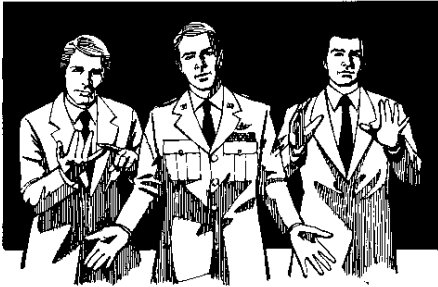


## PRESENTING A TALK

Although preparing a talk can be laborious, for many persons the hardest part is the actual presentation of the talk. Questions speakers most often ask are: How many notes should I use? How can I overcome nervousness? What kind of physical behavior is appropriate for me to use when I speak? What if my voice isn't suited to speaking before a group? How can I project sincerity and enthusiasm? Answers to these questions will provide the content for this chapter.



### METHODS OF PRESENTATION

Speakers can use one of four common methods for presentation: (1) speaking from memory, (2) reading from manuscript, (3) speaking impromptu with no specific preparation, and (4) speaking extemporaneously with, ideally, a great deal of preparation and a limited number of notes. The fourth method usually allows us the most freedom in adjusting to an audience as we speak and is best suited for almost all speaking in the Air Force.

#### Memorizing

Speaking from memory is the poorest method of delivering talks, and it should be used very sparingly or not at all. While this method may seem to be helpful for persons who cannot think on their feet, the memorized talk is a straitjacket. Such a talk cannot be adapted to the immediate situation or audience reactions. In other words, it does not allow the speaker to adjust to the particular situation. Moreover, the method is almost sure to destroy spontaneity and a sense of communication. The method also requires an inordinate amount of preparation, and the danger of forgetting is ever present.

#### Manuscript Reading

Reading a talk from a manuscript allows for planning the exact words and phrases to use. But the disadvantages of this method of presentation far outweigh the advantages. Many speakers use the manuscript as a crutch instead of fully thinking through the ideas in the talk. All too often the written talk is regarded simply as an essay to be read aloud. Therefore, the talk is too broad and has language that is too abstract to be understood when presented orally.

If you must read from a manuscript, consider the following suggestions:

#### Prepare the manuscript.

- Spoken words should be simpler, clearer, and more vivid than writing.
- Sentences should be shorter and ideas less complex than in writing.

- Transitions between thoughts and ideas need to be clear. Provide signposts to keep the audience from getting lost.
- Use repetition to emphasize main ideas and key points.
- Use direct address when speaking about people. Personal pronouns such as *I, we, our, us, you*, are better than *they, people, a person, the reader, the hearer*.
- Use concrete language where possible. Follow abstract or complicated reasoning with specific examples, comparisons, and definitions.

#### Prepare a reading draft.

- Use as large a type as possible. Special type two or three times larger than ordinary will greatly enhance visibility.
- Double or triple space to make the words stand out more clearly and reduce chance for confusion or misreading of the text.
- Type on only one side of the paper to facilitate handling.
- Mark your manuscript, perhaps using vertical lines between words where you wish to pause. Underscore words you want to emphasize. Some speakers use double and triple vertical lines or underlining for added emphasis.
- Mark places in the manuscript where you plan to use visual aids.
- Use short paragraphs to reduce the chance of losing your place.
- Some speakers vary the length of line according to meaning.

#### Practice the talk.

- Read the talk aloud to see how it sounds. Recording yourself on a cassette recorder and listening to the playback will help you to discover places where you may not be communicating effectively.
- Read and reread the talk several times, perhaps once a day for several days if you have time.
- Try to make your talk sound like conversation, as if you were thinking the words for the first time as you read them.
- Avoid combinations of words that are difficult to say. Make necessary changes on the manuscript.
- Practice looking at your audience most of the time as the manuscript becomes more familiar to you.
- Provide the punctuation with vocal inflection, variety, and pauses.

