

# Perfecting Your Delivery Method and Pacing

Your audience's perception of you and your message will have a bearing on whether they listen to you and accept what you have to say. Their perception may be inaccurate, but it will not matter because in their minds it is reality. Therefore, make your message and yourself appealing to that specific audience.

Create the right message exclusively for your audience. Take care with your appearance, behavior, and mannerisms. Deliver an enthusiastic, passionate, sincere talk. The compilation of these factors will create your audience's perception of you and your presentation. Do your best to make a positive impact.

## CREDIBILITY

Your credibility is critical to the success of your presentation. No matter how carefully you craft your speech or prepare your supplemental materials, the audience will not react favorably or take the action you desire unless they believe you.

To begin with, *you* must believe in what you are saying and doing to convey that essence to others. Your visual presence, voice, words, and supporting materials must lead your audience to believe you are honest and trustworthy. If the audience thinks you are dishonest, they will have a difficult time receiving your message, let alone acting on it. Everything you say will be subject to scrutiny and acceptance or dismissal. You must connect with each listener on an emotional level—you must be believed.

An effective presentation informs or persuades an audience by producing credible facts in a visually appealing way. For instance, making eye contact with the audience, speaking in a sincere tone, and portraying confidence will encourage your audience to believe your words and visual aids. On the other hand, faulty information, weak visual performance, and poor preparation will sabotage your presentation and ultimately your message.

When your audience thinks you are credible, you may have an easier time influencing them to accept the premise of your message and the facts as you present them.

Inconsistency in your presentation will have your audience questioning your credibility and asking themselves why they are listening to you. You may have important, factual information, but if the audience questions your delivery, the message may be lost. You may have a great visual presence, but if your information is unbelievable, your message may be lost. Therefore, it is important to work on the total presentation to gain your audience’s trust.

Complete the following checklist.

Credibility Checklist	Yes	No
Do you consistently present credible information?		
Do you believe the information you are presenting?		
Have you verified your information sources?		
Have you sufficient facts to support your key points?		
Does your voice sound convincing?		
Do you exhibit a credible visual presence?		
Are you doing all you can to promote your credibility?		
Do you feel your audience believes you?		

You should have answered yes to each item in the checklist. Work toward correcting any negative answers.

## FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Smiling is one of the best ways to make a connection with others and build rapport. A radiant smile dominates the face. Be generous with your smile, and make it sincere and welcoming. People will be more receptive to your message if they perceive you as friendly and likeable.

People can tell when a smile is forced. If anxiety about speaking in front of groups undermines your smile, practice your presentation over and over until you feel comfortable maintaining a smile.

Negative facial expressions, including frowns, sneers, smirks, forehead creases, lip biting, clenched jaws, pursed lips, stiff faces, and the like will drive a wedge between you and the audience. A stone-faced presenter will have a difficult time holding an audience’s attention and convincing them to act or react the way he intends. Be conscious of these and other nervous ticks and negative facial expressions; practice eliminating them.

Do not cover your mouth as you speak, as it may convey that you are not being truthful or are nervous. Complete the following checklist.

Facial Expression Checklist	Yes	No
Do you exhibit a sincere welcoming smile?		
Is your face relaxed?		
Is your jaw relaxed?		
Is your face animated when speaking with people?		
Do you take care not to frown or bite your lip?		
Do you take care not to smirk?		

You should have answered yes to each item in the checklist. Work toward correcting any negative answers.

## VOICE

Is your voice monotone, flat, garbled, screechy, halting, or inarticulate? Do you mumble or stutter? Do you ramble or race through your speech so fast that your audience misses most of it? If any of these poor habits describes you, the audience may tune you out or be so focused on the annoying habit that they miss your message.

Make your tone appealing by varying your inflection as you emphasize key words and phrases. Speak naturally and clearly. Pronounce words correctly and distinctly.

Stressed speakers and those who worry about forgetting their speech tend to race through their talks or speak in a halting manner. Remind yourself to speak at a normal speed the audience members can follow. Your audience may be unfamiliar with the material and need to digest what you say. Even if they are familiar, some information may be new to them. Speak at a moderate rate and pause occasionally. Pay attention to your audience’s nonverbal signs to determine if they are grasping your message.

