



IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

Basic English
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Lecture No. 34
Do You Have Something to Say?

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DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?



- We speak to give or get information, answer, news, knowledge, joy, to hurt, heal, entertain, encourage, discourage, persuade, convince, dissuade...



Good afternoon. Today we are going to talk about creating content in our presentations in whatever we say, to whomsoever we say. Actually, a huge question in training and learning to speak in formal situations is why do we speak; we speak to say something. So, the huge question is, a big question is do you have something to say. Ordinarily, we speak to give or get information, how to answer a question or to share some news or knowledge or simply out of joy or sometimes when we are angry; we speak to hurt others, we should not.

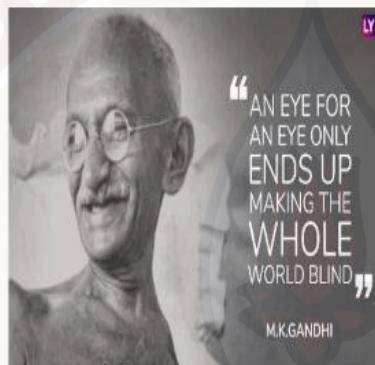
We also speak to heal and comfort others; we should. We often speak to entertain others that is how we sing, that is how we tell jokes, that is how we tell interesting stories. Sometimes we speak to encourage our friends and family; sometimes we also discourage people, particularly when they are up to bad things. We say, 'Don't smoke, it can cause cancer'. Sometimes we persuade people to invest their time, their energy in the right things, we tell them, please sit down, make use of your time, do not waste all of it in mindless entertainment.

Sometimes you try to convince people to buy this brand of soap it is very skin-friendly, and it cleans your clothes like nothing else. So, we are trying to convince the customer that this soap might be the best she can buy for this kind of money. Or sometimes you dissuade them do not buy they are unnecessary, why do you need to buy another shirt you already have too many. So, we speak with a purpose, and these purposes are more than can be counted many more than we can count unlimited, we speak for a variety of reasons.

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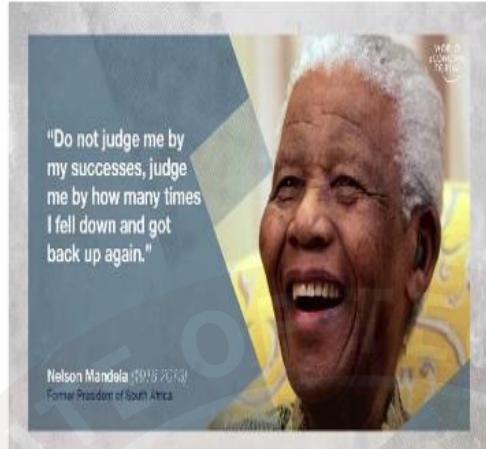
- All the great speakers whom we know because of what they had to say.



But you know we must understand why we speak, we must be clear about our purpose. All the great speakers that you know off in the entire world that you have read about that you have heard are remembered. We remember these great speakers not for how they spoke, maybe also for their pronunciation maybe also for their grammar and vocabulary, but much more importantly for what they had to say, the contents that are what makes their utterances immortal.

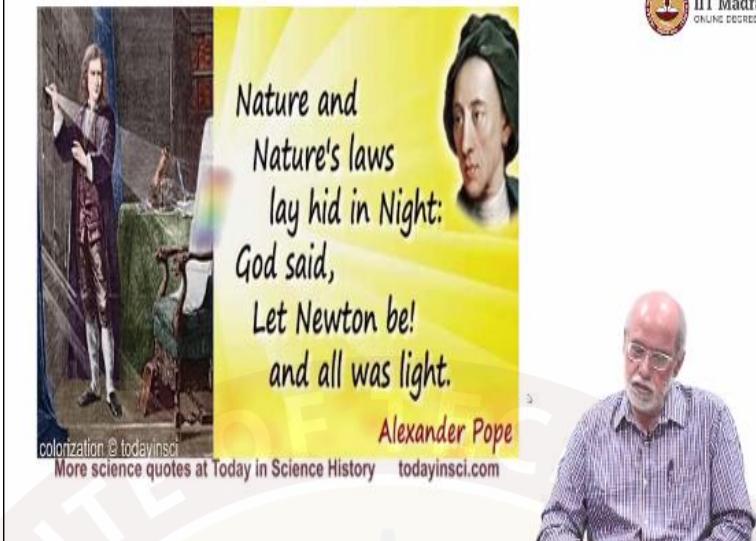
I, for example, do not know when Gandhi said: "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind". I do not even know whether Gandhiji said it in Gujarati, in Hindustani or in English or in French or in Latin or in Sanskrit all the languages that he knew I do not know which of these languages he used, but I have heard this one quote from my early school days, early childhood, early boyhood. Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind". Contents are important, more important than pronunciation, than grammar, than vocabulary, than any other part of the language.

