

Chapter 10 Speaking Skills

Introduction

A cynic asked to define listening, might well say it is what people do while waiting for their turn to talk. In other words, most people are not good at listening and only take in a fraction of what is being said to them. As an instructor it is essential that you do everything you can to ensure that your students hear what you say and understand what you mean. There are 2 key factors that determine your effectiveness as a speaker. They are as follows:

- a. The preparation and planning you put into speaking (discussed in chapters 6 and 7).
- b. The way you deliver your speech.

Delivery

Delivery is important for all types of spoken communication. The way you present yourself and your subject material will largely determine their impact. For example; you wish to inform your student that his performance is not up to the required standard. Hopefully, you will do this in a manner that will encourage him/her to do better. However, an unfortunate choice of words or tone could easily have the reverse effect.

An occasion that involves standing in front of an audience in a formally arranged room and using visual aids to enforce your spoken message, can present the instructor with even more problems. Many people find the prospect of giving a presentation, whether it is a formal lecture or a briefing, frightening to say the least.

In chapters 6 and 7 we discussed lesson planning and in particular, the content of the lesson. It is also important that the delivery of the presentation should be planned. There are a number of considerations to think about:

- a. **Have a definite opening.** Use a strong opening to get the attention of your audience.
- b. **Use light and shade.** In other words, vary the tone of your presentation in order to maintain the audience's interest. Have serious and light-hearted passages, factual and ideas passages, encouraging, exciting passages and cautionary passages. Remember people can only concentrate for between 20 - 30 minutes at a time. With most people concentration slips after about 15 minutes and returns a few minutes later. Vary your delivery so that you work with these facts and not against them.
- c. **Have a definite ending.** Do not ramble on or peter out.
- d. **Rehearse.** Take the opportunity to practice developing themes and expanding ideas from your notes without waffling or drying up. Try presenting to yourself in a mirror and practising facial expressions and gestures to reinforce your message. If questions are likely to be raised, try to anticipate them by rehearsing suitable responses.

e. **Prepare yourself.** First impressions are particularly important (learning law of primacy). Make sure that you are smartly dressed. Take on an attitude of competence and confidence.

Some Do's and Dont's on Delivery

The following are some helpful tips to assist you with your presentation:

a. **Do be enthusiastic.** You can not expect your audience to become interested or excited if you are not enthusiastic. Enthusiasm is infectious. Without enthusiasm a presentation may be competent and polished but it will also be dull.

b. **Do be yourself.** Develop a style that suits you and your personality. What works for one person does not necessarily work for someone else. Pick up tips from other speakers but do not try to copy the style of someone whose personality is basically different from your own.

c. **Do speak naturally.** Avoid reading your notes, which will make you sound clumsy and usually result in losing the attention of your audience. Vary the pace, emphasis and tone of your voice as you would in a normal conversation.

d. **Do use gestures to emphasise points.** However, make sure that you vary your gestures. If you use the same few gestures, their effectiveness is reduced and they can become irritating to the audience.

e. **Do control mannerisms.** Mannerisms and fidgeting distract and annoy.

f. **Do monitor the audience's reactions.** Look frequently at individuals in the audience (eye contact) to involve them and be receptive to signals from them. Watch for signs of confusion, puzzlement, lack of interest, boredom or distraction, and respond to them. Ask questions not only will this help keep people interested, it will also enable you to establish whether or not your message has been understood.

g. **Do be careful with humour.** Avoid making off the cuff jokes. Only a very few people can tell jokes well, especially with the added stress of performing in front of an audience.

h. **Sell, don't tell.** Your aim will normally be to get people to listen, to understand and act upon what you have to say. If you patronise or take a dictatorial approach, you will annoy the very people you are trying to win over.

i. **Do analyse your performance.** When your presentation is over, go through it once more, noting any areas for improvement.