

AEN 105: COMMUNICATION SKILLS





Mechanics of speaking

Abraham Lincoln said:

“Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.”

Many people would agree with what Abraham Lincoln once said: they can't stand the embarrassment of making a mistake before a crowd. However, I beg to disagree – how then would we learn to be eloquent speakers if we don't practically experience the process?

I would want to rephrase the quote as:

‘Better sound stupid than remain a fool by keeping quiet!’ In this regard, one stands a chance for self improvement

Good speaking entails success at having your message understood as you had purposed. However as most of you would admit, it's never an easy task.

There are four basic things that you must do in order to have your verbal message understood.

- Identify the purpose of your speech, conversation etc.
- Keep the message clear and concise
- Be prepared
- Be vivid when delivering the message

Before you start working on your talk or presentation, it's vital that you really understand what you want to say, who you want to tell and why they might want to hear it. To do this, ask yourself: Who?

What? How? When? Where? Why?

Who are you speaking to? What are their interests, presuppositions and values? What do they share in common with others; how are they unique?

What do you wish to communicate? One way of answering this question is to ask yourself about the ‘success criteria’. How do you know if and when you have successfully communicated what you have in mind?

How can you best convey your message? Language is important here, as are the nonverbal cues discussed earlier. Choose your words and your nonverbal cues with your audience in mind. Plan a beginning, middle and end. If time and place allow, consider and prepare audio-visual aids.

When? Timing is important here. Develop a sense of timing, so that your contributions are seen and heard as relevant to the issue or matter at hand. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. ‘It's better to be silent than sing a bad tune.’



Where? What is the physical context of the communication in mind? You may have time to visit the room, for example, and rearrange the furniture. Check for availability and visibility if you are using audio or visual aids.

Why? In order to convert hearers into listeners, you need to know why they should listen to you – and tell them if necessary. What disposes them to listen? That implies that you know yourself why you are seeking to communicate – the value or worth or interest of what you are going to say.

Keep it simple

When it comes to wording your message, less is more. You're giving your audience headlines. They don't need to and are usually not expecting to become experts on the subject as a result of hearing your talk.

If you're using slides, limit the content of each one to a few bullet points, or one statement or a very simple diagram

Be prepared

Preparation is underrated. In fact, it is one of the most important factors in determining your communication successes. When possible, set meeting times and speaking and presentation times well in advance, thus allowing yourself the time you need to prepare your communications, mindful of the entire communication process (source, encoding, channel, decoding, receiver, feedback and context). By paying close attention to each of these stages and preparing accordingly, you ensure your communications will be more effective and better understood. Of course, not all communications can be scheduled. In this case, preparation may mean having a good, thorough understanding of the office goings-on, enabling you to communicate with the knowledge you need to be effective, both through verbal and written communications.

Unforgettable delivery

Your delivery of your speech or presentation will make or break it, no matter how well you've prepared and crafted your clear, concise message. Some useful tips for keeping your presentation vivid include:

- Use examples to bring your points to life .Here you can use allegory, simile, metaphor, comparison and parable to add colour to your speech. They can stir the emotions, stimulate thinking, persuade a change in thought and motivate to action. Because of the way our minds work, they are a great tool to enable the audience to remember the speech.
- Keep your body language up-beat – don't stay stuck behind a rostrum
- Don't talk too fast. Pauses are effective.
- Use a variety of tones of voice
- Use visual aids.



Speech Analysis

Studying other speakers is a critical skill, one of the 25 essential skills for a public speaker. The ability to analyze a speech will accelerate the growth of any speaker. Aspects of analysis include:

The Speech Objectives

Knowing the speaker's objective is critical to analyzing the speech, and should certainly influence how you study it.

- What is the speaker's goal? Is it to educate, to motivate, to persuade, or to entertain?
- What is the primary message being delivered?
- Why is this person delivering this speech? Are they the right person?
- Was the objective achieved?

The Audience and Context for the Speech

A speaker will need to use different techniques to connect with an audience of 1500 than they would with an audience of 15. Similarly, different techniques will be applied when communicating with teenagers as opposed to communicating with corporate leaders.