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All the great speakers, any continent, anytime, any period, anywhere see, for example, I am sure you have heard of somebody called Nelson Mandela, perhaps the greatest leader to have been born in the world after Mahatma Gandhi and he took Mahatma Gandhi for his guru, and that is how following Mahatma Gandhi, he won democracy and equality for his people in his country of South Africa. Many of his quotes, go to Google site, and it is a quote from Nelson Mandela, and you will see, "Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again" that is where your greatness lies. You do not allow temporary failures to put you down. Once again did Nelson Mandela say these sentence in his native African language or in English we do not know, maybe Google can tell us, maybe Wikipedia can tell us, but we know this quote and no matter how many times we fall, we should get up and try again. Contents are important.

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This is any era, any period just as I said any country India or Africa modern twentieth-century or eighteenth century. This is Alexander Pope, an eighteenth-century poet talking about a scientist Isaac Newton, a seventeenth, eighteenth-century scientist, but he said something so wonderful as nobody has been able to forget or has said better regarding Newton. Pope, the poet, said, "Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night. God said let Newton be, and all was light".

We do not know whether Newton lived in London or in Edinburg, we do not know how tall or short, fat or thin he was, but we remember the great words that he said. You are remembered for great things, you say.

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- If you have to give a two-minute talk on "**A Civic Problem in Your Area**", what can you say? You can say some of the following:

- Where?
- What ?
- How much? Quantification.
- Its effects



How can you say those things, where would you get them? So, prepare if you have time, if you do not have time, if you have to speak impromptu, extempore, no problem, trust your wait and go ahead. As they say in English, a heart within and God above, you can go ahead, but if you have time then no matter how much you know about your topic check again, prepare again. Imagine, for instance, you know you have to make a presentation you have to say something, you have to give a talk a 2-minute talk, you have only 2 minutes, and you have to give a talk in a formal situation on the topic of a civic problem in your area.

Now, what you can say in 2 minutes? You can say even in 2 minutes you can say something sensible. Remember a lot of great things are done in a limited time. Nobel Prize acceptance is given in under one minute. So are some other great awards, later Nobel Laureates are invited to give a 40-minute speech. But while accepting it publically, they get under a minute to say they are happy to accept it within that minute, they can say anything, and some of them have said great things in those minutes.

So, it is not that time available is more or time available is less; it is only a question of preparing, giving a thought to what you are going to say. So, for instance, on a topic like a two-minute talk on a civic problem in your area, what can you say. Well, you can say where you can talk about the place, you can say what is the problem, you can say how much, how big is the problem and why how does it affect you can also talk about that. About any of these things, you can talk within a limited time or at length.

Suppose you have 10 minutes, then you could say flooding is a huge problem in my village. If you have time you can go beyond you can say, flooding is a huge problem in my village in

Bihar near Indo-Nepal border. Floods come every year in the month of August here and cause untold misery to people there. If you do not have time, you just say flood is an annual problem in Bihar.

What flood everyone, but if you have time you can explain it during times of flood, rivers in spate, overflow their embankments. They enter homes, farms, roads, railways; they drown people, boats, houses you can go on explaining. So, depending upon the time it is like budgeting, if you have only a limited amount of money, you buy only a few things though you may be at a mall with the world before you if you have a lot of money, a lot of time then you can say a lot of things, you can buy a lot of things.

But the questions must be asked; you must ask yourself how much can I say in the given time and prepare accordingly, check accordingly. So, about its effects you can say, flood ruins agriculture affects traffic, causes diseases, lots of cattle, and human beings die for want of food and water and floods are followed by epidemics like typhoid, cholera, etcetera, etcetera—all those dreadful diseases and problems.

But if you do not have time, then you can only say thousands of people die in the wake of floods. But this kind of decisions will come to you only when you ask yourself this question, what am I going to say, how much time I have got and what I can say in the available time?

