Delivering Your Speech

What you say is your speech’s content, how you say it is your speech’s delivery.
If you and another person presented the same speech with the same words in the same order, your listeners would receive two different messages

This is so because delivery not only shapes your image as a speaker, but it also changes your message in subtle ways

Good delivery should appear to be effortless

Strong delivery can often mask weak content

However, strong delivery can bolster important, well-organized ideas and poor delivery can diminish the impact of those same ideas

Before we cover the individual elements that constitute physical and vocal delivery, let’s first consider some rules that apply to all nonverbal communication and four possible methods of delivering a speech

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is anything that you do that isn’t verbal (that isn’t words) that communicates

1. Part of our nonverbal communication is deliberate, while another part is unintentional
   Nevertheless you cannot not communicate—even the unintentional has meaning to observers/listeners

2. Few nonverbal signals have universal meanings
   Be sensitive to your audience

3. When a speaker’s verbal and nonverbal channels send conflicting messages, we tend to trust the nonverbal message

4. The message you intend may be overridden by other meanings people attach to your nonverbal communication

Methods of Delivery

Speaking Impromptu: whenever somebody calls upon us to express an opinion on some issue or someone unexpectedly asks us to “say a few words” to a group. In these informal situations people don’t usually expect us to be forceful or well-organized
Yet, the more important the speech is, the more inappropriate the impromptu method of delivery

Although impromptu speaking is excellent practice for anyone, no conscientious person will risk an important proposal, or professional advancement on an unprepared speech

**Speaking from memory:** appropriate only on rare occasions. At its best, the memorized speech allows a smooth, almost effortless-looking delivery because the speaker has neither notes nor a manuscript and can concentrate on interacting with the audience.

For most people, memorizing a speech takes too long.

Our concentration on the memory work we’ve done and our fear of forgetting part of the speech can also make us sound programmed or mechanical when reciting.

The memorized approach to delivery, then, may be most appropriate for brief speeches—such as those introducing another speaker or presenting or accepting an award.

**Speaking from a manuscript:** delivering a speech from a complete text prepared in advance

Assures that the speaker will not be at a loss for words, but is also essential in some situations

An address that will be quoted or later published

Major foreign policy speeches or state of the union addresses

There’s a premium on not being misunderstood

Speeches of tribute, commencement addresses and speeches at political conventions are often scripted

Any speaking situation calling for precise, well-worded communication may be appropriate for manuscript delivery

Having every word of your speech scripted should boost your confidence, but it does not ensure your effective delivery

When you write a manuscript it should be in an oral style

It should sound like something you would say

If you don’t take the time to practice delivering the manuscript in a fluent, conversational manner and with appropriate emphasis, well-
placed pauses, and adequate eye contact, you are preparing to fail as an effective speaker

**Speaking extemporaneously:** speaking from notes—conversation with forethought

Assuming that you have researched and organized your materials carefully and that you have adequately practiced the speech, speaking from notes offers several advantages:

You don’t have to worry about specific wording

You don’t have to worry that you’ll forget something you memorized

With your notes before you, you are free to interact with your audience in a natural conversational manner

If something you say confuses your audience, you can repeat it, explain it using other words, think of a better example to clarify it

Your language may not be as forceful and colorful as with a carefully prepared manuscript or memorized speech, but speaking from notes helps ensure that you will be natural and spontaneous

So, freedom, naturalness, and spontaneity make extemporaneous speaking particularly attractive

Your content and organization provide the reference point from which the presentation will spring

The better developed your speech is, the better the delivery will be

**When speaking from notes or a manuscript keep several things in mind:**

1. Practice with the notes or manuscript you will actually use in delivering the speech
   - Get comfortable with it/them
   - Make sure the font size works for you
   - Double or triple space a manuscript
   - Use good heavy paper for a manuscript
   - Type sentences in the upper two-thirds of the page to keep your eye contact cooking
     - You need to know where things are on the page so that you have to glance down only briefly

2. Number your note cards or the pages of your manuscript (just in case things get mixed up)
3. Determine when you should and should not look at your notes

Looking at notes to quote an authority is ok (in fact it is probably better to do this than to recite—depends on text though—a scrap of poetry—maybe reciting is better)

Do not look down when previewing, summarizing or stating your key ideas

Avoid looking down when using personal pronouns (You . . .)