- Where and when is the speech being delivered?
- What are the key demographic features of the audience? Technical ? Students ? Elderly ? Athletes ? Business leaders?
- How large is the audience?
- In addition to the live audience, is there an external target audience? (e.g. on the Internet or mass media)

Speech Content and Structure

The content of the speech should be selected and organized to achieve the primary speech objective.

Focus is important — extraneous information can weaken an otherwise effective argument.

Before the Speech

- Were there other speakers before this one? Were their messages similar, opposed, or unrelated?
- How was the speaker introduced? Was it appropriate?
- Did the introduction establish why the audience should listen to this speaker with this topic at this time?
- What body language was demonstrated by the speaker as they approached the speaking area?

Body language at this moment will often indicate their level of confidence.



The Speech Opening

Due to the primacy effect, words, body language, and visuals in the speech opening are all critical to speaking success.

- Was a hook used effectively to draw the audience into the speech? Or did the speaker open with a dry “It’s great to be here today.”
- Did the speech open with a story? A joke? A startling statistic? A controversial statement? A powerful visual?
- Did the speech opening clearly establish the intent of the presentation?
- Was the opening memorable?

The Speech Body

- Was the presentation focused? i.e. Did all arguments, stories, anecdotes relate back to the primary objective?
- Were examples or statistics provided to support the arguments?
- Were metaphors and symbolism used to improve understanding?
- Was the speech organized logically? Was it easy to follow?
- Did the speaker bridge smoothly from one part of the presentation to the next?

The Speech Conclusion

Like the opening, the words, body language, and visuals in the speech conclusion are all critical to speaking success. This is due to the recency effect.

- Was the conclusion concise?
- Was the conclusion memorable?
- If appropriate, was there a call-to-action?

Delivery Skills and Techniques

Delivery skills are like a gigantic toolbox — the best speakers know precisely when to use every tool and for what purpose.

Enthusiasm and Connection to the Audience

- Was the speaker enthusiastic? How can you tell?
- Was there audience interaction? Was it effective?
- Was the message you- and we-focused, or was it I- and me-focused?

Humor

- Was humor used?
- Was it safe and appropriate given the audience?
- Were appropriate pauses used before and after the punch lines, phrases, or words?
- Was it relevant to the speech?



Visual Aids

- Were they designed effectively?
- Did they complement speech arguments?
- Was the use of visual aids timed well with the speaker's words?
- Did they add energy to the presentation or remove it?
- Were they simple and easy to understand?
- Were they easy to see? e.g. large enough
- Would an additional visual aid help to convey the message?

Use of Stage Area

- Did the speaker make appropriate use of the speaking area?
- Physical – Gestures and Eye Contact
- Did the speaker's posture display confidence and poise?
 - Were gestures natural, timely, and complementary?
 - Were gestures easy to see?
 - Does the speaker have any distracting mannerisms?
 - Was eye contact effective in connecting the speaker to the whole audience?

Vocal Variety

- Was the speaker easy to hear?
- Were loud and soft variations used appropriately?
- Was the pace varied? Was it slow enough overall to be understandable?
- Were pauses used to aid understandability, heighten excitement, or provide drama?

Language

- Was the language appropriate for the audience?
- Did the speaker articulate clearly?
- Were sentences short and easy to understand?
- Was technical jargon or unnecessarily complex language used?
- What rhetorical devices were used? e.g. repetition, alliteration, the rule of three, etc.

Intangibles

Sometimes, a technically sound speech can still miss the mark. Likewise, technical deficiencies can sometimes be overcome to produce a must-see presentation. The intangibles are impossible to list, but here are a few questions to consider:

- How did the speech make you feel?
- Were you convinced?
- Would you want to listen to this speaker again?
- Were there any original ideas or techniques?



Topic Resources

- Extract from the LinguaLinks? Library , Version 3.5, published on CD-ROM by SIL International , 1999.
 - <http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/speech-preparation-1-how-to-prepare-presentation/>
 - Speech Analysis #1: How to Study and Critique a Speech by Andrew Dlugan
 - <http://www.speechmastery.com/writing-speech-introductions.html>
- Topic 7. Writing skills