You may want to have a colleague keep track of the time while you speak and signal you at intervals so you know if you are pacing yourself properly. If you find you are running out of time, finish the speech with the critical information and forget the rest. Another option is to make your summary succinct.

Avoid both shouting and speaking too softly. People sensitive to noise will be irritated by loud voices, and people who must strain to hear you may tune you out or become annoyed because they continue to miss information. A person who misses something you said may disturb the person next to him to ask what was said. Now two people are at risk of losing additional information. If several people ask you to repeat information, you may need to adjust your volume or the microphone.

Using microphones can pose pitfalls. If the microphone is mounted on a lectern, you must speak directly into it. If you turn away from the microphone to look at a slide screen or elsewhere, you risk not being heard. A lapel-mounted mic allows you to move around the room, but take care not to loosen the mic or say something you do not want your audience to overhear.

Knowing your material and practicing ahead of time will help you eliminate “ah,” and “um,” or similar habits from your speech.

Complete the following checklist.

Voice Checklist	Yes	No
Is your tone interesting and enthusiastic?		
Do you speak at a normal rate?		
Is your tone sincere and credible?		
Do you speak clearly and distinctly?		
Is your voice audible?		
Have you checked the pronunciation of unfamiliar words in your presentation?		
Are you mindful of any poor speech habits you have?		
Have you practiced your presentation?		
Have you practiced your presentation using a microphone if you are unfamiliar speaking with one?		

You should have answered yes to each item in the checklist. Work toward correcting any negative answers.

## EYE CONTACT

Your eyes can convey excitement, enthusiasm, and confidence as well as boredom, indifference, and nervousness. You can intimidate a person or make him or her feel relaxed. You can show you are involved in the conversation or detached. Make the most of eye contact with your audience by practicing positive techniques.

Where do you look when presenting to an audience? Ideally, you will want to make eye contact with your audience, but avoid staring in one spot or at one section for too long. Choose an audience member or section of the room and maintain eye contact for five to ten seconds before moving on to someone else. If your audience is large, the people around the person you glance at will get the feeling you are looking at them, too.

Avoid closing your eyes for several seconds while you think about what you want to say. You may give the appearance that you have forgotten what to say or need a few moments; your audience could then feel disconnected from you. Excessive blinking or squinting may make people nervous or uncomfortable; control your blinking, and do not squint.

Try to make eye contact with as many people in the audience as possible to show you are interested in communicating with the entire group. Scan the room occasionally to determine how your message is being received, but do not give the impression your eyes are darting from one person to another or all around the room. Assess your audience. Do people appear to understand your message, or are they confused? Do people look bored, or are they nodding off? By gauging your audience’s reactions, you can adjust your presentation as needed.

In some cultures it is rude to stare or make prolonged eye contact, so be mindful of cultural customs. If you are speaking internationally, learn what is acceptable in that culture.

Do not turn your back on your audience to operate audiovisual equipment or to read from slides. Glancing at note cards or slides is fine, but do not read from your notes, handouts, or slides. If you read your presentation to the audience, many will wonder why they bothered to attend in person when you could have handed them a copy of your notes. An audience comes to a presentation to hear a speaker, not to listen to a reader. Effective presentations are led by speakers who are not bound to their notes, slides, or handouts.

If you are giving a television interview, look at the person you are speaking to; do not look directly at the camera.

Complete the following checklist.

Eye Contact Checklist	Yes	No
Do you make eye contact with your audience?		
Do you scan the audience checking to see how your message is received?		
Do you keep eye contact for 5–10 seconds and avoid staring?		
Do you avoid turning your head in too many directions while looking at your audience?		
Do you avoid turning your back on the audience?		
Do you avoid reading from your notes or from your slides?		
Do you avoid excessive blinking and squinting?		
Do you avoid glancing away from your audience out of nervousness?		
Are you mindful of cultural differences with regard to eye contact?		

You should have answered yes to each item in the checklist. Work toward correcting any negative answers.