#### Presenting the talk.

Use one of two methods for handling the manuscript. (1) Hold the manuscript in front of you with one hand high enough so that you can see it without bending your head, but not high enough to hide your face. The other hand will be free to turn pages and gesture. (2) Place the manuscript on a speaker's stand or table so that both hands are free to gesture. Make sure, however, that the manuscript is placed high enough to read from without bending over. Sometimes books or other objects may be used to raise the manuscript to the desired height. Whichever method is used, remember to *let the eyes, not the head, drop to the paper*.

- Don't explain why you choose to read the talk. If you have prepared well, you should do a good job and no apologies will be necessary.
- Be willing to change the wording here and there as you go along if it will help you communicate ideas to your hearers. These changes will make delivery more conversational.

- Insert comments of up to a sentence or two in length to add variety, but be careful not to deviate so far from the manuscript that your train of thought is interrupted. You

should have carefully thought through and prepared the manuscript. Last minute changes and impromptu asides can be confusing both for you and your hearers.

- Be flexible enough so that you can shorten the talk if necessary.
- Let pauses be dictated by ideas. Pause wherever there would normally be a pause in the same language in informal conversation. You will need to pause often, even when the written punctuation does not dictate a pause.
- Concentrate on the meaning and ideas rather than on individual words. If you have written your own talk, you are intimate with the ideas and the words you chose to express them. You built the talk, you should understand it. Therefore, the most helpful aid to good delivery is to recreate the feeling that helped you put the words on paper. Speak no passage until its meaning hits your mind.
- Construct the next idea in your mind before uttering it.
- Read with all the sincerity, enthusiasm, directness, and force that is proper to the occasion.
- Use gestures and look directly at the audience when executing them.

A manuscript talk, then, is not, as someone once said, merely "an essay on its hind legs." The manuscript should be written in a conversational tone rather than formal English. It is meant to be heard, not read. If you prepare well, practice diligently, and attend to factors of delivery, you can usually read very acceptably and spontaneously.

## **Impromptu**

Speaking impromptu requires a tremendous amount of skill and knowledge. You may find it necessary at times to talk on the spur of the moment without any preparation. But this method should be used only by experienced speakers who are saturated with their subjects and who have the ability to organize their thoughts for learning as they speak. Even these experienced speakers fall back upon thoughts and phrases they have used before. They have spent years, so to speak, in preparing to give an unprepared talk.

## **Extemporaneous**

The technique effective speakers use most widely, extemporaneous speaking, produces the most fruitful results when it is based upon full preparation and adequate practice. The talk is carefully planned and outlined in detail. The speaker's only guide is usually a well-constructed outline. It is a lesson planned idea by idea rather than word by word.

The advantages of speaking from a well-planned outline are many. The method compels speakers to organize ideas and puts pressure on them to weigh materials in advance. It gives freedom to adapt a talk to the occasion and to adjust to audience reactions. It enables speakers to change what they plan to say right up to the moment of utterance. In short, the extemporaneous method will permit the speaker to adhere to the two vital needs of effective speaking: adequate preparation and a lively sense of communication.

You may want to prepare two versions of the outline. One version will be very complete—almost in manuscript form—so you can return to it several weeks or months later if you are called upon to give a similar talk. Another version will be much briefer—perhaps only one page long, or written on cards so you can use it when you actually give your talk. This brief outline may be thought of as a *keyword* outline with keywords and key phrases to remind you of main

points, subpoints, support material you plan to use, questions you might ask, and the things you want to mention in the introduction and conclusion.

## Keyword Outline

The keyword outline should be divided into three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. As discussed previously, the introduction may have three subparts: attention, motivation, and overview. The body will have the main points of the talk as major subdivisions. The conclusion may have three subdivisions: final summary, remotivation, and closure.

**Symbol System.** To show the relative importance of lesson materials in the body of the lesson, you might use a number or letter symbol before each entry. Figure 2 gives an example. But some rules of outlining to remember are:

1. Only one symbol should be used per point or idea.
2. Subordinate points should be indented.
3. The principle of subpoints or subordination means that a point follows logically or supports the point above it.

