. Look for the next real opportunity deliberately.

C Critical Adjustment — can you recover when the skill is not working?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The learner identifies when the skill is not working and adjusts in real time. Competence is not the ability to perform well when everything goes to plan. It is the ability to recover when it does not.

FROM THE LEARNER'S SIDE

Something goes wrong and instead of freezing or repeating the same approach harder, you shift. You read the situation, make a decision, and try something different. That capacity to adjust is genuine ownership.

SELF-CHECK

Think of the last time this skill failed you. Did you adjust in the moment or after the fact? The goal is to catch the failure while it is still happening, not in the debrief.

The test is not whether a learner can describe the skill correctly. It is whether they can perform it under pressure, adjust when it breaks down, and explain their reasoning without looking at a screen.

DIAGNOSTIC — WHAT EACH ELEMENT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT IS MISSING

ELEMENT	PRESENT WHEN...	MISSING WHEN...
Clarity of Purpose	Learner connects the skill to a real professional context without prompting	Completes tasks correctly but cannot say why they matter
Authentic Context	Practice quality resembles real professional work	Succeeds in simulation, fails when conditions become real
Responsive Feedback	Next performance shows improvement on the specific flagged weakness	Same errors repeat across every assessment cycle
Embodied Practice	Learner performs, not describes	High test scores, poor performance under real conditions
Articulation	Clear explanation of reasoning without notes	Cannot explain choices when asked without slides
Consistent Application	Skill appears in novel, unseen contexts	Strong in practiced scenarios, weak in transfer situations
Critical Adjustment	Recovers effectively when the initial approach fails	Persists with a failing strategy rather than adapting