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Speech Analysis

On October 26th, 2022, I spoke about scientists who created matter from energy at the RHIC in Upton, New York. Because of the complicated nature of the topic, it was difficult to convey the information in a way that my audience could understand within the six-minute time limit. However, even with the time limit and despite the mistakes I made in presenting, the audience told me that they were able to follow my explanation, though they did have some follow-up questions.

While I was presenting, I thought I was relaxed. I don’t remember feeling very nervous while standing in front of the class, but in the video, it is extremely clear that I am nervous. I think I was too focused on what I was trying to say to pay enough attention to my internal state. I didn’t cross my arms, but I still looked very tense. When watching the video, it seemed to me as though I was trying to retreat from physical reality. Crossing arms does not feel natural to me, which is most likely the only reason I did not have them crossed. I was fully focused on what I was trying to say and couldn’t spare a thought for my body language.

A huge underlying cause of the issues with my speech was that the topic was too complex for the time allotted. I had an inkling that this would be the case before the day of the speech, but I did not think it would pose such a drastic problem. Maybe, if I had more experience with public speaking, the presentation would have gone more smoothly, but at the time, I couldn’t remember most of what I had practiced. One of the things that I knew I struggled with before watching the video was transitioning between ideas. I had planned out and practiced the transitions, but when presenting, I said something in the wrong order, which confused my next transition, and it just continued from there. The speech would have gone more smoothly if I had had more time or had chosen a simpler topic.

The complexity of the topic and the limited time also made the speech feel more disjointed than I would have liked. Having so much to cover in a short time meant that I couldn’t spend the time to fully flesh out everything I was explaining and get to a natural transition point. There were also concepts that I would have put in between many of the points if I could have fit them in while keeping within the time limit. This made it feel less coherent than it should have.

There were some technical issues that would not have been a problem if I had practiced the speech in the classroom beforehand. While watching the video, it was pointed out that one of the graphics on my slides was very difficult to see, which I didn’t know before presenting because it looked very good on my computer screen. The graphic was a stylized version of a Feynman diagram, and it would have been much more effective if it had been easily visible. There was also a lag when changing slides because I was presenting from the browser-based version of PowerPoint, and if I had known that would happen, I would have downloaded the slideshow. The lag started right away and really threw me off, which contributed to forgetting some of what I had planned.

There are many things that I would like to improve on for the next speech. I’m planning to choose a complex topic again; however, the speech has a much longer time available, so I expect to be able to cover everything needed. I am also going to practice in the classroom so that I know the visual aids will show up well and the set-up will be smooth. Hopefully those things and the first two speeches will help my confidence for the next speech and I won’t seem as tense and anxious, but I’ll also try some meditation techniques to prepare myself.