A tentative outline for a talk on nonverbal communication was presented in chapter 2. Consider how that outline might be revised once you have collected all of your material. As you can see from the keyword outline, the speaker plans to seek the audience's attention by using a familiar quotation—"actions speak louder than words"—and then use an example about a "dinner jacket." The speaker plans to provide motivation by giving testimony from an expert concerning the amount of the message that is communicated nonverbally. Then the speaker plans to use a visual aid—an overview chart—that outlines the main points of the talk.

The two main points—know the performance factors of nonverbal communication and know the nonperformance factors of nonverbal communication—are arranged topically. The subpoints under the first main point (upper body, middle body, and lower body) are arranged spatially—from top to bottom. Each of the subsubpoints (head-eyes-facial expression; arms-hands-torso; hips-legs-feet) are also arranged spatially—from top to bottom.

The subpoints under main point 2 (objects, space, and time) are arranged topically. The subsubpoints under objects are arranged according to time, and subsubpoints under space seem to be arranged topically.

Notice also that the speaker has written keywords not only for main points, subpoints, and subsubpoints but also has written enough down to remember the support that will be used. Some speakers also like to write in their suggested transitions. While writing of the transitions may inhibit spontaneity, the practice is often preferable to having weak or no transitions.

Obviously, when preparing your notes for your talk you will want to use what works best for you. This sample outline is only intended as a possible way of preparing your notes.

Sample Keyword Outline

## **NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Attention: "Actions speak louder than words" (dinner jacket example).

Motivation: Dr Ray Birdwhistle (65 percent of message communicated nonverbally).

Importance—jobs, family, church, clubs.

Overview: Chart listing main points and first-level subpoints.

### **BODY**

1. Know the performance factors of nonverbal communication.

a. Upper Body (importance capitalized on by F.D.R.).

(1) Head.

- (a) Theory of origin of head gesture.
- (b) Cultural differences.

(2) Eyes (very important).

- (a) Show interest in others (blind student example).
- (b) Nonverbal feedback (cultural differences).
- (c) Increase credibility (describe University of Missouri studies).

(3) Facial Expression.

- (a) Affect displays (read quote on expression).
- (b) Affect recognition (use everyday examples).

b. Middle Body.

- (1) Arms (demonstrate how we use them).
- (2) Hands (primary means of gesturing).

(a) Compare meanings from different cultures (okay and victory signs).

(b) Demonstrate use of hands.

(3) Torso (demonstrate shoulder, chest, stomach—belly dancer example).

c. Lower Body.

(1) Hips (Elvis example).

(2) Legs (compare with foundation of building).  
(3) Feet (show different angles).

2. Know the nonperformance factors of nonverbal communication.

a. Objects.

(1) Present (clothes, home, office).  
(2) Past (things we have constructed—former home example).

b. Space.

(1) Personal.

(a) Stress cultural differences (contrast US with Korea, Turkey, etc.).  
(b) Space bubble (example of waiting for a bus or in a line).  
(c) Acceptable distance (cite statistics by Hall).

(2) Constructed (office arrangement, fences, etc.).

c. Time (humorous definition from *Esquire*, Wetumpka example).

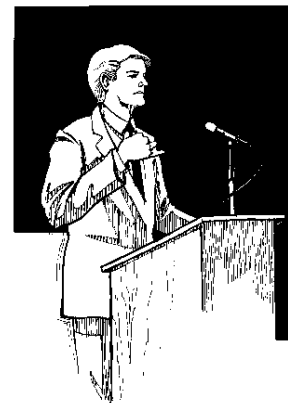
**CONCLUSION**

Final Summary: Mention main points.

Remotivation: Stress importance of nonverbal to each person.

Closure: Tell humorous story of how deaf man solved problems;  
challenge listeners to do likewise.

