

CHAPTER 2

Effective Speaking: Verbal or Oral Communication

Introduction

Among the various forms of communication, oral communication is considered to be the earliest and common medium of communication. In oral communication, speech is a widely adopted tool of communication. The sender, the medium, the receiver and the message are the four basic factors associated with communication. Socrates, and Demosthenes were great and renowned speakers. The world is full of speeches. Everyday, in educational institutions, the students and the teachers come into contact; they converse and communicate. In offices, the superiors talk to the subordinates, the subordinates to superiors and among themselves. In productive and service organisations, the customers carry on conversation with the suppliers, lawyers, doctors, auditors, consultants with their clients, so on and so forth.

Whether it is business communication or otherwise, oral communication should be clear and effective to achieve the objects of communication. Speech is an art; for this, there are no fixed rules which can be uniformly followed always and in all circumstances. There are a number of factors which influence effective oral communication. Factors like conversation style of the speaker, language, medium, the temperament of the receiver and speaker, size of audience, importance of message, fear of superiors etc., are important. For instance, an important person, appearing on the TV, words if wrongly selected and used, may damage his image.

Human relations are the fundamental elements of public relations. It is with speech, one gets along well with the public, both internal and external. The public are of three categories: (a) there are those who know you and like you; (b) there are those who know you and do not like you; (c) there are those who neither know you nor care for.

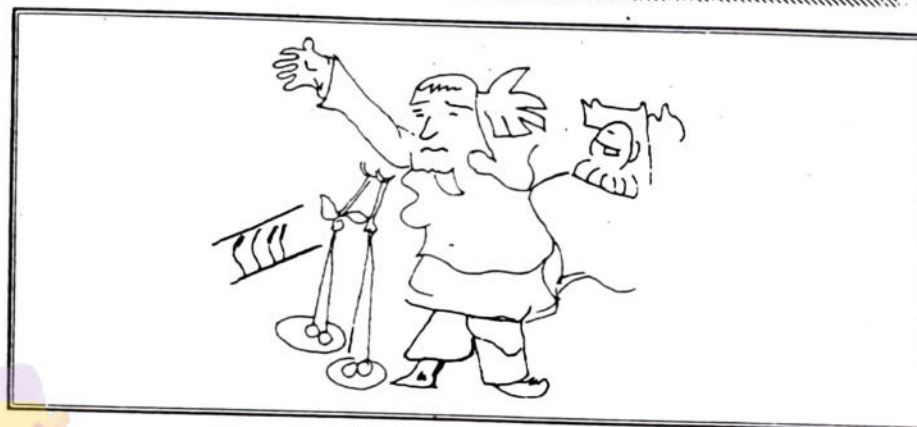


Fig. 2.1 Public Speaking

The technique involved in the process of communication is through speech to do business with all types of people. The essential basis of all cross-sections is the communication process. It is the transfer of information from one to another. The message is transmitted by spoken or written words or by image or a combination of these or other media, such as music, colour, mimicry, design, odour, and sense of touch.

In competitive and dynamic market economy, there are information gaps which cannot be filled up by the interaction of supply and demand through prices and costs. This is where communication activity steps in.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE ORAL COMMUNICATION

The capacity to communicate effectively and clearly is an important skill. The speakers have to make the message clear and easily understandable, both at work and outside. In any profession, it is not possible to get through without communication. Communication is a valuable asset for all the people in modern days of a busy world, particularly to lawyers, teachers, auditors, consultants, administrators, politicians, business executives, parents and children. Thus, speech or talk is basic and indispensable in any group facilities in a civilised society. Speech is for others to understand. The confusion and misunderstanding in conversation are due to ineffective, faulty and vague speech.

There are no standard rules to be followed in making oral communication effective once and for all times to come. However, effective oral communication calls for certain principles to be followed. Whatever the circumstances, the following are the essential ingredients of good oral communication.

(1) **Brevity:** A message to be delivered should be brief. It should neither be too short nor too long. In real life quite often audience comments about a speech, as too long or too short. Time factor is important because not only the speaker's time is wasted but also that of the audience. So,

a message must be brief. Lengthy sentences confuse and may lead to misunderstanding. It should be a short one. One can achieve brevity by taking pains and framing short sentences rather than lengthy and complex sentences. We do come across people who start speech with short sentences. Conversation in short sentences gives the listener time and opportunity to follow what the speaker endeavours to put across. Using precise words, simple and familiar words, and avoiding superfluous words are important factors in effective communication.

