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Effective Presentation Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Whether you work in a business organization or an educational institution, or you are a student, it is essential that you possess good public speaking skills. Throughout your career, you are bound to encounter innumerable situations which demand effective presentations. To mention a few, as a team leader you may have to present before the corporate body, a product which your team has brought out; as one of the top administrators of your institution, you may have to present the goals, activities, and achievements of your institution to an important visitor; as project manager you may have to present before a committee the results of a project recently undertaken by your company, and so on. In addition, as a student you may have to attend seminars or you may have to present your project reports to your fellow students and faculty members. These situations call for effective, memorable presentations. Though these circumstances differ in purpose, the strategies you need to make good presentations do not differ much.

The ability to make effective and memorable oral presentations is one of the most important qualities you need to develop for a successful career. Constant practice is the key to acquiring this skill.

The more successful your career, the more often you will be called upon to make presentations for a variety of situations and audiences. Let us look at certain fundamentals of professional presentations, which will help you to become an effective presenter.

DEFINING PURPOSE

'Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half, who have nothing to say and keep on saying it.'

Robert Frost

The purpose of your presentation not only decides the content and style but also affects the amount of audience interaction. For instance, when your purpose is to provide information or to analyse a situation, you and the audience generally interact in a limited manner. Say, you want to present the *control of operations or implementation of policies and procedures or the status of work* to the respective audiences; they may ask questions or offer suggestions.

On the other hand, when your purpose is to persuade people to take a particular action, or to collaborate with them in solving a problem, or making a decision, the interaction would be more. You generally begin by providing facts and figures that increase your audience's understanding of the subject; you might also offer arguments in defence of certain conclusions and recommendations. In addition, you invite them to participate by expressing their need, suggesting solutions, and formulating conclusions and recommendations. However, this would need a lot of 'on-the-spot' thinking skills and in-depth knowledge of the subject. Depending upon your purpose—to inform, to analyse, or to persuade—you should be flexible enough to adjust to new input and unexpected audience reactions.

ANALYSING AUDIENCE AND LOCALE

'It is a remarkable observation that the more learned and respected the researcher, the simpler their talks often seem to be.'

Mike Grimble

All audiences have one thing in common. They are at the receiving end of your communication. They may be your friends, foes, clients, colleagues, sometimes unfamiliar faces, or a medley of all these. The nature of your audience has a direct impact on the strategy you devise for your presentation. Hence it is necessary to have some prior knowledge of the audience's characteristics. If you are going to speak before an unknown group, ask your host or an organiser for help in analysing the audience; supplement their estimates with some intelligent guesstimates of your own.

Whether you present locally or in a foreign country, you can expect at least some members to have linguistic or cultural backgrounds different from your own. Those who are not very conversant with English or with your accent will appreciate relatively slow speech and visual aids designed to aid their understanding. You should also adjust your style to accommodate cultural differences. For instance, people from a particular culture may feel uncomfortable asking questions or may not reveal their feelings through facial expressions.

Know Your Audience

- What are their interests, likes, and dislikes?
- Are they familiar with the topic?
- Is their attitude hostile or friendly?
- What's the size of the group?
- Age range? Gender distribution?

If you know in advance how your audience is likely to react, you can structure your presentation and adapt your style to help them feel comfortable. You too are less likely to feel distressed by their reactions.

If your target audience is from your own organization, you will already have information about their characteristics. Estimate their interests, likes, and dislikes, determine their degree of knowledge of the topic, know whether there is hostility toward the topic or toward you, be aware of the gender of the group and approximate ages, and consider the size and composition of the audience. All the above

steps are essential because you'll be gearing the style and content of the speech to your audience's background, needs, interests, and attitudes.

We communicate to inform, persuade, or entertain. Whatever may be the purpose, give the impression to your audience that you want to share your views with them. Fathom out their experience and knowledge of the subject matter. What do they know about the topic already? What more will they want to know about the topic? What do I want them to know by the end of my talk? Now prepare your material accordingly.

At the start of your presentation make eye contact with your audience. This will help you to assess whether they are excited, resistant, hostile, or dull. *Always begin with a smile* and greet them in a pleasant tone.

