

## **Elements of Rhetoric**

Workshop on Public Speaking  
by Rebekah Maggor  
Director, Program in Speaking and Learning

The following packet contains content and tipsheets on public speaking in class discussions and for oral presentations:

1. The Craft of Effective Speaking
2. Preparing Notes for Speaking
3. Engaging Your Audience: Tips on Delivery



Derek Bok Center , Harvard University

## The Craft of Effective Speaking

### CRITERIA FOR SPEECHES AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS

*To create and maintain strong communication between speaker and audience, speak from an outline or notes and avoid reading directly from your paper. Reading verbatim rarely allows the speaker to genuinely connect with the audience.*

#### **1. ORGANIZATION**

- Argument or thesis clearly introduced.
- Main points well organized.
- Main points fully supported with examples and textual evidence.
- Transitions between points clear and obvious.
- Argument and central ideas restated (reinforced).
- Counter-argument acknowledged and refuted (when applicable).
- Diction (word choice) appropriate to audience and situation.
- Language vivid and illustrative (including allusion and imagery).

#### **2. DELIVERY**

- **Volume**—*Spoke with adequate volume throughout the speech. Varied volume to emphasize important words and phrases.*
- **Pitch**—*Varied pitch to emphasize important words and phrases. Did not speak in a monotone.*
- **Pace**—*Spoke at a pace easily understandable by audience. Did not rush. Varied rate to emphasize important words and phrases.*
- **Pauses and Breath**—*Took time to breathe and pause between ideas or sentences. Paused effectively to emphasize central points, and important words.*
- **Articulation**—*Enunciated words clearly. Made effort to pronounce terms or names unfamiliar to audience with particular clarity.*
- **Eye contact**—*Made direct eye contact with numerous individuals around the entire room. Maintained strong eye contact throughout the speech.*
- **Gesture and facial expression**—*used appropriate, deliberate and natural gestures and expressions.*
- **Control of distracting physical habits or verbal tics**—*speaker avoided such distracting habits as pacing, rocking, playing with hair, or using verbal fillers such as “like” and “um”.*
- **Use of visual aids** (when applicable)—*visual aids such as slides or PowerPoint used to illustrate and strengthen points, not to restate points. Slide layouts clear and simple without too much text. Speaker maintained eye contact while using visual aids.*

#### **3. GENERAL**

- Completed speech within time limit and left adequate time for questions.
- Maintained audience attention.
- Established and maintained an appropriate tone (established credibility).
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## **Preparing Notes for Speaking**

While several of these reminders might strike you as obvious, speakers often ignore them when preparing to speak.

- Use an outline format for your notes:  
An outline helps you visually recall the structure of your talk. Placing numerals and letters by the various points in your talk also helps you distinguish main points from subordinate ones. If you indent supporting points, the outline will be easier to read while you are speaking.
- Keep the outline as brief as possible:  
Too much detail on your notes encourages you to read them to your audience. When this happens, you can't maintain eye contact with your listeners and you lose any sense of engagement with your audience. (Remember the three steps in the ball-throwing exercise: 1-Are you ready? 2-Throw the ball. 3-Did you get it? Stay engaged with your audience as you throw out your ideas.)
- Place visual cues on the outline if necessary:  
A good speaking outline includes the content of the talk as well as reminders about how you wish to proceed. You might mark certain sections of notes where you wish to pause, or to speak more slowly or loudly to achieve emphasis. You might remind yourself about when to use a visual aid. Perhaps you want to pause at particular spot to ask the audience for questions.
- Make your speaking notes legible:  
Under the stress of speaking before a group, you may suddenly be unable to decipher your own writing. You'll need to be able to read your notes at a distance -- they need to be clear and large enough for you to do so easily.
- Practice speaking with the notes you have prepared:  
That's the only way to tell for sure if your notes will make sense to you at the time you'll be giving the final presentation.

Adapted from the Mary Washington College Speaking Intensive Program

<http://www.umw.edu/spkc/resources/students/handouts/structure/suggestions.htm>

## Engaging your Audience: Tips on Delivery

### **Tip #1 – Connect with your Audience.**

*Public speaking is a dialogue between speaker and audience. Even when the audience remains mostly silent—such as during a lecture or formal presentation—it is still an exchange. Think of it like playing catch with a ball—the speaker throws out an idea or concept; the audience catches it and throws back signals in response such as nodding, taking a note, raising a hand with a question, or even looking confused or inattentive. There are three steps to throwing a ball—just as there are three crucial steps to communicating with an audience during a speech, presentation, or interview.*

**1. Are you ready? (make eye contact with your audience—prepare them for each throw throughout your talk)**

**2. Throw the ball (throw out your idea/concept to your audience).**

**3. Did you get it? (Did your idea “land”? Did the audience catch it?)**

- Public speaking is not about *you* it's about communicating your idea or message to your *audience*.
- *Be fully present in the room.* React to what is going on around you. Concentration is about *taking things in*, not about shutting things out.

### **Tip #2 – Breathe!**

- Take a deep breath before you begin your presentation and make eye contact with several people in the audience. (Are they ready?)
- **Breathe** low and deep between sentences throughout your presentation or talk. If you tend to get nervous, speak too fast, or mumble—taking regular deep breaths will help you calm down, slow down, and speak clearly and distinctly.

### **Tip #3 - Connect with your Body.**

- Remember: you speak with your entire body—not just your mouth. Stand up straight, **breathe**—energize your presence and “own the room.”
- Be conscious of your body language. What signals are you sending through your gestures, stance, and tone of voice? Do you have any distracting habits? (“Signal vs. Noise”)
- Do a physical or vocal warm-up or some sort of physical activity before you start your talk—it will help you deal with nerves and focus on the task at hand.
- Let your arms and hands rest in an open and available position—don't clasp them in front or behind you. If you are standing at a podium or sitting at a table let them rest open on the podium or on the table. If there is no podium or table let them rest at your sides. Don't worry about planning hand gestures—if you are focused on your audience and your hands are relaxed and available—when the urge for a gesture comes they will rise.

### **Tip #4 – “Speak the Speech”**

- Present important or operative words (including terminology, names, and key phrases) clearly and generously. (This is your specialty—don't assume your audience has heard these terms before).
- Vary your pitch, rate, and volume to stress these important words and phrases.
- Calibrate the volume of your voice and enunciate clearly enough to reach the people in the back of the room—the audience should be able to hear and understand you *effortlessly*.
- Keep your vocal energy up throughout the sentence—don't “trail off” at the end of sentences.
- Instead of looking down at your paper *as* the sentence is ending, stay with your audience until the very end of the sentence and “land” your idea.