

Delivery

When you stand up in front of the class to give your speech, the performance should be practiced and polished. Every part of the presentation, from your posture to your clothing to your hand gestures and, ultimately, to the words that you speak, should be prepared carefully as parts of the complete presentation.

We communicate all of the time, even if we are not speaking or intentionally sending a message. Any message that is not encoded (put into words) is considered non (not) verbal. Facial expressions, clothing choices, posture, being late for an appointment, and the tone of your voice are all forms of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication is much less effective than verbal communication if the speaker wants to send a message with a specific meaning. Nonverbal communication is ambiguous or open to a wide variety of interpretations depending on what the receiver wishes to see or hear. A speaker's slumped posture can be interpreted as a sign of exhaustion, a bad habit, illness, or nerves. It wouldn't matter that the speaker threw out his back while tossing his child's tricycle out of the driveway early in the morning to get to class on time. The painful slumped posture is sending a message to the audience; each member of the audience is interpreting the posture differently. A raspy voice could indicate that the speaker is a heavy cigarette smoker, has a bad cold, has had drastic throat surgery, or simply has something from breakfast stuck in a vocal fold.

Nonverbal messages can change or even overwhelm the verbal message. Nonverbal messages come in through multiple channels including sight, sound, and the rest of the

senses. An audience member will see the speaker's posture, clothing, gestures, and eye contact as continuous and simultaneous nonverbal messages that may compliment or distract from the verbal message. In contrast, a verbal message is received via a single channel, one word at a time, leaving plenty of time between words and phrases for the audience to be distracted by the continuing nonverbals.

To control for ambiguity, the speaker must pay attention to all of the messages being sent nonverbally, especially those that might conflict with the verbal message. First of all, be aware of how cultural standards will influence your choice of subject and the reaction of your audience to the subject (see Audience Analysis). Second, be aware of "what" you appear to be stereotypically and whether that stereotype will give greater or less credibility to your topic (see Speaker). Third, pay very close attention to how you deliver your speech, and how you prepare your physical appearance and behavior on the day of the presentation because a simple check in the mirror can preserve your credibility as a speaker. For example, a young man giving a presentation on Mothers Against Drunk Driving (M.A.D.D.) a few years ago in a public speaking classroom wore, unwittingly, a souvenir T-Shirt from the Jack Daniels visitors' center in Lynchburg, Tennessee. Prominently

displayed on the front of the T-shirt was a line drawing of a liquor bottle and the label identifying the product. When asked why he wore that shirt during the post-speech classroom discussion, the student said it was the only clean shirt he had, and he hadn't looked in the mirror since he got up late and had to rush to get to class. The class agreed that they'd been distracted throughout the speech by the T-shirt, wanting to know if it were a joke or if it were going to be part of the presentation at some point. When he finished his rather good presentation and sat down, applause was very light and there was a buzz of conversation among the audience members who had been distracted by the conflicting verbal and nonverbal messages.

As you practice your presentation, be aware of those nonverbal elements you can control and those you can't. You can practice your facial expressions, your use of space as you move around the platform (kinesics), and the amount and type of hand gestures that compliment your subject. In fact, you need to include some expression if you have a "dead pan" expression; a lack of facial affect might be interpreted as lack of interest by the audience. You can't change your gender, your height, your ethnicity – these are all elements you take into consideration when doing audience analysis and topic selection. You can make choices about

your hair color and style, your clothing choices, jewelry and personal grooming. It just depends on which sorts of messages you want to send and whether the audience will agree.

Paralinguistics

The word “paralinguistics” (para=next to; near) refers to everything about the vocal speech act except the words themselves. These elements include the sound of the voice, pitch, volume, inflection, accent or dialect, pronunciation, enunciation, and articulation.

VOICE:

The sound of your voice is a critical element in the presentation. Everyone in the room should be able to hear you, so the amount of volume should be appropriate for the size of the audience. In most public speaking situations, the speaker will need to increase their usual volume from a conversational level. This doesn't mean that the speaker should shout or be excessively loud; it simply means that the speaker should increase the volume to reach the last row of occupied seats in the room. Volume should not be constant but change with the need to emphasize or de-emphasize

elements of the speech. A very important part of the speech can be delivered much louder – or much more softly – than the rest of the speech to give it emphasis.

PITCH and INFLECTION

These refer to the amount of up and down movement of the voice on the musical scale. In conversation, we use an habitual pitch – the pitch we’ve learned to use to fit our self-image and credibility over the years. Everyone also has an optimum pitch – a level at which we speak with the least effort and the most effect. Practice for optimum pitch.