If you get the impression that they are not interested in what you are saying try to change your tone. Work to achieve effectiveness in your communication by responding to audience feedback. For example, you must watch for signs that your audience wants to interact, ask questions, or even to end your presentation. Even though they are well educated, don't go for words rarely used in conversation. Instead of creating a good impression, you will only confuse or irritate them. The more meticulous you are in your choice of words, the greater are the effects of your oral presentation. If you feel that the audience is not interested in your speech, try to catch their attention by giving it a personal tinge to which they can easily relate. Anecdotes can work wonders for the wandering attention of the audience.

Remember that while a person reading a written report can review what he has read, skip pages and go forward, or stop to ponder the meaning of words, a listener cannot replay what he misses when his attention wanders. Since it is inevitable that his attention will wander, you must prepare your presentation specifically for listeners. Even before the content is presented, the structure and organization of your presentation must be clear. Key points should be emphasized and repeated at appropriate moments.

The structure of a presentation can further be skillfully emphasized by pauses, through interactions with the audience, and through changes in delivery techniques. You can also use visual aids to great effect to hold audience attention and promote understanding.

If you are going to speak about something controversial or you have to break bad news perhaps, set aside some time before your presentation to chat with those who will be affected. This will help you to

- build support;
- anticipate problems; and
- consider strategies.

Testing the waters before hand, so to speak, will help you to fine-tune your approach.

Speak with confidence and conviction. Make your points crystal clear and easy to understand. Maintain an attitude of alertness and confidence. Encourage questions from audience. Audience participation gives the opportunity to clear up any misunderstanding.

In addition to an overall understanding of the audience you need to find out about the locale. Every location has its unique physical environment. You may present in magnificently large auditoriums or oppressively small conference rooms. Know the physical setting; find out whether you'll have a podium or a table, whether you'll have a public address system and so on. Also pay attention to the physical conditions confronting your audience such as seating, room temperature, and lighting. Have they been seated on hard metal chairs for an hour in a freezing room? Or is the lighting too powerful to render your slide presentation ineffective? If you identify such problems in advance, you can either ask for alternative arrangements or modify your materials, visual aids, and style to suit the environment.

ORGANIZING CONTENTS

'Humour is just another defense against the universe.'

Mel Brooks

People vary in their ability to speak confidently in public. When you face an audience you should expect to feel a little nervous. Without a little nervous excitement, you could end up making a dull, lifeless presentation. *Always prepare more material than required, as this will help you feel confident.* When you get on the stage, take your time to arrange your notes. Before you start speaking take a couple of deep breaths. Your first words will sound louder and more confident. The extra oxygen will also help you concentrate. Make eye contact with one person for a few seconds before you move up on to the next. Begin with a smile; by doing so you offer them a warm welcome that helps them and you to relax. If you are still a novice, memorize the first few sentences so that you can move ahead easily. Arrange the contents of your presentation into three major parts namely, introduction, main body, and conclusions. In other words, *say what you want to say; say it; then say what you've already said.*

Ways to Control Anxiety

- **Make sure you are well-rehearsed**

Panic sets in if you are not fully prepared. Work on your timing. Rehearse in front of a practice audience.

- **Warm up with relaxation exercises**

Relax tense muscles with some simple exercises. This will help to avoid feeling nervous and shaky.

- **Expect the unexpected**

Accept that things may not go according to plan. Keep your humour intact.

Introduction

The introduction comprises the porch or the opening statement, the aim, and the layout. The porch can be a question, a sincere greeting, or a starting statement. This catches the attention of your audience and prepares them to listen to the rest of your presentation. Depending upon the topic, you can use a question, a quotation, a statement, or even an anecdote to grab the attention of the audience. For example, if you deliver a presentation on the topic 'The New Performance Appraisal System', you can begin your presentation with the question: 'What are the benefits of the

newly introduced performance appraisal system?' or with the statement, 'The new performance appraisal has brought in a lot of changes.'

Imagine that you are giving a presentation on the topic 'The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Developing Leadership Skills'. You can start your presentation with an anecdote similar to the one given below:

On Friday, when I was attending a meeting, I could barely control my open appreciation of Ms. Veena, the Chairperson. You may wonder why. I will tell you now. She was able to resolve the conflict between two participants amicably simply by using intelligence to understand their emotions. Yes, friends, in today's business world, emotional intelligence plays a very important role in cultivating various skills—leadership skill is one among them.

After the porch, state clearly and precisely the purpose of your presentation. For instance, it can be as pointed as this—'One reason brings me here today: to inform you about our new performance appraisal system.' End your introduction by giving an overview or road map of your presentation.

