

extemporaneous speech

A carefully prepared and rehearsed speech that is presented from a brief set of notes.

conversational quality

Presenting a speech so it sounds spontaneous no matter how many times it has been rehearsed.

Speaking Extemporaneously

In popular usage, “extemporaneous” means the same as “impromptu.” But technically the two are different. Unlike an impromptu speech, which is totally off-the-cuff, an extemporaneous speech is carefully prepared and practiced in advance. In presenting the speech, the extemporaneous speaker uses only a set of brief notes or a speaking outline to jog the memory (see Chapter 10). The exact wording is chosen at the moment of delivery.

This is not as hard as it sounds. Once you have your outline (or notes) and know what topics you are going to cover and in what order, you can begin to practice the speech. Every time you run through it, the wording will be slightly different. As you practice the speech over and over, the best way to present each part will emerge and stick in your mind.

The extemporaneous method has several advantages. It gives more precise control over thought and language than does impromptu speaking; it offers greater spontaneity and directness than does speaking from memory or from a full manuscript; and it is adaptable to a wide range of situations. It also encourages the conversational quality audiences look for in speech delivery. “Conversational quality” means that no matter how many times a speech has been rehearsed, it still *sounds* spontaneous to the audience. When you speak extemporaneously—and have prepared properly—you have full control over your ideas, yet you are not tied to a manuscript. You are free to establish strong eye contact, to gesture naturally, and to concentrate on talking *with* the audience rather than declaiming *to* them.

There is no better example of the power of extemporaneous delivery than Elizabeth Dole’s renowned speech to the 1996 Republican National Convention in support of her husband’s bid for the White House. Speaking to the delegates assembled in San Diego and to a national television audience, Dole broke 150 years of tradition by leaving the lectern and presenting her speech while walking among her listeners on the floor of the auditorium. Speaking extemporaneously, with no notes (and no teleprompter), she was able to break through the physical and psychological barriers that would otherwise have separated her from the audience. As numerous observers commented, it was more like listening to a conversation than to a formal speech.

Dole, of course, is one of the most accomplished speakers in the United States. You can’t be expected in your speech class to reach the same mastery that she has worked years to achieve. Yet like thousands of previous students, you can become quite adept at speaking extemporaneously by the end of the term and have a solid foundation to build on in the future. As one student commented in looking back on his speech class, “At the start, I never thought I’d be able to give my speeches without a ton of notes, but I’m amazed at how much progress I made. It’s still a bit nerve-racking to speak extemporaneously, but I’m confident I can do it, and I know I’ll connect better with the audience as a result. This is one of the most valuable things I learned in the entire class.”

Most experienced speakers prefer the extemporaneous method, and most teachers emphasize it. Later in this chapter (pages 317–318), we’ll look at a step-by-step program for practicing your extemporaneous delivery.



View excerpts from Elizabeth Dole’s speech at the Republican National Convention

The Speaker's Voice

What kind of voice do you have? Is it rich and resonant like James Earl Jones's? Thin and nasal like Willie Nelson's? Deep and raspy like Al Sharpton's? Soft and alluring like Catherine Zeta Jones's? Loud and irritating like Dick Vitale's?

Whatever the characteristics of your voice, you can be sure it is unique. Because no two people are exactly the same physically, no two people have identical voices. This is why voiceprints are sometimes used in criminal trials as guides to personal identity. The human voice is produced by a complex series of steps that starts with the exhalation of air from the lungs. (Try talking intelligibly while inhaling and see what happens.) As air is exhaled, it passes through the larynx (or voice box), where it is vibrated to generate sound. This sound is then amplified and modified as it resonates through the throat, mouth, and nasal passages. Finally, the resonated sound is shaped into specific vowel and consonant sounds by the movement of the tongue, lips, teeth, and roof of the mouth. The resulting sounds are combined to form words and sentences.

The voice produced by this physical process will greatly affect the success of your speeches. A golden voice is certainly an asset, but you can manage without. Some of the most famous speakers in history had undistinguished voices. Abraham Lincoln had a harsh and penetrating voice; Winston Churchill suffered from a slight lisp and an awkward stammer. Like them, you can overcome natural disadvantages and use your voice to the best effect. If you speak too softly to be heard, constantly stumble over words, spit out your ideas at machine-gun speed, or plod along as if you were reading a grocery list, your speeches will fail. Lincoln and Churchill learned to *control* their voices. You can do the same thing.

