

How to Make Your Speaking Easier and More Effective

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Remember that the members of the audience are supposed to be the beneficiaries of your communication.

- **Don't make too many assumptions about your audience.** But you do have to make some.

- **Figure out the basics.**

Who are these people?

- demographics (age, ethnicity, gender mix, etc.).
- predispositions (hopes, fears, positives/negatives, level of interest).
- knowledge of/experience with subject/me.

In what kind of setting will they receive this information?

- large lecture hall or small seminar room or classroom.
- lighting and sound issues.
- time of day.

- **Take into account the "me, here, now."**

- Picture yourself as a member of the audience and ask "How does this message affect me, here, now?"
- Me, here, now translates into what you as a sender have to offer your audience/receivers—what they will be able to understand, accept, support, consider important—because it matters to them.

- **Establish cognitive / behavioral objectives for your audience:**

- What do I want my audience to *know*?
- What do I want my audience to *do*

OPENINGS, AND CLOSINGS

- **OPENINGS.** Stay away from the predictable (Good morning. . . . Today, I'm here to talk about . . .). Instead:

- **Begin with a provocative question, anecdote, or current event**—and how it relates to the content.

- **Ask the audience a question**

- **Set up a problem**—and promise that they'll have all the tools for a solution by the end of the class.

- **CLOSINGS.** Many speakers simply talk until the end of the time or beyond it—and say, "I see we're out of time." Instead:

- **Plan a rhythm for your speaking**—plan to end with content 5 minutes early, so you can summarize, raise questions.

- **Set aside a time for questions**—and structure that time.

PREPARATION

You probably can't cover everything you want to in a talk or speech.

- **Decide what is essential, what is important, and what is helpful (what would be nice).**

- Cover the first; try to cover the second; forget about the third.
- Release a little control over the material and rely on the textbook or a list of supplementary readings for the nonessentials.

- **Set objectives.**

- What do you want to have accomplished at the end of the speech?
- What do you want the audience to know at the end of the speech?

- **Plan a speech to cover less than the allotted period.**

- It takes some time to get going.
- Questions always take up more time than you expect.

- **Divide the speech/talk into discrete segments and follow the standard speech structure.**

- Divide it both in terms of time and in terms of material.
- Try for roughly equal blocks, each one on a topic.

- Unlike in a piece of writing, you should tell them what you'll say, say it, and tell them what you've said
- **Speak from notes or an outline, rather than a complete text.**
 - It's too tempting to simply read, rather than lecture, from a complete text.
 - Reading also creates a barrier between speaker and audience.
 - Writing up an entire speech is very time consuming.
 - A written speech often becomes a fossil that never gets updated.

DELIVERY

- **Be conversational; speak naturally; be yourself (or your best self).**
 - That self may be formal, "laid back," understated, or hyper. Use those traits; don't fight against them.
 - Talk about the material; don't lecture about it.
 - (Talking is easier if you don't read verbatim.)
- **Vary your pacing and voice.**
 - Gauge audience reaction, and
 - Repeat critical points immediately if you sense the necessity.
 - Use your voice to underline and italicize the important points.
 - Pause before new points.
 - Use transitional statements to move to the next idea.
- **Use gestures to emphasize points.**
 - Consider gestures to be a mirror of your voice.
 - Adjust your gestures to the size of the room.
- **Look at the audience.**
 - Try to cover all parts of the room by dividing it into four quadrants.
 - If direct eye contact makes you forget your place, try looking just over a student's head, or between two students (They won't see the difference).
- **Use language to create pictures.**
 - Use metaphors, analogies, and similes.
- **Observe the techniques of others.**
 - Try out in your own talks techniques you admire in others.
 - Like any skill, delivery is not innate, but must be learned.

CREDIBILITY & COMMITMENT

Although speaking isn't theater, we do know that audience find concepts, knowledge, skills, and ideas most accessible and credible from someone they consider . . . well, not dull.

• **Think about antecedent image**—perception is often stronger than reality.

• **Credibility is enhanced by:**

- Your own sense of comfort and confidence presenting material.
- Your enthusiasm and interest in teaching.
- Your research and own ideas.

• **Commitment is enhanced by:**

- Relating your own experience, ideas, and feelings.
- Taking the first person approach, not separating yourself from your subject.
- Relating your "passion" for your subject.
- **Delivery is tied to both commitment and credibility:**

An old UCLA study of effective presentations analyzed 3 elements (verbal, vocal, visual). Here's what it found was important in establishing credibility/believability:

- Verbal (words you say): 7%.
- Vocal (how you sound when you say them): 38%.
- Visual (how you look when you say them): 55%.

• **Your energy and intensity will move your audience—and help you (them) reach your objectives.**

BUILDING INTERACTION

• **Learning takes place best in an active, not a passive environment.**

- **Interaction is a continuous way to**
 - Assess the *me, here, now*.
 - Determine whether or not your content is understood.
 - Share the responsibility of learning more equitably and appropriately.
- **How to build interaction?**
 - Have questions prepared—begin with relatively easy, accessible ones.
 - Work to get everyone involved, even in large groups.
- ☞ Ask the audience to consider issues with the person sitting next to them/jot down ideas, questions, concerns.
- ☞ Discuss as a larger group.
- **Move yourself!**
 - Don't scurry back and forth, but don't get locked into one position.

HANDLING QUESTIONS

- **Explicitly request and encourage questions.**
 - The audience will see that you have a genuine interest in what they're thinking.
- **Be aware of how your behavior and comments can set the tone for questioning.**
 - A negative response (e.g., "We've already covered that") discourages further questions and may make the audience think you don't really want questions.
- **Make sure everyone hears the question.**
 - Repeat it if necessary.
 - But don't make a habit of simply repeating every question.
 - Ask the audience if they heard the question; then ask the person to repeat.
- **Clarify questions.**
 - Say, "Do you mean that . . .," or "I'm sorry, I don't understand the question," rather than "Your question isn't clear."
- **Answer questions as directly as possible.**

- Address your answer to the whole audience.
- Ask whether you have answered the question.

• **Be diplomatic when people raise tangential, overly complicated questions, or persistently ask questions just to be asking.**

- Ask them to stop by after the presentation or to contact you.
- If a someone is simply confused, say, "Let me go over this point a bit more slowly."

GETTING FEEDBACK

- **Get regular feedback.**
 - Ask the audience to spend the last five minutes of class writing down the most important thing they learned that day or one question they have as a result of the talk.
 - Or ask them to write down questions they still have.
- **Use eye contact as a tool for continuous feedback.**
 - If you notice people with questioning looks, stop what you're doing and ask if you need to clarify.
 - If you get no response, go ahead and clarify.

Tollefson/Peterson
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