A good introduction is a vehicle to lead the audience into the main body of the speech. Consider the following example:

I am here to brief you about the details of this appraisal system. I will start by giving a brief idea about the earlier system and then proceed to discuss the highlights of the new system.

After giving a preview, make sure that you provide a smooth transition to the main body of the speech.

Among the highlights, let me begin with the most important one, that is, the frequency of appraisal.

'A talk is a voyage with a purpose, and it must be charted. The person who starts out going nowhere, generally gets there.'

Dale Carnegie

Main Body

The main body, the discussion, or the text part follows the subsequent to introduction and supports your aim or specific purpose. The major points you highlighted in your opening will be expanded upon here. Depending upon your topic and your introduction, you can choose from any of the following patterns to organize the main body of your speech.

Chronological

You can have this pattern for organizing the details which you can arrange sequentially (in the order in which the events occurred or appeared before you). The entire presentation can be arranged chronologically. This method is useful for topics such as 'the profile of your institute', 'the changing face of the earth', and 'history of sports'.

Categorical

This is one of the easiest and most commonly adopted patterns for many topics. The entire presentation can be divided into various topics and sub-topics arranged on the basis of subordination and coordination. This can be used for topics such as 'the role of advertising', 'environmental protection', 'importance of professional presentation', etc.

Cause and effect

You can adopt this method whenever there exists a cause and effect relationship. Here you have to illustrate and explain the causes of the situation and then focus

on the effects. It is relevant for topics such as 'impact of cinema on children', 'internet—boon or bane', 'smoking in children', etc.

Problem-solution

Here you divide the presentation into two parts. In the first part describe and analyse the cause and effect of the problem. After the analysis you move on to the main objective of your presentation to suggest or propose a solution to the problem. It is a very helpful and effective way for persuasive presentation. For topics such as 'population explosion' this method can be used.

You can bolster your argument or ideas by providing examples, illustrations, statistics, testimony, analogy, or definition.

Resist the temptation to include too many points in the body of your speech. Restrict yourself to four or five main points. You can help the audience follow your preparation by summarizing your points as you go along. Every main point is a unit of thought, an essential part of a speech. Each point should be clearly stated independent of other main points. Balance the time devoted to each point accordingly.

Plan how you will bridge or link points so that you move smoothly from one part of your presentation to the next. Make use of transitional expressions such as therefore, because, in addition to, apart from that, on the contrary, next, etc.

Internal previews, internal summaries and sign posts help not only you in understanding where you are in the speech, but also the audience in grasping the topic better. For example, you can say, 'before taking you through the advantages of the new appraisal system, let me just recapitulate what I had told you about the existing one. The existing appraisal system, in a nutshell, lacks important aspects such as the candidates' communication skills, their ability to motivate their subordinates and their analytical capabilities.' This statement would serve as an internal preview as well as an internal summary.

Similarly when you say, 'There are four advantages, as I had already said. Having discussed the first two of them, let me move on to the third advantage', the statement would serve as a signpost to tell the audience that you have completed two and there are two more to go.

Conclusions

You can conclude your presentation by reviewing the main points. Give a signal such as to sum up, to conclude, to review. As you conclude, remind the audience briefly about the purpose of your presentation, which could be either to persuade them or to inform them. Tell them what you want them to do, think, or remember based on your presentation.

Avoid the temptation to wrap up in haste or add something new in this part of your speech.

You can also conclude with a quotation or recall the earlier story, joke, anecdote with which you commenced your presentation to bring it to a full circle.

'A speech is like a love affair, any fool can start one but to end it requires considerable skill.'

Lord Mancraft

'The brain starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you get up to speak in public!'

Anonymous

Very often, presentations are followed by a question period. Questions provide you with vital feedback about the ideas that you have put forth in your presentation. Preparing for questions, therefore, is as important as preparing for your presentation.

How does a presenter cope with difficult questions? This is every presenter's nightmare, but one every seasoned speaker has to overcome to emerge more confident and self-assured. If a questioner tries to trip you up with a difficult question, maintain a polite but firm attitude. Do not reveal annoyance, but as soon as possible, divert to other members of the audience.

It is also important that you learn how to quickly divert irrelevant questions, so as to avoid wasting everybody's time. If any one person in the audience tries to monopolise question time, you have to learn to handle that too by indicating that each questioner has to be given a fair chance.