## Exercise: Assess Your Eye Contact with Others

The next time you engage in a conversation with an individual, pay particular attention to where you look. Ask yourself:

- ◆ Do you maintain eye contact?
- ◆ Do you glance around at other parts of the person's face or hair or shoulders?
- ◆ Do you glance around the room or other surroundings?
- ◆ Do you stare?
- ◆ Do you blink excessively or squint?

Pay attention to where you look the next time you engage in a conversation with a large group. Ask yourself:

- ◆ Do you maintain eye contact?
- ◆ Do you glance at different individuals in the group?
- ◆ Do you glance around the room or other surroundings?
- ◆ Do you stare at any one individual?
- ◆ Do you blink excessively or squint?

## Exercise: Assess a Speaker's Eye Contact with You

The next time you engage in a conversation with an individual, pay particular attention to where he or she looks. Ask yourself:

- ◆ Does the speaker maintain eye contact with you?
- ◆ Does the speaker glance around at other parts of your face or hair or shoulders?
- ◆ Does the speaker glance around the room or other surroundings?
- ◆ Does the speaker stare at you?
- ◆ Does the speaker blink excessively or squint?

Pay close attention to the speaker the next time you attend a presentation where you are part of a large group or audience. Ask yourself:

- ◆ Does the speaker maintain eye contact with several people in the group or audience?
- ◆ Does the speaker seem to be spinning in all directions trying to take in too many faces at once?
- ◆ Does the speaker glance around the room or other surroundings?
- ◆ Does the speaker stare at any one person or section of the group too long?
- ◆ Does the speaker blink excessively or squint?

## POSTURE

Stand tall and poised if you want to be perceived as a confident professional. An erect posture commands respect and signals that you are self-assured. However, do not exaggerate to the point of giving the impression you are arrogant or snobbish.

Balance your weight so you do not appear to lean back on one hip or slouch. Keep your shoulders back. When you slump or stoop your shoulders, you give the impression you are awkward, shy, insecure, or apprehensive.

Watch out for nervous movements such as constant shifting from one foot to the other, tapping feet, crossing and uncrossing legs over, pacing or walking too briskly through an audience, leaning on walls or a podium, and similar motions. Videotape yourself to get a good picture of how you carry yourself when talking and interacting with others.

Avoid being bound to a desk or podium during your presentation. Stand while speaking to give weight to your words. Step away from the podium occasionally and walk around the room. If you must sit, mind your posture and sit erect.

Your arms and hands should appear relaxed at your side unless you are gesturing or making a point. Avoid awkward, uncomfortable positions such as a permanent bend at the elbows or clenched fists that detract from your appearance.

When sitting, maintain an erect posture; avoid slouching in your seat. Cross your feet at the ankles or keep them flat on the floor.

Complete the following checklist.

Posture Checklist	Yes	No
Do you stand and walk straight?		
Do you keep your shoulders back?		
Do you hold your head erect?		
Do you have a balanced stance?		
Are your hands and arms relaxed?		
Are your legs relaxed?		
Do you walk with confidence?		
Do you walk at a normal pace?		
Do you sit up straight?		

You should have answered yes to each item in the checklist. Work toward correcting any negative answers.

## GESTURES

Mannerisms can either make or break a presentation. Some animation will liven up your presentation, but overusing gestures can be annoying. Find a balance that is natural and comfortable for you.

Keep your arms and hands relaxed at your side whenever you do not need to gesture to make a point. Too much gesturing may give the impression you are over-exaggerating. Awkward gestures will make you look uncomfortable and clumsy. Annoying gestures include fingering necklaces and earrings, pulling at ties, playing with hair, tugging at clothing, biting the lip, clicking the tongue or fingers, and the like.

Find out how you look to others by asking a trusted friend or associate to analyze your gestures, or video-tape yourself. Concentrate on identifying and eliminating nervous and annoying gestures. Choose the worst habit you have and work on removing it. Then systematically work on another habit and another. Trying to eliminate all negative gestures at the same time may discourage you, as it is difficult to break bad habits.

Complete the following checklist.