While a speaker wants to avoid straining the voice by speaking at an inappropriately high or low pitch, the audience can be distracted by an unusually pitched voice.

Inflection refers to the changing pitch within a word or group of words that creates emphasis. It’s nearly impossible to speak in a complete monotone (mono=one), so you have been inflecting your speech without realizing how much. Questions go up in pitch with the inflection on the higher pitched final word of the phrase; declarative sentences often finish with a downward inflection or pitch to signal the end of the emphatic thought. Those portions of the speech that are transitions or background material might be less inflected;

those that are critical to audience understanding might be more heavily inflected to capture audience attention.

RATE

Is the speed with which you deliver the words and phrases in your presentation. Conversational rate can be fairly quick because your “audience” can ask for clarification plus your messages are much shorter. When giving a speech, your rate may be slower than in conversation in order to allow the members of the audience to absorb the information you are sharing and also to allow you to inflect carefully the sounds you make for optimal clarity. A hurried delivery packs a lot of information into a short period of time; the risk to the speaker is that audience will not decode the message quickly enough to keep up with the speaker. Rate should change during the speech to allow for emphasis. Pauses can set off important points or signal a change in the tone of the speech.

In summary, the vocal delivery of the speech can produce noise (interference) within the message if attention to volume, pitch, inflection, and rate are not deliberately considered by the speaker. In addition, the speaker should practice the speech out loud, choosing where to vary the rate, the volume, and the inflection to best punctuate and enhance the presentation.

ARTICULATION

This refers to the physical action of making vocal sounds. Articulators include your lips, teeth, tongue, jaws, palates, throat (pharynx), and even your lungs and bones. After a visit to the dentist, you will form your words differently than you would normally because your tongue and your lips are not responding as they normally would. Pronunciation is the skill of both articulating and inflecting a word correctly. Dictionaries have written guides to pronouncing vowel combinations, for example, with the word divided into syllables, odd spellings to suggest a pronunciation different from the correctly spelled word, and diacritical symbols to show you where to put the emphasis on the correct syllable. And enunciation is the way words are pronounced in context. We slur together many of our words in conversation such as “gimme” for “give me”. Public speaking will demand more care with enunciation simply because a clear enunciation will provide a clear message for the audience.

DIALECT and ACCENT

Refer to ways of pronouncing a language based on regional variations or one’s native language. In the American South, words are pronounced differently than in New England – both regions have specific dialects or

varieties of a native language. Native Arkansans might have a Southern dialect, but never an accent. An accent indicates that the speaker is pronouncing and inflecting a second language according to the standards of some native tongue. Someone from the Philippines or Angola might be able to speak perfect English, but their pronunciation will sound as though they are verbally translating from another language.

Language

Articulated sounds shaped into words are the building blocks of language. While there is no agreement about how many tens of thousands of words comprise the English language, it is estimated that there are about 200,000 words in use today and that an educated person has a vocabulary of approximately 20,000 words. With this many words, speakers have a wealth of vocabulary from which to build their speeches.

Words are nothing more than symbols. No word has a meaning unless it is given a meaning by the people using the language. Therefore, we can describe man as a symbol-using animal because we use words to name objects, thoughts and actions, then we agree on the meanings of those symbols. As

an example, a hamburger is nothing more than an arrangement of meat, vegetables, condiments, and bread in a recognizable shape. There was no pre-existing word for this particular, perhaps unique, type of hot-meat sandwich developed in the United States in the French, Spanish, German, Polish, Chinese, or Japanese languages, so an American traveling in foreign countries can ask for *le hamburger* (France), *der Hamburger* (Germany), *la Hamburguesa* (Spanish), *hamburger* (Poland), *hanbao* (China), and *hambaga* (Japan).

However, word meanings change and this leads to communication problems. A “monitor” to a contemporary high school student is part of the computer hard-ware set up, but to his or her grandmother it refers to a person given some authority to watch over other people. A mouse? That’s easy. To those same grandparents, a mouse is a rodent, but it has two meanings to the high school student.

Some common principles of good language use in public speech include using colorful language that paints word pictures for the audience, clarity by using words with precise meanings that are the least ambiguous and the most descriptive, and choosing the correct words by definition.