Dealing with Difficult Questions

- While preparing for the presentation, make a list of questions which you think your audience will ask and mentally prepare yourself to answer them.
- Indicate when you are ready for questions.
- Avoid becoming defensive. Make questioners feel that their questions are welcome.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, be truthful and say so. Admitting ignorance is better than hedging.
- Think before you speak.

✓ PREPARING AN OUTLINE

An outline is a mechanical framework in which are fitted the bits and pieces of your presentation material. It serves as a guide to show you the right path for your presentation. So spending time in developing an outline never goes waste. In fact, you should use an outline as your 'script' but be prepared to deviate in response to audience feedback.

Suppose you are the project leader of a team, which has taken up a project on developing a new product for the company. You have to present before a committee the new product, which is going to be launched in the market. This may be a 10 minute presentation about the facilities the product offers, its functioning, etc. Your outline can be in the form of words, phrases, or sentences:

1. Introduction
2. Product appearance
3. Various parts
4. Functioning
5. Facilities
6. Conclusions

You may have to work out the sub-headings under each or some of these main topics. But as already said, you should be ready to skip or add some topics if your audience wants you to do so.

Body communication without words

KINESICS (Physical movements)

'Nobility and dignity; self-abasement and servility, insolence and vulgarity, are reflected in the face and in the attitudes of the body whether still or in motion.'

Socrates

Kinesics is the name given to the study of the body's physical movements. In other words, it is the way the body communicates without words, i.e., through various movements of its parts. As is well said by Watzlawick and his associates, 'You cannot not communicate'. You communicate just by being. Nodding your head, blinking your eyes, shrugging shoulders, waving the hands, and other such physical activities are all forms of communication. Some kinesic behaviours are deliberately intended to communicate, as when you nod your head for acceptance. Understanding non-verbal cues will develop your ability to use them more effectively during your presentations.

While speaking, listening, reading, or writing, we consciously use words to receive or send ideas. Why do we use words? Because they are the primary symbolic forms that convey our thoughts. On paper, words remain static; punctuation marks are used to convey pauses, expressions, emotions, etc. But in face-to-face communication the message is conveyed on two levels simultaneously. One is verbal and the other is non-verbal. For example, you are congratulating two of your friends on their success in their interviews. If you extend your hand to them with a big smile on your face along with your utterance, 'Congrats', your appreciation has more impact on them than the word in isolation. Your smile and the handshake are non-verbal means of communication, which enhance the impact of your verbal communication. Sigmund Freud established the power of non-verbal communication when he stated, 'He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent he chats with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore'.



The non-verbal part of an oral presentation is not as deliberate and conscious as verbal communication. Rather, it is subtle and instinctive. Non-verbal communication refers to all communication that occurs without the use of words either spoken or written. Non-verbal communication is concerned with body movements (Kinesics), space (Proxemics) and vocal features (paralinguistic features). It is important that we know more about these features of body language because the verbal components of oral communication carry less than 35 percent of the social meaning of the situation, while more than 65 percent is carried on the non-verbal band. People react strongly to what they see.

Body Language

When a speaker presents himself, we see him before we start hearing him. Immediately, we begin developing impressions of his abilities and attitudes based on the non-verbal signals he sends. This is why body language is so critical in oral communication.

Body language includes every aspect of your appearance, from what you wear, how you stand, look, and move, to your facial expressions, and physical habits such as nodding your head, jingling change in your pocket, or pulling your necktie. Your use of space and gestures are other key concerns.

Personal Appearance

Personal appearance plays an important role; people see you before they hear you. As you adapt your language to an audience, you should also dress appositely. Appearance includes clothes, hair, jewellery, cosmetics, and so on. In today's society the purpose of clothing has altered from fulfilling a basic need to expressing oneself. Clothes accent the body's movements.

You should expect appearance to be a part of the message you communicate. Plan your appearance in such a way that it communicates effectively to others. Even before the speaker utters his first syllable you begin to form an opinion about him and visualize the way he is going to talk. One's appearance may put the audience into a resistant or hostile attitude or induce in them a receptive mood. You should be clean and well groomed, conforming to the need of the occasion. Appearances communicate how we feel about ourselves and how we want to be viewed.

Posture (sitting, standing, how to move yourself)

Posture generally refers to the way we hold ourselves when we stand, sit, or walk. Novice speakers are unsure of what to do with their body. Certain mannerisms creep in, usually from nervousness—pacing constantly, bobbing the shoulders, fidgeting with notes, jingling coins, either constantly moving or remaining static. Truly, what one speaks is very important but what you do just before you begin and after you have finished is equally important.