Figure 2



## Nervousness

If you suffer from stage fright, nervousness, or fear of speaking, your audience may also become uneasy or anxious. Yet some nervousness is both natural and desirable. Even skilled speakers often experience the queasy feeling of "butterflies in the stomach" as they prepare to speak. The secret is to get the butterflies "flying in formation," through practice. Just as a visiting athletic team practices on a field before game time to accustom themselves to differences in terrain and environment, so you may need to dry run or practice your talk several times, preferably in the room where the talk will be given, before actually presenting

it. Practice reminds us to look up the pronunciation of a word that is new or check an additional piece of information on an important point.

### **Suggestions for Nervous Speakers**

Consider the following suggestions for coping with nervousness.

1. Enthusiasm is the key when practice is over and you are ready to deliver the talk. At times you may talk on subjects that you find dull, but as you get more involved, the subject becomes more interesting. There is no such thing as a dull subject, only dull speakers. It is important to be enthusiastic about your subject, because enthusiasm can replace fear. And the more enthusiastic you are about the subject, the more involved the audience will be both with you and what you are saying.
2. Hold good thoughts toward your audience. The listeners in the audience are the same ones that you enjoy speaking with in a less structured environment. Most audiences are made up of warm human beings with an interest in what you have to say. They rarely boo or throw vegetables. Most listeners have great empathy for speakers and want them to do a good job.
3. Do not rush as you begin to speak. Many speakers are so anxious to get started that they begin before they are really ready. The little extra time taken to arrange your notes will generally pay big dividends. When you are ready to begin, look at various parts of the audience, take a deep breath, and begin to speak.

### **Physical Behavior**

Communication experts tell us that over half of our meaning may be communicated nonverbally. Although nonverbal meaning is communicated through vocal cues, much meaning is carried by the physical behaviors of eye contact, bodily movement, and gestures. You need to know how these physical behaviors can improve your speaking skill.

### **Eye Contact**

Eye contact is one of the most important factors of nonverbal communication. Nothing will enhance your delivery more than effective eye contact with your audience. Eye contact is important for three reasons. *First*, it lets the listeners know that you are interested in them. Most people like others to look at them when talking. *Second*, effective eye contact allows you to receive nonverbal feedback from your audience. With good eye contact, you can gauge the effect of your remarks. You can determine if you are being understood and which points are making an impact and which are not. You will be able to detect signs of poor understanding and signs that the listeners are losing interest. Then you can adjust your rate of delivery or emphasis. You can rephrase or summarize certain points or add more supporting data. *Third*, effective eye contact enhances your credibility. Speakers with the greatest eye contact are judged by listeners as being more competent.

To achieve genuine eye contact, you must do more than merely look in the direction of your listeners. You must have an earnest desire to communicate with them. The old advice of looking over the tops of your listeners' heads or attempting to look at all parts of the audience systematically simply does not describe effective eye contact. Furthermore, looking at only one part of the audience or directing attention only to those listeners who seem to give you reinforcing feedback may cause you to ignore large parts of the audience. Make it evident to each person in a small group and each part of the audience in larger auditoriums that you are

interested in them as individuals and eager to have them understand the ideas you are presenting. In this way you will establish mental as well as sensory contact with your listeners.

Effective eye contact can be described as *direct* and *impartial*. You look directly into the eyes of your listeners, and you look impartially at all parts of the audience, not just at a chosen few.

## **Body Movement**

Body movement is one of the important factors of dynamic and meaningful physical behavior. Good body movement is important because it catches the eye of the listener. It helps to hold the attention needed for good communication. But movement can also represent a marked departure or change in your delivery pattern—a convenient way of punctuating and paragraphing your message. Listeners will know that you are finished with one idea or line of thought and ready to transition to the next. Finally, aside from its effects on the listeners, movement helps you as a lecturer. It helps you work off excess energy that can promote nervousness. Movement puts you at ease.

How much movement is desirable? Some speakers never move yet are quite effective. However unless the formality of the situation or the need to use a fixed microphone keeps you in one position, then you probably should move frequently. Movement from behind the lectern can reduce the psychological distance between you and your listeners and place them more at ease. Some speakers feel that they need the lectern to hold their notes. But in most cases it is actually more effective if you carry your notes with you rather than looking down at the lectern to see them. But whenever you look at your notes, remember to *drop your eyes not your head*. In other words, have your notes high enough that you can see them.

