

Speech Qualities: Part 5

Q. Fluency

When in front of an audience delivering a talk, do you often grope for the right words? If so, your problem is fluency. Again, fluency is critical for maintaining the audience's attention and interest.

1. Be ready in the use of words
 - A fluent person is one who is ready in the use of words, but not glib. Fluent speech is smooth or pleasingly graceful speech that flows with ease or freedom.
2. Make the words work for you
 - Common causes for lack of fluency are lack of clear thinking, lack of preparation and a weak vocabulary. Use a dictionary when you read to build your vocabulary.
3. Avoid word whiskers
 - Word whiskers are expression such as “and-uh”, “like”, “uh”, “uhm”, etc. that tend to creep into our speech when we lack fluency. They quickly become mannerisms and can become habits that are difficult to break.

R. Conversational Quality

Do not become overly formal or “preachy”; yet you should not be too casual. The proper balance is similar to a professional conversation with a large group of people.

1. Conversational expressions used
 - Except for technical vocabulary specific to the material being presented, your speech should reflect your daily expression. Do not “put on airs”. However, a prepared talk should be an improvement over everyday speech because the ideas are more carefully thought out in advance and will come with greater fluency. Avoid the use of involved sentence structure.
2. Conversational style of delivery
 - This involves the manner or style of delivery including tone of voice, voice inflection, and naturalness of expression.
 - Opposite of oratory
 - Free of preachiness and affectation
 - Do not memorize the written talk; do not over prepare.
 - Speak to individuals in the audience (see audience contact). Think of that person as having asked a question, and then answer it.
3. Proper pronunciation
 - Incorrect pronunciation can significantly detract from the authority of your presentation, or even convey the wrong meaning. If you are unsure consult other individuals, dictionaries, and glossaries during the preparation of the talk. This seems like a small point, but it is critical to a truly professional presentation (just ask Dr. Harris about forum names sometime).

S. Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is the life of a talk. If you are not enthusiastic about your material, the audience certainly will not be. You must be convinced about the significance and validity of your material, and that the audience can benefit from it. You must select points that will be of value to the audience, and present them in such a way that they can readily appreciate the value.

1. Shown by animated delivery
 - Should be thoroughly alive in facial expression, tone of voice and manner of speaking.
 - Speak with strength and vigor, convincing but not dogmatic.
 - Do not get carried away or lose self-control. Do not be overly emotional, angry, flip, condescending, overly critical etc.
2. Appropriate to material
 - Vary the level of enthusiasm throughout the talk. If it is maintained at a high level throughout, the audience will be exhausted at the end. Scan the material a select appropriate place to vary the intensity and enthusiasm. For example, at the main points, at summaries, at the punch lines as it were.

T. Warmth, Feeling

Enthusiasm originates as a result of the nature of the material. Warmth and feeling come from concern for the audience, concern that they benefit from the material.

1. Evident in facial expressions – friendly, sincere
2. Evident in tone of voice – not condescending or adversarial, calm, firm and authoritative
3. Appropriate to material – balance is the key

U. Illustrations

Illustrations are critical to good presentations. Two types of illustrations are commonly used in public presentations, those using visual aids (slide, transparency, poster, etc.) and those without such aids (verbal). The purpose of both types of illustrations is to impress meaningful pictures on the minds of the audience, and thereby, stimulate interest, highlight important ideas, and facilitate learning. Visual aids are typically used in most all professional or classroom presentations. In scientific presentations, well prepared illustrations couple intellectual and aesthetic appeal resulting in a message that is conveyed with a force that is not often possible with simple statements of fact.

Verbal illustrations can take many forms. They can be analogies, comparisons, contrasts, similes, metaphors, personal experiences, or examples. Whatever illustration is used it should be chosen because of the material, and not because it is a favorite anecdote of the speaker.

Proper use of either type of illustration is an art and preparation of visual illustrations requires a degree of artistic ability. Preparation of visual illustrations (figures) for talks or poster presentations is a topic on which numerous books have been written. These books

give rules or guidance with regard to use of colors, fonts, size, dimensions, complexity, etc. Whatever the illustration it should fit the material and the audience.

1. Fit material

a. Simple

Do not make illustrations or figures overly complex. Complex illustrations detract from the presentation and cause the audience to lose concentration and interest. Think about your own experience with such figures.

b. Application made clear

Make sure the illustration is pertinent to the point being made. Again, have you ever been to a talk where a speaker used an illustration and then you asked yourself why the speaker showed that picture or diagram. Or have you ever been to a talk where a speaker skipped over illustrations that were not really important because they were running out of time. Do not use pictures or diagrams just because you think they are pretty or cool or whatever. The one exception is the traditional sunset picture at the end of talks.

c. Important points emphasized

2. Fit audience

a. Drawn from familiar material

b. In good taste