You need to analyse the effects of body shape and posture to understand their role in non-verbal communication. When you are with your friends you are probably spontaneous. You are unaware of your posture, being fluid in all of your physical movements. But when you encounter an unfamiliar situation, you become more conscious of your posture. Stiff, unnatural positions such as the *big leaf* (hands crossed below the waist with the back of the hand toward the audience) send the message that you are unsure of yourself and your message. Instead, lower your hands to your sides in a natural, relaxed, and resting posture. Standing, sitting, or walking in a relaxed way is a positive posture, which will encourage questions and discussion. Also being comfortably upright, squarely facing an audience, and evenly distributing your weight are all aspects of posture that communicate professionalism, confidence, attention to detail, and organization. Seeing is believing; so be and appear at ease. Neither remain static nor fidget. Move occasionally to hold attention, suggest transitions, and increase emphasis. The way you sit, stand, or walk reveals a lot about you:

- Slumped posture—low spirits
- Erect posture—high spirits, energy, and confidence
- Lean forward—open, honest, and interested
- Lean backward—defensive or disinterested
- Crossed arms—defensive and not ready to listen
- Uncrossed arms—willingness to listen

Ways to Improve Body Language

Try and videotape a part of your presentation. Play it back and identify one aspect of your body language you want to improve. After more rehearsal, record this part again and see if there is any improvement. You can also practise in front of a mirror to improve on facial expressions. When you have worked through your entire presentation, and feel sufficiently confident, invite a friend to watch your performance. Ask him for comments on aspects of your body language that are good or need improving.

Gesture (body language)

Gesture is the movement made by hands, arms, shoulders, head, and torso. Adroit gestures can add to the impact of a speech. A well-timed gesture not only drives a point home but also enhances the impact and adds greater value to what is being said. Similarly, an ungainly gesture (like playing with your key chain or button) can mar the effectiveness of the message.

Gestures clarify your ideas or reinforce them and should be well suited to the audience and occasion. Gestures are more numerous than any forms of non-verbal communication, and the meanings attached to them are diverse. It has been observed that there are as many as 700,000 varied hand gestures alone, (Ray L. Birdwhistell, Introduction to Kinesics, Louisville, Ky. University of Louisville Press, 1952), and the meanings derived from them may vary from individual to individual.

Gestures should not divert the attention of the listener and distract from your message. Your gesture should be quite natural and spontaneous. Be aware of and avoid irritating gestures such as playing with a ring, twisting a key chain, clasping the hands tightly, or cracking your knuckles. Gestures can roughly be divided into the following types:

- Enumerative—numbers
- Descriptive—size of the objects
- Symbolic—abstract concepts
- Locative—location of an object
- Emphatic—emphasis

Facial Expression

Some facial expressions are common to all cultures. Even if you have never met a person from a particular culture, you can recognise certain feelings or attitudes. These are love, happiness, and mirth; surprise; anger and determination; contempt and disgust; fear and suffering.

Along with posture and gesture, facial expressions also play an important part. The face is the most expressive part of your body. A smile stands for friendliness, a frown for discontent, raised eyebrows for disbelief, tightened jaw muscles for antagonism, etc. Facial expressions are subtle. You can use them in a variety of ways: to aid or inhibit or complement your communication. The face rarely sends a single message at a time. Instead it sends a series of messages—your facial expressions may show anxiety, recognition, hesitation, and pleasure in quick succession.

Facial expression is difficult to interpret. Though there are only five basic expressions, you can have 33 blends. (Pearce, C. Glenn et al., 1988, Business Communication: Principles and Application, Second edn, page 590, USA, John Wiley and sons.) Also, people tend to hide their true feelings and reveal only those expressions required at a particular movement. The five basic expressions are as follows:

- Inhibited—restricted and stolid
- Uninhibited—spontaneous and impetuous
- Substitute—happy with a long face
- Frozen—no change in expression
- Blank—no expression at all

Eye Contact

The eyes are considered to be the windows of the soul. You look to the eyes of a speaker to help find out the truthfulness of his speech, his intelligence, attitudes, and feelings. Eye contact is a direct and powerful form of non-verbal communication. You use your eyes to cull information. Your eyes are a rich source of feedback.

Looking directly at listeners builds rapport. Prolonging the eye contact for three to five seconds (without, however, giving the impression of staring) tells the audience that you are sincere in what you say and that you want them to pay attention. Eye contact is especially important when you start the presentation, and at the beginning of each new section.