The aspects of voice you should work to control are volume, pitch, rate, pauses, variety, pronunciation, articulation, and dialect.

Volume

At one time a powerful voice was all but essential for an orator. Today, electronic amplification allows even a soft-spoken person to be heard in any setting. But in the classroom you will speak without a microphone. When you do, be sure to adjust your voice to the acoustics of the room, the size of the audience, and the level of background noise. If you speak too loudly, your listeners will think you boorish. If you speak too softly, they will not understand you. Remember that your own voice always sounds louder to you than to a listener. Soon after beginning your speech, glance at the people farthest away from you. If they look puzzled, are leaning forward in their seats, or are otherwise straining to hear, you need to talk louder.

volume

The loudness or softness of the speaker's voice.

Pitch

Pitch is the highness or lowness of the speaker's voice. The faster sound waves vibrate, the higher their pitch; the slower they vibrate, the lower their

pitch

The highness or lowness of the speaker's voice.

pitch. Pitch distinguishes the sound produced by the keys at one end of a piano from that produced by the keys at the other end.

In speech, pitch can affect the meaning of words or sounds. Pitch is what makes the difference between the “Aha!” triumphantly exclaimed by Sherlock Holmes upon discovering a seemingly decisive clue and the “Aha” he mutters when he learns the clue is not decisive after all. If you were to read the preceding sentence aloud, your voice would probably go up in pitch on the first “Aha” and down in pitch on the second.

inflections

Changes in the pitch or tone of a speaker's voice.

Changes in pitch are known as *inflections*. They give your voice luster, warmth, and vitality. It is the inflection of your voice that reveals whether you are asking a question or making a statement; whether you are being sincere or sarcastic. Your inflections can also make you sound happy or sad, angry or pleased, dynamic or listless, tense or relaxed, interested or bored.

monotone

A constant pitch or tone of voice.

In ordinary conversation we instinctively use inflections to convey meaning and emotion. People who do not are said to speak in a *monotone*—a trait whose only known benefit is to cure insomnia in one's listeners. Few people speak in an absolute monotone, with no variation whatever in pitch, but many fall into repetitious pitch patterns that are just as hypnotic as a monotone. You can guard against this problem by recording your speeches as you practice them. If all your sentences end on the same inflection—either upward or downward—work on varying your pitch patterns to fit the meaning of your words. As with breaking any other habit, this may seem awkward at first, but it is guaranteed to make you a better speaker.

Rate

rate

The speed at which a person speaks.

Rate refers to the speed at which a person speaks. People in the U.S. usually speak at a rate between 125 and 150 words per minute, but there is no uniform rate for effective speechmaking. Daniel Webster spoke at roughly 90 words per minute, Franklin Roosevelt at 110, John Kennedy at 180. Martin Luther King opened his “I Have a Dream” speech at a pace of 92 words per minute and finished it at 145. The best rate of speech depends on several things—the vocal attributes of the speaker, the mood she or he is trying to create, the composition of the audience, and the nature of the occasion.

For example, if you wanted to convey the excitement of the Daytona 500 car race, you would probably speak rather quickly, but a slower rate would be more appropriate to describe the serenity of the Alaskan wilderness. A fast rate helps create feelings of happiness, fear, anger, and surprise, while a slow rate is better for expressing sadness or disgust. A slower tempo is called for when you explain complex information, a faster tempo when the information is already familiar to the audience.

Two obvious faults to avoid are speaking so slowly that your listeners become bored or so quickly that they lose track of your ideas. Novice speakers are particularly prone to racing through their speeches at a frantic rate. Fortunately, once a speaker begins to work on it, this is usually an easy habit to break, as is the less common one of crawling through one's speech at a snail's pace.



The best rate of speech depends partly on the mood a speaker wants to create. To communicate the excitement of surfing, you would probably speak at a faster-than-normal rate.

The key in both cases is becoming aware of the problem and concentrating on solving it. Use a digital recorder to check how fast you speak. Pay special attention to rate when practicing your speech. Finally, be sure to include reminders about delivery on your speaking outline so you won't forget to make the adjustments when you give your speech in class.