Of course, some speakers move too much. Perhaps out of nervousness they pace back and forth in front of the audience. Still others have awkward movement that does not aid communication. Some leave their notes on the lectern then move in and out from behind it like a hula dancer. Others plant their feet firmly in one place then rock from one side to the other in regular cadence.

Effective body movement can be described as *free* and *purposeful*. You should be free to move around in front of the listeners. You should not feel restrained to stay behind the lectern but should move with reason and purpose. Use your movement to punctuate, direct attention, and otherwise aid communication.

## **Gestures**

Gestures may be used to clarify or emphasize ideas. By gestures we mean the purposeful use of the hands, arms, shoulders, and head to reinforce what is being said. Fidgeting with a paper clip, rearranging and shuffling papers, and scratching your ear are not gestures. They are not purposeful and they distract from the verbal message. Placing both hands in your pockets, or behind your back, or in front of you in a fig leaf position severely limits their use for gesturing. Holding your shoulders and head in one position during the talk will also rob you of an effective means of strengthening your communication.

Although gestures can be perfected through practice, they will be most effective if you make a conscious effort to relax your muscles before you speak, perhaps by taking a few short steps or unobtrusively arranging your notes. Effective gestures are complete and vigorous. Many speakers begin to gesture, but perhaps out of fear, they do not carry through and their gestures abort. Comedians get laughs from the audience by timing gestures improperly. A gesture that comes after the word or phrase is spoken appears ludicrous. Good gestures

should come exactly at the time or slightly before the point is made verbally. Poor timing results from attempting to "can" or preplan gestures. Finally, good gestures are versatile. A stereotyped gesture will not fit all subjects and situations. Furthermore, the larger the audience, the more pronounced the gestures will need to be. As with all aspects of communication, gestures must fit the situation.

You should not adopt a dynamic, forceful mode of delivery if by nature you are quiet and reserved. As with movement, gestures should spring from within. Effective gestures are both *natural* and *spontaneous*. Observe persons talking with each other in a small group. You should try to approximate the same naturalness and spontaneity of gestures when you are speaking.

## **Use of Voice**

A good voice has three important characteristics. It is reasonably pleasant, it is easily understood, and it expresses differences in meaning. Technically we might label these three properties as quality, intelligibility, and variety.

### **Quality**

Quality refers to the overall impression a voice makes on others. Certainly a pleasing quality or tone is a basic component of a good speaking voice. Some persons have a full rich quality, others one that is shrill and nasal, and still others may have a breathy and muffled tone or quality. Although basic aspects of quality may be difficult to change, your voice may become more breathy when you are excited, tense when suspense is involved, and resonant when reading solemn language. Listeners can often tell from the voice if the speaker is happy, angry, sad, fearful, or confident. Similarly vocal quality can convey sincerity and enthusiasm. Some speakers are overly concerned about the basic quality of their voices, but at the same time they pay too little attention to the effect of attitude and emotion on the voice. Most people have reasonably pleasant voices that are suitable for speaking.

### **Intelligibility**

Intelligibility or understandability of your speech depends on several factors.

1. Articulation refers to the precision and clarity with which sounds of speech are uttered. A synonym of articulation is enunciation. Good articulation is chiefly the job of the jaw, tongue, and lips. Most articulation problems result from laziness of the tongue and lips or failure to open the mouth wide enough. You should over articulate rather than under articulate your speech sounds. What sounds like over articulation to you will come out as crisp, understandable words and phrases to your listeners.

2. Pronunciation refers to the traditional or customary utterance of words. Standards of pronunciation differ, making it difficult at times to know what is acceptable. Dictionaries are useful, but as they become outdated, they should not be adhered to excessively. Generally, educated people in your community as well as national radio and television announcers provide a good standard for pronunciation. Common faults of pronunciation are to misplace the accent (saying *de-vice* instead of *de-vice*), to omit sounds (guh/mnt for government), to add sounds (athlete for athlete), and to sound silent letters (mortgage or offen). Do not overcompensate to the point that you call attention to your speech, but remember that pronunciation acceptable in informal conversation may be substandard when speaking in front of a group.