Your upper eye lids and eyebrows help you to convey an intricate array of non-verbal messages. Arabs, Latin Americans, and South Europeans look directly into eyes. Asians and Africans maintain far less eye contact. In the professional world you should make personal and pleasant eye contact with the listeners. It is not only that you should look at the audience, how you look at them also counts. Do not look outside the windows, towards the roof or floor, or at one particular section; instead try to establish eye contact with one and all. Your eye contact shows your intensity and elicits a feeling of trust. A direct look conveys candour and openness. This direct and powerful form is a signal for confidence or sincerity; therefore, experienced speakers maintain longer eye contact. Your eyes should convey the message, 'I am pleased to talk with you, believe deeply in what I am saying'.

Eye contact and eye movement help you tremendously in the filtering process or in getting the desired response or feedback. However, be wary of cultural differences when addressing a foreign audience as signals vary from one culture to another.



PROXEMICS (Space)

Proxemics is the study of physical space in interpersonal relations. Space is related to behavioural norms. The way people use space tells you a lot about them. In a professional setting, space is used to signal power and status. For instance, the head of a company has a larger office than more junior employees, and you, as a speaker, will have an open space before you when addressing an audience. You should use the psychological power of this space to your advantage.

Your gestures should be in accordance with the space available. When you have plenty of space to manoeuvre, move more boldly and expand your gestures. When seated at a table, use milder gestures. Even here, though, you can subtly reach out over the table to extend your space. This expresses control and authority.

Moving closer to an audience is useful to invite discussion, to express agreement, or to emphasize a point. However, do not retreat from this close position when you make an important point or conclude your presentation. This encourages the audience to downplay the importance of your point.

You can learn a great deal about how to use space to great advantage by observing dynamic, influential speakers. It is interesting to note that like kinesics, proxemics also has cultural variations. A Latin American or a French is likely to stand closer to another person when conversing than an Anglo-Saxon would in the same situation. Americans, addressed from a close distance, may feel offended or become aggressive. Studies show that Americans, unlike many other nationals, avoid close contact with one another in public places.

Edward T. Hall in his *The Hidden Dimension* divides space into four distinct zones.

Intimate This zone starts with personal touch and extends just to 18 inches (one and a half feet). Members of the family, lovers, spouses, relatives and parents fall under this zone. The best relationship that describes it is the mother-child relationship. No words are spoken; if at all something is spoken, it is just some whispering sounds. Other individuals come close for a very brief period and only under special circumstances—when they want to congratulate you, sympathize with you, or console you. A handshake, a pat on the back, or a hug all come into this zone.

Personal This zone stretches from 18 inches (one and a half feet) to 4 feet. Your close friends, colleagues, peers, etc. fall in this tier. Instead of whispering sounds or utter silence, normal talking takes place. Though this zone is personal, it is quite a relaxed and casual place. It permits spontaneous and unprogrammed communication. Sitting or standing so close brings you closer to the listener and gives the impression of friendliness and warmth.

Social Social events take place in this radius of 4 feet to 12 feet. In this layer, relationships are more official. You tend to become more formal. People are more cautious in their movements. You should be smart enough to conduct it with less emotion and more planning. Here the number of people decides whether it should be sitting-sitting or sitting-standing position. It is through experience that you decide which position to take. If the number of people is less and you can maintain eye contact, you could go in for a sitting position. If you have to be authoritative and the audience is large, you can go for the sitting-standing position.

Public This zone starts from 12 feet and may extend to 30 feet or to the range of eyesight and hearing. Events that take place in this zone are formal. Here the audience views what is happening as an impartial observer. The degree of detachment is very high. The audience is free to do whatever it feels like. Here the speaker has to raise his voice to communicate to others or use a microphone. Public figures like the Prime Minister of a country, for example, have to maintain this distance for security reasons.

✓ PARALINGUISTICS (vocal features)

Paralinguistic features are non-verbal vocal cues that help you to give urgency to your voice. Your voice is your trademark; it is that part of yourself that adds human touch to your words. Writing does not have that immediacy because the words are static on a page. Voice gives extra life to your delivery. Therefore, you may find it useful to understand the characteristic nuances of voice, namely *quality, volume, rate, pitch, articulation, pronunciation, and pauses*.