Positive Gestures Checklist	Exhibit	Hope to Improve	Do Not Exhibit
Smiling			
Nodding			
Waving			
Laughing			
Making eye contact			
Relaxing arms and legs			
Relaxing jaw and face			
Standing straight			
Keeping shoulders back			
Keeping head erect			
Maintaining confident, balanced stance			
Using hand motions appropriately			
Shaking hands properly			

You should have answered yes to exhibiting each gesture in the checklist. Work toward correcting any gestures you hope to improve or do not exhibit.

Complete the checklist on the following page.



Negative Gestures Checklist	Exhibit	Hope to Improve	Do Not Exhibit
Pulling at clothing			
Blinking excessively			
Pursing lips; frowning			
Tapping fingers or feet			
Toying with hair, jewelry, and so on			
Darting eyes			
Avoiding eye contact			
Clicking tongue or fingers			
Slouching			
Flailing arms and hands			
Trembling hands			
Sweating hands			
Clenching fist			
Clenching teeth/jaw			
Frowning			
Tapping feet			
Shifting from one foot to the other			
Pacing			
Displaying nervous ticks			
Mumbling			
Covering mouth			
Fidgeting			
Biting lip			
Smirking			
Raising eyebrows			
Slouching shoulders			
Putting hands on hips			

You should not exhibit the gestures in the previous checklist. Work toward correcting any negative behaviors.

Exercise: Analyze a Speaker

Watch a political speech, and critique the politician’s facial expressions, eye contact, voice, and gestures. Watch a television news interviewer who is covering a scene where he has to move around, and critique his posture. Practice emulating these individuals if their posture and gestures are positive.

Exercise: Analyze Your Presentation

Ask a trusted friend or associate to analyze your gestures during your next presentation.

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Positive personal attributes, including mannerisms and character traits, can be used to engage and to persuade your audience. Character traits such as credibility, honesty, friendliness, efficiency, enthusiasm, and the like will help you build rapport with an audience and gain their trust. Negative character traits will have the opposite effect.

Be generous in your desire to help others succeed by being the best presenter you can be. Realize your capacity to change the lives of your audience for the better by bringing them information on your subject.

Show your enthusiasm and passion. Getting excited and believing in what you say will encourage the audience to get excited and to trust you.

Avoid negative traits and their accompanying gestures as discussed earlier.

Exercise: Assess Your Character Traits

Check the appropriate boxes to indicate whether you exhibit the positive character traits, hope to improve in that area, or do not exhibit the trait. Ideally, you should exhibit all of the traits or aspire to achieve them. Add other positive traits you feel would benefit you as a presenter.

Character Traits Checklist	Exhibit	Hope to Improve	Do Not Exhibit
Honest			
Credible			
Sincere			
Friendly			
Helpful			
Calm			
Confident			
Efficient			
Dependable			

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Character Traits Checklist	Exhibit	Hope to Improve	Do Not Exhibit
Discreet			
Knowledgeable			
Courteous			
Organized			
Good Listener			
Supportive			
Motivated			

You should have answered yes to exhibiting each character trait in the checklist. Work toward correcting any traits you hope to improve or do not exhibit.

## QUESTIONS

Welcome questions throughout your presentation. It shows your audience is attentive and interested in the topic. Offer a brief response based on their knowledge. On the other hand, do not get sidetracked by questions or the person asking them. If numerous interruptions become a distraction for you or for the audience, ask people to hold their questions until the question-and-answer period at the end of your presentation.

## HUMOR

Using humor is appropriate in your presentation, but you do not want to fall off the stage laughing. A short humorous story can build rapport with your audience, but avoid inappropriate humor and humor at someone else’s expense. Skip the jokes and opt for a general comment about life, yourself, or your subject that will bring a smile or laughter.

## GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Involve your audience in games or activities that will help them assimilate your message. If a demonstration will help the audience members understand how something works, arrange one. If you want people to get to know each other better, have them do an ice-breaking activity or two. Plan activities that will make their learning easier. Keep the activities and participants moving along so as not to exceed your time limit.

Note-taking and completing exercises on handouts help attendees gather information, practice what they are learning, and integrate information.

### Exercise: Analyze a Presentation

The next time you attend a presentation, analyze how the speaker uses humor to build rapport with the audience. Think of similar ways that you can build rapport with your future audiences through humor.

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