(2) **Clarity:** The essential of good oral communication is clarity. Clarity of message is the first and foremost important among principles. The three most important qualities of oral communication style are: first, clarity, then clarity and last clarity. Before you start talking, think and rethink ideas till they are clear. Then only can one put ideas in conversation in a clear-cut terms. Clarity can be achieved with simple words, short sentences and common words. Daniel Defoe, the author of Robinson Crusoe, said that clarity is a matter of style in which a man speaking to five hundred people of all common and various capacities, idiots and lunatics excepted, should be understood by them all.

(3) **Choosing Precise Words:** Precision is the most important principle in effective communication. Using the precise words means speaking in exact detail using the right words at right place to the context alone will convey the meaning intended by the speaker. In oral communication, the precise words which are often the concrete words express the real and correct meaning. As far as possible, using vague words should be avoided. But in practice, it is difficult to replace one word with another. No two words give exactly the same meaning. It is better to have full knowledge of synonyms and antonyms of words.

(4) **Cliche:** Cliche means a phrase which is used often, and has no meaning. The cliches are now stale in oral communication. An effective good communicator avoids cliches. A speaker may use them unconsciously when he is involved in a serious mood of conversation. Examples of cliches are 'I mean', 'eh, really- 'quite fine', 'yes' etc.

A cliché is generally used to express indirectly a simple idea, when it suddenly strikes the speaker. The strongest objection to its use is that, as it is too frequently used and in the wrong context, that it is hackneyed. They are used like catch phrases, faulty in English, because it irritates the listeners, particularly in public speech. Some of the cliches are:

- The supreme sacrifice.
- The order of the day.
- Conspicuous by his absence.
- Slowly but steadily.
- Cruel to be kind.

(5) **Sequences:** Presentation of matter in a logical sequence is yet another important principle of effective communication. The speaker should not jump points or change the sequence. Consistency, continuity, and logical development of the subject matter should be there. The manner in which a speaker says something is important than the something itself that matters in communication

(6) **Avoid Jargon:** In our conversation, we must be conscious to avoid jargon. Jargon is a field, applicable or relating to a particular section of profession. It means language or terminology relating to law, commerce, sports, defence etc. It may be called as legal jargon, military jargon, commercial jargon etc. Only people who are well-versed in a particular subject can understand. But in general conversation, the words used must be clear to other people as well.

(7) **Avoid Verbosity:** To convey meaning is more important than using superfluous words. Verbosity in oral communication is a great danger. Using more words does not assure greater clarity. Using more words will take more time and the time of the audience is wasted. The listener may tire and may misunderstand the meaning.

(8) **Seven C's of Communication:** Francis J. Betgen advocates that there are seven C's to remember in spoken communication. They are:

1. Candid
2. Clear
3. Complete
4. Concise
5. Concrete
6. Correct
7. Courteous.

(9) **Prepositions:** Use of unnecessary prepositions should be avoided. For instance, all employees must follow the safety regulations in regard to work. Here the word 'about' can be used in place of "in regard to." Some other examples are: in connection with, with reference to, in relation to, with regard to.

(10) **Adjectives and Adverbs:** Adjectives and adverbs should be used where necessary. They emphasise the meaning with the degree of importance, for instance, the problem is under active consideration; a positive decision will be taken; definite results; comparatively, the results are poor.

✓ SPEECH PREPARATION — USEFUL HINTS¹ ✓

Advance preparation and careful planning will prove very helpful in making effective speeches. A check list of the following steps should be kept in view:

(1) **Select a Topic:** Selection of a subject matter for a speech is the first and the most important task on the part of the speaker. The topic should be specific in content and in scope.

(2) **Narrow Down the Scope:** For example, environmental pollution is too general, bus noise pollution or air pollution are specific themes. Similarly, in a speech like communication skills, it should be specified as speaking skills, writing skills or listening skills. However, in some cases, narrowing the focus may not be practical.

(3) **State the Object:** It may be one or the combination of two or more like to inform, to persuade or influence and to entertain.

(4) **Prepare an Outline:** Make a rough blue print like introduction, body copy, major thrust and conclusion.

(5) **Locate Material and Data:** Collect information and organise it from books, documents, speeches, magazines, reports etc.

(6) **Rough Draft:** Attempt the rough draft and refine it. It includes introduction, quotation, anecdotes, body, examples, references and conclusions.