1 Quality

Quality is a characteristic that distinguishes one voice from another. Each one of us has a unique voice and its quality depends upon its resonating mechanism. While the quality of one's voice cannot be changed, it can be trained for optimum impact. It may be rich and resonant, soft and alluring, thin and nasal, hoarse and husky, or harsh and irritating. Very few people are naturally blessed with deep and resonant quality; everybody can improve upon the quality of the voice and develop it to its fullest potential. Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill, for example, adapted the quality of their voices to become speakers par excellence.

2 Volume

Volume is the loudness or the softness of the voice. Your voice should always project but need not always be loud. If the place you are speaking in is large and open, the volume should be high, and if the place is small and enclosed, the volume should be low. If your volume is too high you may sound boorish and insensitive, whereas if it is too low you may convey an impression of timidity, which has no place in the business world. It also gives the impression that you are not well prepared and lack the confidence to express yourself. In all, you should vary your volume so as to make your voice audible and clear.

One way to improve your voice and speaking style is through reading aloud. Read children's stories, giving each character a unique way of speaking, to develop vocal variety. Reciting tongue twisters such as *she sells sea shells on the seashore* also improves diction.

Projection

Loudness and projection are two different aspects of our voices. It is possible to project your voice without being loud. Stage actors do this when they speak in a low voice, and yet are heard in the back rows of a theatre. If you begin speaking in a loud voice, you will get the full attention of the audience. Then shifting to a lower, softer voice when appropriate will hold that attention. Generally, you need to use a louder voice at the beginning of your talk and at the start of each new section.

To make your voice travel through the room, breathe deeply. You need air in your lungs to project. Often, speakers run out of air and let their voices fade just when they are delivering critical information. At the end of a section, your voice need not be loud, but it must project.

Speed of your speech
 - slow speech
 - too slow
 - burst
 - too fast

Vibration per second
 you control per second

Articulation
 - crisp & clear

Pace/Rate

Rate is the number of words which you speak per minute. It varies from person to person and from 80 to 250 words per minute. The normal rate is from 120 to 150 words. Cultivate your pace so as to fit in this reasonable limit. If a person speaks too slowly and monotonously, he is most likely to be considered a dull speaker even though the contents of his speech may be highly interesting. Similarly, a fast speaker also causes discomfort because the listeners do not get time to grasp the thoughts and switch from one thought to another. Under these circumstances, listeners may just stop listening to you and their attention may go astray.

It is best, therefore, to vary your speaking pace. Use pauses to create emphasis. A well-paced, varied message suggests enthusiasm, self-assurance and awareness of audience.

Pitch

Pitch refers to the number of vibrations per second of your voice. The rise and fall of the voice conveys various emotions. 'Thank you' is such a phrase. You can find out the difference when you utter it indifferently and when you say it with sincerity. Inflections give warmth, lustre, vitality, and exuberance to your speech. Lowness of pitch can indicate sadness, shock, dullness, guilt, etc. If you are excited, joyous, ecstatic, triumphant, and even angry, then your pitch automatically becomes high. A well-balanced pitch results in a clear and effective tone. It helps you avoid being monotonous. Intonation refers to the rising and falling pitch of the voice when somebody says a word or syllable. By learning and adopting an appropriate intonation pattern, you will be able to express your intention very clearly.

Pitch is also influenced by your air supply; if you run out of air, you cannot control the pitch of your voice. Like the strings of a guitar, if you tense the vocal chords, a higher pitch results, and if you relax the vocal chords, a lower pitch results. Tilting your chin up or down reduces your ability to control pitch.

Use a variety of pitches to hold your listeners' attention. Avoid raising the pitch of your voice as you end a sentence. This vocal pattern, called *pitching up*, makes your remarks sound tentative or unfinished.

5 Articulation

Speakers should be careful not to slop, slur, chop, truncate, or omit sounds between words or sentences. If all the sounds are not uttered properly, the flow of understanding gets interrupted and deters the listener from grasping the meaning of the message. The result is similar to the negative impression that written errors leave with a reader. Lazy articulation, slurred sounds, or skipping over words will lower the credibility of the speaker. Develop in yourself the ability to speak distinctly; produce the sounds in a crisp and lucid manner without causing any obfuscation. Your audience will better understand 'I do not know' and 'I want to go' than 'I dunno' and 'I wanna go'.