3. Vocalized pause is the name we give to syllables "a," "uh," "um," and "ah" often at the beginning of a sentence. While a few vocalized pauses are natural and do not distract, too many impede the communication process.

4. Overuse of stock expressions such as "OK," "like," and "you know" should be avoided. These expressions serve no positive communicative function and only convey a lack of originality by the speaker.

5. Substandard grammar has no place in speaking. It will only serve to reduce your credibility with some listeners. Research shows that even persons who have been using substandard grammar all of their lives can, with diligent practice, make significant gains in this area in a relatively short time.

### **Variety**

Variety is the spice of speaking. Listeners tire rapidly when listening to a speaker who doesn't vary delivery style or a speaker who has a monotonous voice. A speaker's voice that is intelligible and of good quality may still not appeal to listeners. You may vary your voice and at the same time improve the communication by considering the vocal fundamentals of rate, volume, force, pitch, and emphasis.

1. Most people speak at a rate of from 100 to 180 words a minute when presenting a talk. In normal speech, however, we vary the rate often so that even within the 100- to 180-word constraints there is much change. The temperamentally excitable person may speak at a rapid rate all the time, and the stolid person generally talks in a slow drawl. The enthusiastic but confident individual, however, will vary the rate of delivery to emphasize ideas and feelings. A slower rate may be appropriate for presenting main points, while a more rapid rate may lend itself to support material. The experienced speaker also knows that an occasional pause punctuates thought and emphasizes ideas. A dramatic pause at the proper time may express feelings and ideas even more effectively than words.

2. Volume is important to the speaker. Always be certain that all the audience can hear you. Nothing hinders the effect of a talk more than to have some listeners unable to hear. On the other hand, the talk should not be too loud for a small room. A bombastic or overly loud speaker tires listeners out very quickly.

3. Force is needed at times to emphasize and dramatize ideas. A drowsy audience will come to attention quickly if the speaker uses force effectively. At times a sudden reduction in force may be as effective as a rapid increase. By learning to control the force of your voice, you can help to add emphasis and improve communication.

4. Pitch is the highness or lowness of the voice. All things being equal, a higher pitched voice carries better than a low pitched one. On the other hand, listeners will tend to tire faster when listening to the higher pitched voice. If your voice is within normal limits—neither too high nor too low—work for variety as you speak.

5. Emphasis obviously stems from all forms of vocal variety, and any change in rate, force, or pitch will influence the emphasis. The greater or more sudden the change, the greater the emphasis will be. As a speaker you will want to use emphasis wisely. Two things should be avoided: *overemphasis* and *continual* emphasis. Be judicious. Emphasizing a point beyond its real value may cause you to lose credibility with your listeners.

## **Sincerity**

Ironically, one of the most important points to be discussed in this chapter can be covered with just a few words. A speaker certainly needs to prepare well and possess strong delivery skills to do an effective job in front of a group. But something more is needed. To be really effective, a speaker must be sincere. So long as you obviously try to generate light and not merely heat, listeners will be amazingly tolerant of weaknesses in both preparation and delivery. But give them a chance to suspect your sincerity, and you lose effectiveness. And once lost, effectiveness is nearly impossible to regain. What is sincerity? Sincerity may be defined as a state of appearing to be without deceit, pretense, or hypocrisy—a state of honesty, truthfulness, and faithfulness.

Sincerity toward your listeners is reflected in your eye contact, enthusiasm, and concern about audience members as individuals. Sincerity toward the subject is judged by whether or not you seem involved and interested in the subject or topic of the talk. Sincerity toward self is displayed in the confidence and concern you have that you are doing the best job possible. Lack of sincerity in any of these areas will, almost certainly, directly hinder communication.