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- In all of the points above, lots can be said. But we must not exceed time. How much can be said in two minutes? You must mention at least the following:



- name of the problem
- name of the place
- extent of the problem, quantity
- its harmful impact



In all the points above, just as I said, lots can be said. But you must not exceed time. Remember, whatever else may be, time is an infinite supply. No matter how strong you are, you cannot extend a day into 25 hours; you cannot extend a year into 366 days except perhaps in the leap year, you can add another day there, otherwise, it is all finite. Time is one commodity which is not an endless supply, and therefore you must respect, you must be within the time given to you. So, depending upon how much time you have you should decide what you would say about the problem, about the place, about quantification of the problem and about the impact that the problem creates upon the place, the people etcetera, etcetera.

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Suppose you mention “Water logged road” in your area.



Problem: Water logged road

- **Place:** On 3rd Cross Road, Nehru Nagar
- **Extent:** Knee-deep water even after an hour long rain
- **Data:** Support it with a photograph in a slide
- **Impact:** Spreads disease, smell, and stops free flow of traffic



Suppose you are talking about waterlogged road. First, find out this morning while preparing for this session, I had written waterlogging on the road, but when I checked the dictionary, I found that, no, it is in the passive voice. We are talking about road, and they are waterlogged road. So, not that waterlogging is incorrect, but waterlogged is better. So, if you have the attitude to check, you learn all the time. And you are only as rich, as strong, as you are willing to learn, as the riches you have in terms of knowledge. So, invest in learning, in researching.

Similarly, if you have to give a 2-minute talk on the waterlogged road, then what is the problem? The problem has a place. What is the problem? There is knee-deep water even after the slightest rain. What problems do they create? They create problems for traffic, motor vehicles, pedestrian, young and old, cattle. Nothing can move freely; we do not know what is

underwater; we might catch all kinds of problems and infections. Vehicles might collide against one another; they may burn more petrol and move less few kilometres.

So, there comes data quantification of the problem; you can quantify the problem in many ways. How many people met with an accident? How much longer did the vehicles take to cross? How many people got infectious skin diseases because of waterlogging or because they breed mosquitoes? How many people got a viral fever or other kinds of health hazards? So, depending upon the time you can collect and quantify data, you can talk about its spread, its impact, the diseases, the time taken by traffic, the foul smell and lot of other things that problems of this kind create and all this can be quantified.

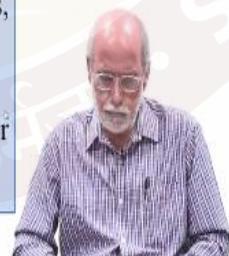
There is no human, no problem faced by human beings that cannot be quantified and your presentation becomes better when you talk through quantification when you have data in support of your claims. It is a lot noisy does not make much sense or as much sense as saying that even at 5 in the morning the locality has 54 decibels of noise coming from the temple next to my house.

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- If you do not have enough to say, you may find out.

- Consult search engines on the Net" Google, Wikipedia, other sites;
- Consult local sources, Libraries, Archives, etc.
- Consult local folk-lores, songs, etc
- Consult elders, knowledgeable local senior people, etc.



So, quantify your data, how can you do that? Today, more than ever before, fortunately, we have lots of sources of data available to us. For one thing, anyone, almost anyone who has a mobile phone handset, the smartphone has access to the net. You can check with Google, you can check with Wikipedia, and there are other sites I perhaps, I do not know of as many of you might. The problem is many of us feel reluctant.

And we say, 'oh come on I already know enough'. Do I need to check about the problem outside my house of waterlogging, I know about it, of course you know about it, of course, you do you have photographs, but if you take a new photograph you will discover something new, if you look at the same data source again you will find some more data, you will find a different way of presenting.

How many vehicles collided? How much more petrol or diesel or fuel was burned? How many vehicles got stuck? How many pedestrians fell down and slip? How many old people suffered, how many children came near drowning, how many policemen suffered directing traffic standing in knee-deep water? So, umpteen ways in which you can quantify data if you have a mind too.

So, look up these well-known public sites and your own if there is any. Then you know, in each place, you have local data sources. You can go to the local library. In Chennai, for instance, where I live, we have a huge archive of data about local problems in places like Connemara Library, Madras University Library, Adyar Theosophical Society library; Anna Centenary Library. There are all kinds of library and archives then university libraries like Anna University Library, IIT Madras Library.