A break in eye contact at these points suddenly distances you from the audience and creates the impression that the speech is coming from a script rather than you

4. Slide your notes or the pages of your manuscript rather than turning them

Less distracting—more direct and personal

As a rule you will use a lectern—do not let your audience see your notes after you put them in front of you

Also—should not have page breaks in the middle of sentences

5. Devote extra practice time to your conclusion

_The last thing you say can make a deep impression, but not if you rush through it or deliver it while gathering your notes and walking away from the lectern_

Your goal at this critical point in your speech is the same as your goal for all your delivery:

_To eliminate distractions and to reinforce your message through your body, voice, and language_

Qualities of Effective Delivery

Effective delivery helps both listeners and speakers

Your audience only has one chance to receive your message

Effective delivery can help underscore your key points, sell your ideas, and communicate your concern for the topic

The best delivery looks and feels natural, comfortable, and spontaneous

Delivery is best when the audience is not aware of it at all

_Art is that which best conceals art_
Any prescription for effective delivery will cover what you do with your body and your voice. Effective language is also important—that’s covered in Chap. 12 (remember?)

**Elements of Vocal Delivery**

**Rate and pause:**
- **Rate**: the speed at which you communicate
  - It can say something about your motives for speaking, your disposition, or your involvement with the topic

  Avoid extremely fast or slow delivery

  Use a variety of rates as you do in conversation

  For emphasis, to display enthusiasm, to make sure you’re understood, etc.

**Pauses/silences**: you pause to allow the audience to reflect on something you have just said or to heighten suspense about something you are going to say—to help ‘chunk up’ your speech where a printed page does not bound it

  Pauses also mark important transitions in your speech, helping your audience to shift gears

  Don’t vocalize your pauses with “ummm” or other filler sounds

  You can use slashes / to mark ‘beats’ or length of pauses

**Volume**: how loudly or softly you speak

  Make sure you adapt your volume to the size of the room

  Sometimes you may wish to use a microphone

  Practice with a mike beforehand so the sound of your amplified voice does not startle you

  Sometimes you may have to conquer external noise

  Again—vary your volume to fit the circumstances

  You can also use volume for emphasis and to accentuate emotional tones

**Pitch and inflection:**

- **Pitch**: highness or lowness of vocal tones
  - Every speaker has an optimal pitch range

  When you can, favor the lower tones of your normal register

  They have more ‘punch’
To practice speaking in usual tone, start out sitting and pretend a person in front of you asks you a question—then—give the answer as if it is the introduction to a speech

Now—keeping this tone, keep talking and stand up and walk to the front of a room & continue on
Now you sound just like yourself

Inflection: changes in pitch
If you speak without changing your pitch, you’re speaking in a monotone—how monotonous

Use your normal vocal variety
Focus on the meaning of what you’re saying as you say it and there’s a good chance you’ll be appropriately inflected

Inflection is an essential tool for communicating meaning accurately:
She is my friend
She is my friend
She is my friend
She is my friend
She is my friend

Five possible meanings conveyed by inflections of the same four words

Voice quality
Voice quality or timbre—the least flexible characteristic—it distinguishes your voice from other voices
If people describe your voice as characteristically strident, harsh, nasal, breathy, or hoarse over a long period of time, you may wish to consult a speech therapist

Articulation and Pronunciation

Articulation: is the mechanical process of forming the sounds necessary to communicate in a particular language.
Most articulation errors are made from habit

Articulation errors take four principal forms:
Deletion: leaving something out
Addition: adding something in
Substitution: of one sound for another
Transposition: the reversal of two sounds that are close together
**Pronunciation**: a matter of knowing how the letters of a word sound and where the stress falls

This can be a real problem with proper nouns

In many cases, if you’re in doubt about pronunciation, you can look the word up on the web and there will be a sound clip of the way to pronounce it

Check out this website: www.m-w.com

**Elements of Physical Delivery**

**Appearance**:

Grooming and the way we dress

Studies show that people we consider attractive can persuade us much more easily than those we find unattractive

High status clothing carries more authority than low-status clothing

The advice: avoid extremes in dress and grooming

*Use clothes to reinforce your purpose for speaking*—not to draw too much attention to yourself—unless—of course—there’s a rhetorical aim involved in doing so—always a judgment call

Clothing also influences our perceptions of ourselves (just as much as it influences others)

You might consider choosing what you’re going to wear the day before your speech and practicing in it

It CAN make a difference

**Posture**: the position or bearing of your body

A public speaker should look comfortable, confident and prepared to speak

Again—avoid the extremes of rigidity and sloppiness

Don’t lean on or drape yourself across the lectern

Keep your weight balanced

Avoid shuffling back and forth or rocking or standing on one leg or tapping your foot, or . . .

