**Speech Feedback: How to give feedback to others?**

As you enhance your ability to effectively listen to messages and identify rhetorical strategies, you may be asked to evaluate other people’s speeches and provide feedback. When you’re invited to critique your classmates, your feedback will be more effective if you keep the following general principles in mind. Because the word **criticism means “to judge or discuss,”** to **criticize a speech is to discuss the speech**— identifying both **its strengths and those aspects that could be improved**. Effective criticism stems from developing a genuine interest in the speaker, not from seeking to find fault.

1. **Be Descriptive**. In a neutral way, describe what you saw the speaker doing. Act as a mirror for the speaker to help him or her identify gestures and other nonverbal signals of which he or she may not be aware. (If you and the speaker are watching a videotape of the speech together, you can point out these behaviors.) Avoid providing only a list of your likes and dislikes; describe what you observe.

*Effective: Stan, I noticed that about 50 percent of the time you maintained direct eye contact with your listeners.*

*Less Effective: Your eye contact was lousy.*

1. **Be Specific.** When you describe what you see a speaker doing, be precise enough so the speaker has a clear image of your perceptions. Saying that a speaker had “poor delivery” doesn’t give him or her much information—it’s only a general evaluative comment. Be as specific and thoughtful as you can.

*Effective: Dawn, the use of color in your PowerPoint slides helped to keep my attention. Less Effective: I liked your visuals.*

1. **Be Positive.** Begin and end your feedback with positive comments. Beginning with a negative comment immediately puts the speaker on the defensive and can create so much internal noise that he or she stops listening. Starting and ending with positive comments engenders less defensiveness. Some teachers call this approach the feedback sandwich. First, tell the speaker something he or she did well. Then share a suggestion or two that may help the speaker improve the presentation. End your evaluation with another positive comment or restate what you liked best about the presentation

*Effective: Gabe, your opening statistic was effective in catching my attention. You also maintained direct eye contact when you delivered it. Your overall organizational pattern would have been clearer to me if you had used more signposts and transition statements. Or perhaps you could use a visual aid to summarize the main points in the body of your speech. You did a good job of summarizing your three points in your conclusion. I also liked the way you ended your speech by making a reference to your opening statistics.*

*Less Effective: I got lost in the body of your speech. I couldn’t figure out what your major ideas were. I also didn’t know when you made the transition between the introduction and the body of your speech. Your intro and conclusion were good, but the organization of the speech was weak.*

1. **Be Constructive**. Give the speaker suggestions or alternatives for improvement. It’s not especially helpful to rattle off a list of things you don’t like without offering some ideas for improvement. As a student of public speaking, your comments should reflect your growing skill and sophistication in the speechmaking process.

*Effective: Jerry, your speech had several good statistics and examples that suggest you spent a lot of time researching your topic. I think you could add credibility to your message if you shared your sources with the listener. Your vocal quality was effective, and you had considerable variation in your pitch and tone, but at times the speech rate was a little fast for me. A slower rate would help me catch some of the details in your message. Less Effective: You spoke too fast. I had no idea whom you were quoting.*

1. **Be Sensitive.** “Own” your feedback by using I-statements rather than you statements. An I-statement is a way of phrasing your feedback so that it is clear that your comments reflect your personal point of view. “I found my attention drifting during the body of your speech” is an example of an I-statement. A you-statement is a less sensitive way of describing someone’s behavior by implying that the other person did something wrong. “You didn’t summarize well in your conclusion” is an example of a you-statement. A better way to make the same point is to say, “I wasn’t sure I understood the key ideas you mentioned in your conclusion.” Here’s another example:

*Effective: Mark, I found myself so distracted by your gestures that I had trouble focusing on the well-organized message.*

*Less Effective: Your gestures were distracting and awkward.*

1. **Be Realistic.** Provide usable information. Offer feedback about aspects of the presentation that the speaker can improve rather than about those things he or she cannot control. Maybe you have heard this advice: “Never try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time. It doesn’t sound pretty. And it annoys the pig.” Saying “You’re too short to be seen over the lectern,” “Your lisp doesn’t lend itself to public speaking,” or “You looked nervous” is not constructive. Comments of this kind will only annoy or frustrate the speaker because they refer to things the speaker can’t do much to change. Concentrate on behaviors over which the speaker has some control.

*Effective: Taka, your closing quote was effective in summarizing your key ideas, but it didn’t end your speech on an uplifting note. Another quote from Khalil Gibran that I’ll share with you after class would also summarize your key points and provide a positive affirmation of your message. You may want to try it if you give this speech again.*

*Less Effective: Your voice isn’t well suited to public speaking. As you provide feedback, whether in your public-speaking class or to a friend who asks you for a reaction to his or her speech, remember that the goal is to offer descriptive and specific feedback that will help a speaker build confidence and skill.*