There are those places, so libraries, archives and many of them luckily are digitized now. You can look up the libraries of some of the great universities in the world right through your mobile phone sitting in the comfort and privacy of your own chair, of your own study, of your own office or sometimes when it is not given in any public place then there are folklores. We have heard that Chennai had no water problem until about 1960 because all the rivers in the city were freshwater flowing rivers, the Cooum, the Adyar, but I have not seen them.

So, what I can do I can talk to older residents, I can look at older literature, and I find a description of a boat that came from Vizag bringing rice, vegetable, fruits, banana, banana leaves from across Andhra to Chennai. So, I can use that. Then there are folk songs, folk stories, folklores. So, you can consult elders; you can look up collections of folklores, you can go to archives, you can look at public sites. There are many ways, many more than I can tell you, of finding out and collecting data about the problem that you were talking about.

And you will notice that the more you know, I am not advising, I am not suggesting, you should tell everything you know not necessary. You must always know as much as you can and then decide how much of what you know can be said in the given time.

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- Whatever you say must be “**interesting**” to the listener. What makes anything interesting to the listener:

- **Good News**
- **Good Word**
- **Entertainment**



Say things that are interesting, which are interesting to you and also to the listener, say them in a manner. Now, what can be interesting, if you look at the way, if you look at the audience reaction to a spoken discourse you might notice that people get interested whenever they get good news. You tell them you have got a job; you tell them you have got admission to the university you were trying for, you have got the train reservation ticket. You have got x or y you got a prize; you won a lottery.

There can be a variety of things, your favourite team has won the cup, the match, good news always interests people no matter how you give them, and it can be given in a variety of ways like surprise way of giving. Tell me what I have to tell you, and then they guess and guess and you tell them you got the job you wanted or good word. There is no human being who does not like a good word. They have done some work, and you tell them well done. It does not take a long time, it just takes a smile, and for you to tell them well done, you have done well, marvellous, God bless you.

If you have time, say more say, well I am proud of you for the way you have done. But if you do not have so much time, you can simply say congratulations, great. You can compliment them the way they are dressed. Wow, so well dressed, this dress looks still better on you. Or the way they have done their hair, the way they are wearing their shoes, the way they spoke,

the way they travel. If you are determined to find good things in others, you will find good things in others, and you should let others know that you notice these good things in them.

Then, that creates in the listener a favourable, a positive mindset whatever you will be heard. I am not suggesting you should do get into false flattery. No way, never ever. Never say things that are false, never say things that are untrue, but you do not have to because in God world there is no human being who does not have something wonderful, something good, the way they do, the way they talk, the way they move, the way we listen.

The way they work. Or good things can also be entertaining like a joke you say, like the songs you sing, like stories you tell, like the gossip you carry. Try and avoid getting into harmful, violent, slanderous gossip. But some good joke to a friend at the cost of a friend it is not such a bad thing, it goes. One must also learn to laugh at oneself if that entertains your audience, but do not make yourself ridiculous.

The truth about a joke is something like salt in your food, you give too much, and it is ruined. You have nothing of it; it is ruined you must have that common sense, you must develop it. But you can make your presentation interesting by getting into these ways.

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While talking about a civic problem, you can also present data in a different manner as well. You can say the slippery road, or the submerged stretch of the road has caused so many vehicles to collide, to turn upside down, or so many people, including women, old men & women and children to slip and fall down.



So, while talking about a civic problem you can make it interesting, how it hurts the listeners, how it cost the listener and you can find data, you can present pictures, you can bring photographs, you can bring stories and make it interesting to them.

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You can also back it up with a photograph.



You see, a photograph is equal to 1000 words. If I started telling you to close your eyes and I am telling you that opposite my house there is a road, the road has a divider and it is the main thoroughfare in the city. Lots of two-wheelers, four-wheeler, three-wheeler use this road, and in times of rain there is knee-deep water, and people have lots of difficulties driving on this road. They have to switch their headlights on; some people keep helmets, some go without them.

