



Book The Articulate Executive

Learn to Look, Act, and Sound Like a Leader

Granville N. Toogood
McGraw-Hill, 1996

Recommendation

Granville N. Toogood is a top executive communications expert, an established speaker (who used to be a TV reporter and network news producer), trainer, and writer, so he draws upon a vast amount of useful and successful tips for anyone interested in becoming a top-notch communicator. Although this book is written in a conversational, accessible style, you won't find any fluff and filler, just on-target training. He covers planning your talk, speech, or presentation; your delivery and appearance; and pitfalls to avoid. He tells you how to deal with visual aids, Q&A sessions, and even the media. The author stresses that the book's instructions can make anyone an effective and dazzling conversationalist, not just a great speechmaker, though both are well-rewarded skills. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to every professional, on every level, and to those who would like to excel as communicators.

Take-Aways

- The ability to make an articulate, interesting and successful verbal presentation is essential for executives and non-executives alike.
- Great leaders excel in competence, clarity, and communication.
- A good speaker evaluates, interprets, translates, and projects.
- Presentations should be in conversational language and should have good examples, a single theme, a strong start, and a strong ending.
- Using the POWER formula, P is punch, a strong beginning; O is one
- Shape fear and anxiety into a tool that you can put to good use.
- If you plan to speak from a prepared text, write like you speak.
- Design your speech so that you have some variety at the 18-minute point where an audience's attention span slumps.
- When being interviewed, focus on what you want to get across.
- Don't overuse visual aids.

Summary

The Speaking Game

The ability to make an articulate, interesting, successful verbal presentation - whether it's a ten-minute pitch in a meeting or a one-hour speech in an auditorium - is essential for executives and non-executives alike. Those who are serious about their careers have to be able to speak effectively in interviews, meetings, pitches, presentations, lectures, and other assorted communications.

“A very good speaker knows how to use silence to his or her advantage.”

To look, sound, and act more "like someone worth listening to," think of speaking as an opportunity, and not something to fear. Consider it a challenging, fun, and productive activity that, like a sport or game, involves knowledge and skills, whether natural, learned, or practiced. It also takes good timing and the right moves. Public speaking is an opportunity to share your thoughts and ideas, and to gain advantage in any professional setting. Articulate people who are comfortable speaking to others, even just in conversation, will always do better professionally. Great leaders excel in three areas that combine to create super-competence: competence, clarity, and communications. Communication skill can make or break a professional, particularly a leader. "Those who talk well thrive. Those who talk best lead."

“Fear is the mind's wake-up call.”

Today's business environment relies heavily on communication (and not just e-mail). Communication is now of utmost importance at all levels. Now, everyone is talking, and in areas that combine the social with the professional. As a professional or an executive, you talk to customers, employees, peers, the media, team groups, classrooms, committees, panels, analysts, associates, boards, industry groups, associations, civic groups, and many other audiences, from one person to many millions. The best speakers are seen as leaders because:

- They have charisma and a point of view.
- What they have to say is valuable because they take a position.
- They know how to translate situations into positions.
- To back up those positions, they present evidence, then a course of action.
- They speak simply, but eloquently. They have conviction and believe their message.
- They anticipate and can answer questions or objections before anyone even raises them.

“The only way you can ever be a leader is to learn to speak effectively.”

To be an effective speaker, understand your audience and identify their needs. Appeal to them by selling them your personality and by touching their emotions and basic needs. The needs you address, either directly or by implication, will vary depending upon the purpose of your communication. An employer interviewing you has different needs than a client you are pitching or a convention audience you are addressing.

Organization, Writing, and Presentation

A good speaker evaluates, interprets, translates, and projects. When you organize your presentation, assemble the relevant data. Align the facts so they all point in the same direction and use them to tell a story. Assign added value to your message by projecting the information into a probable future reality. After you've determined your audience's needs, use logic to appeal directly to those needs. Use conversational language and vivid examples. Your presentation should have a single theme, a strong start, and a strong ending.

Use the POWER formula

The power formula is an anagram for the elements of a strong speech:

- P stands for Punch, a very strong beginning that can be achieved by stating your ending or conclusion first; telling a personal

story that makes an important, relevant point, and using anecdotes as verbal illustrations or analogies. Start with a quotation or a rhetorical question. Look into the future or the past. And, use humor if you can.

- O stands for one. That means having one theme. You may talk about as many things as you like, but they should all relate in some way to just one theme.
- W stands for windows, examples that provide ways to see inside your message. Examples are the specifics of your message. Give the audience many particulars to remember.
- E stands for ear, which means speak conversationally. You will always be at your best when you're just being yourself. A speech is an enlarged conversation, even though you're the only one talking.
- R stands for Retention. To get the audience to retain what they've heard, have a strong ending. You can do this by returning to the beginning or by summarizing your key point or points. Ask the audience to do something - cooperate, support, vote, present ideas, make donations, raise funds, or consider changes. Your strong ending can also appeal to the positive side of the issue, look to the future, or relate a story that illustrates your theme.