Colorful language evokes emotion and makes sensory connections. Words such as “silky” for “smooth,” and “scuffed” for “dirty,” and “piercing” for “loud” all evoke

specific visual or tactile or aural experiences. Clarity keeps the audience from guessing about the speaker's intention. Describing extreme winter weather as "cold" is ambiguous and non-descriptive; saying that the weather is "icy" evokes both the visual image of ice and the notion of extreme cold. Another aspect of clarity is to use words that give specific visual images. A "man" is only vaguely descriptive. A "tall, thin man with dropping shoulders and a tiny, bearded chin" is much more specific. The correct word is most often the word with a specific dictionary definition that fits the speaker's need. For example, an "idea" is a thought or concept but an "ideal" is a measure of perfection. Novice public speakers sometimes confuse these words which will then confuse audience members who will have to puzzle out the meaning from the context. Sadly, incorrect word use can reduce speaker credibility as well as confuse the audience.

One additional important "language 'C'" is concise. An effective speaker will try to use shorter sentences and the most direct phrasing to deliver information to the audience. Long, long sentences and long, long words in long, long paragraphs may look elegant on the printed page, but an audience can get lost in the tangle of grammar and verbiage by the time the speaker completes the thought.

Putting together the right words on paper is no guarantee that they will sound good when pronounced aloud. The difference between written and spoken language is more than just saying the words out loud. In speech, words blend together that appear separately on the page. Some words look fine when written on a page, but are very difficult to pronounce in sequence. “She sells seashells by the seashore” is a concept easy to grasp when reading the phrase, but try saying it out loud.

Presentation

Presentation is the act of performing the speech in front of an audience. Presentation begins from the moment you rise from your seat to walk to the podium (initial ethos) until the moment you sit down (terminal ethos). Everything about the presentation can be – and should be – practiced, changed, and improved.

In addition to working on your vocal qualities for delivery and choosing your clothing and other raiment to enhance your credibility as a “type” of person, you – the speaker – have a stage on which to perform and props to develop and use effectively. Public speech was called platform speech at one time in American history. The

speaker would stand on a raised area in front of or in the midst of a crowd so that their voice would carry above the crowd and their gestures would be visible to more people. The idea of the platform is still used in most classroom speaking where the student goes to the front of the room, turns to face the class, and delivers the speech from a space reserved just for them.

Some speakers use a podium, or stand, and do not move around the platform. These speakers will use eye contact, hand gestures, facial expressions, and body orientation to enhance the speech nonverbally. Speakers who have no podium can move around the platform, shifting their position to maximize eye contact and body orientation for greater emphasis. All of these nonverbal gestures should be practiced along with the actual words of the speech. Stand up, move around, practice the entire performance so that it feels natural to gesture and change your expressions during the course of the speech.

Whether using notes or a manuscript, the speaker should speak with confidence and look directly at members of the audience. Notes should be unobtrusive. Small notecards that can be moved up to eye level and enhance hand gestures keep the speaker fully engaged with the audience. Manuscripts should be fully memorized so that the

speaker does not have to break eye contact to find his or her place while turning pages. The speech should never be read from a manuscript with minimal eye contact – that’s not speaking, that’s reading out loud.

Presentation Aids

To provide concrete images or clear, simple illustrations that enhance the speech, a speaker might choose to prepare anything from a simple map or a chart to an elaborate electronic slide show. Presentation aids can be divided into three categories: no-tech, low-tech, and interactive.

No-tech visual aids would include posters, flip charts, and paper maps that are prepared ahead of time and mounted at the front of the room. These visual aids, designed to engage only the sense of sight must be simple to understand, visible from all parts of the room, and enhance the speech, but not be a substitute for any part of the presentation. In other words, the speaker does not prepare a chart, then stand in silence after asking the audience to read the chart. A presentation aid never substitutes for the presentation itself.

Low-tech presentation aids include transparencies or photographic slides that are more sophisticated than a home-

made paper chart or a printed map. These aids require equipment to render them visible and that equipment will need to be at the front of the room with the speaker or manipulated with a remote as part of the presentation. High-tech aids are those with interactive audio-visual capabilities such as animated computer generated graphics in programs such as PowerPoint. These, too, require additional equipment or remote control, requiring the speaker to manage another physical element during the presentation.

Keeping in mind that presentation aids are always a supplement to the speech and never a substitute, it is important to practice your speech with the aids to make sure that they do not interfere with the performance. Lo-tech posters can fall off of the chalk rail behind the speaker and flip charts can make a lot of noise. Higher tech aids can break down – power can fail, light bulbs can blow out, computers can refuse to load. The well-prepared speaker always has a presentation that can be delivered seamlessly without a presentation aid. If there is an equipment failure, the audience should never know that there has been a change in plans.