6 Pronunciation

If *articulation* means speaking out all the sounds distinctly, then *pronunciation* requires us to speak out sounds in way that is generally accepted. The best way is to follow British Received Pronunciation. (Received pronunciation or R.P., or Educated Southern British English, is a form of English socially acceptable in all parts of the country.) One should be careful enough to pronounce individual sounds along with word stress according to the set norms. Don't be taken in by the fancy that you know the correct pronunciation of all the words. Wherever there is confusion, always consult a good dictionary and try to pronounce it accordingly. Given below are few commonly mispronounced words along with their correct pronunciation:

Word	Common Error	Correct Pronunciation
arctic	ar-tic	arc-tic
gesture	ges-ture	jes-ture
3 tier	3-tyre	3-tear
gigantic	jai-jan-tik	jai-gan-tik

7 Voice Modulation

While intonation refers to the tonal variations, modulation pertains to the way we regulate, vary, or adjust the tone, pitch, and volume of the sound or speaking voice. Modulation of voice brings flexibility and vitality to your voice, and you can express emotions, sentiments like impatience, careful planning, despondency, suspicion, etc. in the best possible way. If you do not pay special attention to the modulation of your voice, then your voice becomes flat and you emerge as a languid speaker with no command over your voice. Word stress and sentence stress also play an important role in voice modulation. For example, by accentuating one or two words in a sentence (e.g., in the sentence *This company produces 50 cars everyday*, you can stress 'this' and '50 cars'), you can effectively bring in modulation in your voice. If you are a novice in professional presentations, it is better to initially underline the words that you may like to stress during your presentation. This will help you to avoid sounding dull and monotonous.

8 Pauses

A pause is a short silence flanked by words. A pause in speaking lets the listener reflect on the message and digest it accordingly. It helps you glide from one thought to another one. It embellishes your speech because it is a natural process to give a break. Be spontaneous. If you become too self-conscious, this process becomes artificial.

A pause helps not only the listener but the speaker as well. Pauses automatically come in between the major points of your speech. Do not prolong the pauses unnecessarily as they will hinder the flow of your speech. Vocalized pauses or vocal segregates such as *uh, ah, hm, ahem, a, aah* should be substituted by silent pauses. Vocalized pauses make the speech sound evasive and untruthful, they dilute the conviction of your point. If you keep inserting repetitive phrases such as '*I mean*',

'well', 'like', 'ok', 'got it', 'actually', etc., then these phrases sweep away the good impression you have created. Use pauses thoughtfully, and time them well as they exhibit assurance, confidence, and self-control. Use pauses at the end of certain thought units to let the audience fully absorb the information.

✓ CHRONEMICS

Chronemics is the study of how human beings communicate through their use of time. How do you communicate with others? What does time mean to you? In order to use time as an effective communication tool, you should understand the impact it has and then act accordingly. We attempt to control time, trying to use it more effectively.

In the professional world, time is a valuable commodity. When you are late for an appointment, people react negatively. If you arrive early, you are considered either over-eager or aggressive. So always be on time. Through time, you communicate both subtly and explicitly.

People have their own 'time language'. To one person who wakes up at 8:00 a.m., 6:30 a.m. may be early; to another, 8:00 a.m. may be late if he wakes up at 5:00 a.m. every day!

Time language also varies from culture to culture. In Latin countries, meetings usually begin well after their appointed time. Everyone knows this. It is customary, and no one is offended by the delay. In Scandinavia or Germany, on the other hand, strict punctuality is the rule, and tardiness is frowned upon.

As a speaker, your awareness of schedules is a chronemic element. Good timing is crucial, and you should rehearse a formal presentation until it is a little under line, because staying within time limits is a mark of courtesy and professionalism. If, at the beginning of your presentation, you assure the listeners that you will be giving them time at the end of your presentation and then keep talking till the time is all gone, without allowing scope for the audience to respond, you will undoubtedly annoy the audience.

The shorter the time allowed, the more difficult the task. The more difficult the task, the greater the need not just for careful planning and effective visual aids but also for diligent rehearsal.

To recapitulate, oral presentation is an art that requires careful planning, preparation, and a great deal of practice. This tool is both valuable and relevant. Apart from communicating the main purpose of your presentation, there are various factors that you need to blend inextricably to convey your message clearly. These features are audience analysis, organization of matter, preparation of an outline, nuances of delivery, kinesics and paralinguistics, and visual aids. Your aim should be to keep all these threads intact, neither too loose nor too tight. With care and practice, you can achieve wonders with your oral presentations.