Write the Way You Speak

If you will be speaking from a written text, write it in a conversational style, following these guidelines:

- Use short sentences, strong verbs, and a conversational vocabulary.
- Use active - not passive - voice, which keeps the "actor" in the action.
- Avoid archaic language, confusing terms, and excess statistics.
- Avoid buzzwords. You don't "interface" with your staff, you talk to them.
- Be specific and use concrete images, not broad generalities.
- Avoid "peacock" language. Use the simple, unembellished truth without superlatives, exaggeration, or puffed-up images.
- Use careful grammar to avoid common language mistakes. Be sure your subjects and verbs agree. One item or person requires a singular verb, more than one requires the plural.

Delivery

To get over any fear of speaking in public, develop a feeling of good will toward your audience. Concentrate on your message. Remember that you know your subject as well as or better than, anyone else in the room. Have fun and pump yourself up. Don't fall into the trap of a poorly designed presentation. For a well-designed presentation, don't speak too long, don't use too many visual aids, don't include too much detail, and don't have too many themes. Have one major theme. Try to appear comfortable; avoid nervous behaviors.

The Eighteen-Minute Wall

After eighteen minutes, an audience's attention span drops. If your speech or presentation must go beyond eighteen minutes (and most do), design it so that you can energize the audience with something at that point - a Q&A session, a video tape, a story - before returning to "just speaking."

Capturing the Audience

At home, practice boiling your presentation down to three minutes, then two, then one, then twenty seconds, ten seconds, and finally eight seconds. When you can sum it up in only eight seconds, that's your theme. If you have trouble defining your theme, this exercise will help. It will also help you prepare a crisp presentation.

“Say it with clout, with just short of a shout.”

Practice getting to your point quickly, so that when you write your text you introduce your theme as soon as possible. Be aware of momentum. Avoid slow areas that can drag down your delivery and bore your audience. Be conscious of the rhythm and pacing of your voice. Do not speak in a monotone. Keep the energy flowing by building up as you go along. You can use silence effectively before you begin your presentation - it captures the audience right away.

Your Image and Body Language

Look, sound, and be natural. Use your hands to bring your talk alive. Dress for the particular level of formality or informality of the occasion, location, purpose, and audience. Make plenty of eye contact when reading from a prepared text.

Visual Aids

"Overheads, slides, and computer-generated displays are probably the most overused and misunderstood aspect of communications in business. They are almost universally used incorrectly." Don't completely darken the room or turn your visuals on immediately. Don't use transparencies that are mostly words. Your visuals should match your presentation but they should not dominate it. Even with visuals, you need a theme and good examples. Keep speaking, whether a visual is on or not, but don't make your presentation too long.

Using Presentation Books in a Meeting

In a meeting, when using a notebook that contains elements of your presentation (and everyone in the meeting has a copy), don't begin or end with the book. A book to be used in a meeting should have only graphics, illustrations, and schematics. You don't want people reading text while you are talking. You can provide a separate presentation book that includes text for people to take with them after your speech. As you are speaking, "roll-in" to the next item. Introduce your next graphic before you turn the page.

The Art of Q&A

When doing a question and answer session (Q&A), be alert. Don't be caught off guard by tough questions. Use the questions to further your own agenda, make points, and reinforce your speech. Don't answer too quickly, but do get to the point. Tell the truth. Don't be evasive. Your attitude is important: stay cool, sincere, and concise. Beware of questions based on incorrect information. Avoid saying "no comment" or prolonging the session. And tape it, so you can refer back to it later.

Dealing with the Media

The media can be very helpful to you, but you must be very careful. Consider yourself "on the air" or "on the record" the minute you walk into the studio or begin a conversation with a reporter. Don't say anything you do not want made public. Assume the microphones are always on, before, after and during the show, and even during commercials. Don't say anything you wouldn't want broadcast, in case a microphone is left on by mistake.

“Visual aids often dominate presentations at the expense of the presenter.”

Focus on what you're trying to get across, not how "you're doing" during the interview. Your commitment will show; be yourself and you'll do fine. If you are going on a television or radio talk show, learn about the show and the interviewer ahead of time. Know what you're getting into. When you are being interviewed, be positive and enthusiastic. Use clear, instructive, non-bureaucratic, conversational language. Provide good examples and plan great quotes in advance. Listen carefully. Be on the alert for "loaded" questions or ones that are based on false, misleading, or hostile premises. If you are pressed too hard, question the interviewer and defuse loaded questions. Don't be afraid to use apt personal references or to change your mind about an issue.

About the Author

Granville N. Toogood is a top executive communications expert, as well as an established speaker, trainer, and writer. Prior to starting his own company in 1982, he was a TV reporter and network news producer for NBC and ABC. He now works with dozens of blue-chip clients and has been a consultant to 38 of the Fortune 50 CEOs, as well as thousands of senior executives, elected officials throughout the world. This book is based on his corporate workshops in executive communications.