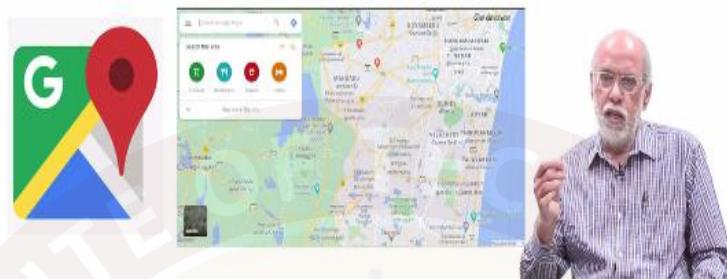
It will take a lot of time to hear and understand, but if I show a photograph, open your eyes now and see the photograph. It not only makes it interesting, it takes little time, and everything is conveyed. But think of an appropriate photograph. Work, invest some time in preparing. All I am trying to tell you is that a talk, a presentation, a formal speech, even if you speak to a friend is better if it is done with some preparation. It is not as good if it is done without preparation.

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Whatever you say must be “**relevant**” to the listener.
There is no point talking about “**flying to fish**”, or
“**swimming to bird**”, etc.

- It helps to research or re-check your facts.

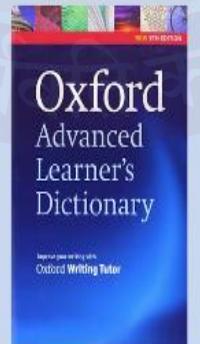
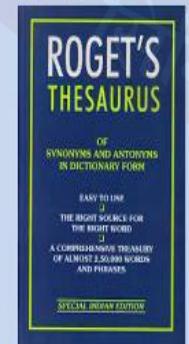
- See Google map of your area.



Similarly, when you show your place, you can say my village is always flooded in Bihar, and you can show Google map. Chennai residents every year have awful roads during monsoon. Now, where is Chennai? I am a resident of Nehru Nagar. Nehru Nagar's roads become waterlogged during rains. I can show Nehru Nagar, the map on my right immediately gives you the location. Even for those who have not been to Chennai, it tells where Nehru Nagar is located. I do not have to waste or use precious time in giving you the location of this place that look Nehru Nagar is located about 3 kilometres from IIT Madras campus, about 2 kilometres inside from the beach. I do not have to. The map says that very clearly.

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- See Dictionary, Roget's Thesaurus for the appropriate word for “water-logging”.



Similarly, for words and language that dictionaries, I am sure everyone has seen a dictionary. Similarly, there is a thesaurus. Thesaurus gives you a variety of words for the same meaning

do you want to say fine or nice or good or excellent or decent or marvellous. They all have shared meaning. But fine means something which nice does not, which marvellous does not, which excellent does not.

Aroma means something which fragrance does not; a stench means something which stink does not. Thesaurus gives you answers to these questions. It helps you choose between a stink and a stench, between aroma and flavour, between good and delicious, between excellent and marvellous. So, you should learn to use a thesaurus, a dictionary. You can go to Google, and there is any number of dictionaries available in the market today. Go for something called advanced learners addition; each publisher has that.

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- Check the kinds of harmful effects possible from such spots.
- Check how engineers measure quantity of water in such places, and decide how you will convey this information.



Similarly, you know check using those sites. The same data are presented differently by different kinds of speakers. If you are an engineer, present it like an engineer. If you are a medical doctor, present it like a medical doctor. If you are a social worker, present it like a social worker because there can be more than one angle on anything.

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- There are sites that tell you about driving through flooded roads, escaping harmful effects of water-logged stretches of roads, etc.
- If you have limited time for presentation, you should check your facts and how much to say much more carefully.



There are sites that tell you about these things; you can go ahead and check.

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Once you have done all this checking with sources of local and non-local knowledge, you may have enough data to speak on the given subject. Then you should preferably by rehearsing decide what and how much of what you are going to say.



Once you have done all these checkings with the sources, then you can take a final look, you can rehearse and see how much time I have, how much time I take and as the old proverbs go, cut your coat according to the cloth.

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ACTIVITY

1. Gather information about a civic problem, i.e. a man-made problem, in your area.
2. Talk about it to a member of your family or a friend, with a timer in your hand. You should not exceed time even by a second.
3. Record yourself and see if you can collect, and, using some more sources of information on the same subject, talk again. Compare the two recordings to see what interests you and your readers/ listeners more.
4. Do a similar thing with another listener once again!



Do the activity and check with the model answers given. Thank you very much. Have a good evening.