(7) **Aids:** Consider and procure visual, audio-visual aids like charts, overhead projector, T.V. etc.

(8) **Rehearse:** Rehearsal and practice should be recognised as advantageous for improvement in speech delivery. Rehearsal gives self-confidence. It is desirable to rehearse in front of try-out group. Invite good points or bad points of the speech, indicating verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the speaker. This will help to infuse confidence. Do retouching of draft where necessary.

A speaker steadily gains confidence, is able to anticipate question from the listeners and answer the queries, use transitional phrases to establish relationship between ideas and concepts.

VOCAL CONTROL PRONUNCIATION AND PHYSICAL BEHAVIOUR²

The use and co-ordination of the above attributes enhance the effectiveness of a speaker's message.

1. **Vocal Control:** (a) **Pitch:** It is a listener's interpretation of frequency of sound. The high pitch is, in many cases, the result of emotional and physical tension. Through practice and experience, it is possible to adjust the pitch and use different levels and give information to enhance the effect. Two irritating features of the quality of voice must be avoided like:

- (i) Muffled effect.
- (ii) Breathlessness or whispering effect.

(b) **Rate:** An average speaker can deliver 120-150 words per minute. About 90-120 words per minute is considered ideal. Uniformity in rate is considered boring. Avoid continuous word delivery. Generally, All-India Radio news reading pattern keeps high range but, in practice, it is not suited to speech-making. Reading at a speed of 120-150 words per minute is acceptable for a short or brief speech or announcement.

(c) **Volume:** It refers to loudness or softness of a speaker's voice. The simple rule is to accent syllables and important phrases which you think should orally stand out. The volume should match the contents of the various parts of the speech.

2. **Pronunciation:** Inaccurate and faulty pronunciation reduce the credibility of communication. There are great variations of pronunciation based on national and regional characteristics. But with practice and effort, pronunciation can be improved and stabilised.

3. **Physical Behaviour:** There are four levels of physical activities that a speaker can utilise to improve the transmission of his message:

- (a) **Eye Contact:** This helps to generate a feeling of directness and every member in the audience feels the speaker is talking to him.
- (b) **Facial Expressions:** This is the second level of physical reinforcement. The speaker shows his interest, enthusiasm and belief in his ideas, reflecting a sincere effort to share them with his listeners.
- (c) **Movement:** Taking a few steps during speech delivery suggest transition, enhances emphasis and helps to overcome nervousness. Adopt a posture in which you feel comfortable but avoid clumsy movements.
- (d) **Gestures:** The verbal expressions should be reinforced with graceful movements of head, shoulders, arms or hands. The effect of your ideas is enhanced with gestures and co-ordination.

TECHNIQUES OF EFFECTIVE SPEECH

There are several ways in which speech may be considered 'good' or 'bad' by different people and this is usually because it may be used for many different purposes. These various angles on speech will be discussed in this chapter and we shall deal later with the ways in which each may be improved.

First, why do we speak at all? In fact, is speaking really necessary? We are sure, we all agree that it is. We realize this very forcibly when we go to a country where we do not speak the language. Of course, if one is good at mime, one can get along to a certain extent with gestures. This is fun on a holiday and when there is plenty of time; but we all know that it does not get one far in the end. We may say then that the first and foremost use of speech is to convey our ideas to other people. It is when our speech does not do this, immediately and clearly that it may truly be said to be "bad."

Certain techniques should be followed to be a successful communicator. He must build into his speech an element of goodwill to which the listener will react favourably. A speech creates goodwill provided a message produces a favourable reaction among the listeners. A positive favourable reaction from the listeners can be achieved by promoting a friendly, kind attitude, cheerful towards listeners. Listeners are many and human, of all common and various capacities. They should be treated as such and the message is capable of being understood by them all. A favourable effect of a message is important. One principle is being courteous, which is fundamental in all oral communication and good relations.

However, the following are the important techniques in oral communication to be successful:

(1) **Audibility of Voice:** Different people speak in different situations; speech which may be perfectly adequate in some circumstances may be inadequate in others. For instance, a soft voice is usually quite satisfactory at home but the same voice might not be heard at the back of a classroom, while a competent teacher, who is clearly audible in the class room may not be heard in a large lecture room, a court of law, a theatre or church. So, the first requirement of good speech is that in any given circumstance, "the voice should be audible."