Get rid of annoying mannerisms

**Facial expression**: watch out for the blank mask look—use your face to project meaning—most often feeling

Your facial expressions much match what you’re saying
Concentrate as much as possible on the ideas you present and the way your audience receives and responds to them.

Try not to be overly conscious of how you look and sound.

Maintain eye contact and respond with your audience to your own message.

Your facial expressions should be varied and appropriate and reinforce your spoken words.

**Eye Contact:** use direct eye contact with as much of your audience as much of the time as you can—can carry messages of confidence, concern, sincerity, interest, and enthusiasm (and the opposite!)

Your face is the most important source of nonverbal cues as you deliver your speech.

You will glance at your notes—but—you must keep coming back to the eyes of your audience & check their understanding, interest, and evaluation of your message.

Make eye contact especially with those individuals who seem to be listening carefully and responding positively to your message.

**Movement:** effective movement benefits you, the speaker, your audience and your speech.

Place-to-place movement helps you to relax.

From the audience’s perspective movement adds visual variety to your speech.

Appropriate movement can arouse or rekindle the listeners’ interest.

Physical movement serves your speech by guiding the audience’s attention.

Through movement you can underscore your key ideas, mark major transitions, or intensify an appeal for belief or action.

Your speech starts the moment you enter the presence of your audience.

Your behavior, including your movement, sends signals about your attitudes toward the audience and your speech topic.

When your turn to speak comes, approach your speaking position confidently, knowing that you have something important to say.
Addressing a large audience with a microphone mounted on the lectern will restrict your movement.

If the lectern is there as a matter of convenience and particularly if you’re speaking to a relatively small audience, don’t automatically box yourself in behind the lectern. Even the smallest lectern puts a physical barrier between you and your audience. Moving to the side or front of it reduces the physical and psychological distance between you and your audience and may be especially helpful whenever you conclude a speech with a persuasive appeal.

Make sure that your movement is selective and that it serves a purpose. Avoid random pacing.

Movement to mark a transition should occur at the beginning or the end of a sentence, not in the middle.

Finally—bring the speech to a satisfying psychological conclusion, and pause for a second or two before gathering your materials and moving away—however—if there’s a Q&A included, try to do the same thing with the last question you answer.

**Gestures**: movements of a speaker’s hands, arms, and head

Gestures punctuate and emphasize verbal messages for the benefit of listeners, but also ease the process of encoding messages for speakers.

Gestures can replace words.

You can use gestures to draw a picture of an object, to indicate the size of objects or relationships between them, to re-create some bodily motion, to emphasize or underscore key ideas, to point to things such as presentational aids, or to trace the flow of your ideas.

If you don’t normally gesture in conversation, force yourself to gesture in public speech—as you practice your speech.

Not only do gestures reinforce your ideas and make you seem more confident and dynamic, gestures, like movement, can help you to relax.
To be effective gestures must be coordinated with your words and must appear natural and spontaneous.

Any gesture should be large enough for the audience to see it clearly.

The speaker who gestures below the waist or whose gestures are barely visible over the top of the lectern may appear timid, unsure, or nervous.

Speakers who gesture too much—who talk with their hands—may be perceived as nervous, flighty or excitable.

**The two extremes to avoid**, therefore, are the absence of gestures (hands clenched on the lectern) or excessive gestures (gestures emphasizing everything so nothing stands out).

Two generalizations:

People who are confident, relaxed and have high status tend to expand the space around them and use gestures that are wider than those of other people.

So, people who wish to appear more authoritative can do so by increasing the width of their gestures.

A wide palm-up gesture with both hands creates an openness that is entirely appropriate when a speaker is appealing for a certain belief or urging an audience to action.

A palm-down gesture with one or both hands carries more force and authority and can be used to command an audience into action or to exhort them to a certain belief.

As a speaker adapt the size of your gestures to the size of your audience.

Again—rhetoric’s two chief interests are:

**What you say**

**How you say it**

Delivery matters: When asked what the three most important rhetorical skills are Demosthenes said “Delivery, delivery, delivery.”

Take a tip from the Big D

NEVER underestimate the power of delivery—but remember—your delivery must be attuned to the audience, the occasion, the subject, and the aim of your speech.

Be flexible.
Be in tune.