Pauses

Learning how and when to pause is a major challenge for most beginning speakers. Even a moment of silence can seem like an eternity. As you gain more poise and confidence, however, you will discover how useful the pause can be. It can signal the end of a thought unit, give an idea time to sink in, and lend dramatic impact to a statement. "The right word may be effective," said Mark Twain, "but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause."

As Twain knew, the crucial factor is timing. "For one audience," he cautioned, "the pause will be short, for another a little longer, for another a shade longer still." Looking back on his own career as a speaker, he recalled: "When the pause was right the effect was sure; when the pause was wrong . . . the laughter was only mild, never a crash."

Developing a keen sense of timing is partly a matter of common sense, partly a matter of experience. You will not always get your pauses just right at first, but keep trying. Listen to accomplished speakers to see how they use pauses to modulate the rate and rhythm of their messages. Work on pauses when you practice your speeches.

When you do pause, make sure you pause at the end of thought units and not in the middle. Otherwise, you may distract listeners from your ideas. Most important, do not fill the silence with "uh," "er," or "um." These *vocalized pauses*, as they are called, are always annoying, and they can be devastating. Not only do they create negative perceptions about a speaker's intelligence, but they often make a speaker appear deceptive.⁵

pause

A momentary break in the vocal delivery of a speech.

vocalized pause

A pause that occurs when a speaker fills the silence between words with vocalizations such as "uh," "er," and "um."

Vocal Variety

Just as variety is the spice of life, so is it the spice of public speaking. A flat, listless, unchanging voice is just as deadly to speechmaking as a flat, listless, unchanging routine is to daily life.

Try reading this limerick aloud:

I sat next to the Duchess at tea.
It was just as I feared it would be:
Her rumblings abdominal
Were simply abominable
And everyone thought it was me!

Now recite this passage from James Joyce's "All Day I Hear the Noise of Waters":

The gray winds, the cold winds are blowing
Where I go.
I hear the noise of many waters
Far below.
All day, all night, I hear them flowing
To and fro.⁶

Certainly you did not utter both passages the same way. You instinctively varied the rate, pitch, volume, and pauses to distinguish the light-hearted limerick from the solemn melancholy of Joyce's poem. When giving a speech, you should modulate your voice in just this way to communicate your ideas and feelings.

vocal variety

Changes in a speaker's rate, pitch, and volume that give the voice variety and expressiveness.

For an excellent example of vocal variety, look at CD 1, Video 12.2. The speaker is Sajjid Zahir Chinoy, who was born and raised in Bombay, India, before coming to the United States to attend college at the University of Richmond. At the end of his senior year, Chinoy was selected as the student commencement speaker in a campuswide competition. He spoke of the warm reception he received at Richmond and of how cultural differences can be overcome by attempting to understand other people.

At the end of his speech, Chinoy received thunderous applause—partly because of what he said, but also because of how he said it. Addressing the audience of 3,000 people without notes, he spoke extemporaneously with strong eye contact and excellent vocal variety. The speech was so inspiring that the main speaker, Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles, began his presentation by paying tribute to Chinoy. "I've been to a number of commencements," said Coles, "but I've never heard a speech quite like that!"

How can you develop a lively, expressive voice? Above all, by approaching every speech as Chinoy approached his—as an opportunity to share with your listeners ideas that are important to you. Your sense of conviction and your desire to communicate will help give your voice the same spark it has in spontaneous conversation.

Diagnose your present speaking voice to decide which aspects need improvement. Record your speeches to hear how they sound. Try them out on members of your family, a friend, or a roommate. Check with your teacher



View an excerpt from Sajjid Zahir Chinoy, "Questions of Culture"

THE INTERNET *Connection*

Do you want to learn more about speech delivery? Perhaps gain additional experience after your speech class is over? You can do both by joining an organization such as Toastmasters International, which has more than 200,000 members and 10,000 clubs in 90 countries around the world. For information about Toastmasters, log on to its Web site at www.toastmasters.org.

If you are a non-native speaker of English and want to work on your skills of spoken English, you will find a number of excellent resources at the English as a Second Language student Web site (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslstudent.html>).

ONLINE LEARNING CENTER

You can link to these Web sites at www.mhhe.com/lucas9.

for suggestions. Practice the vocal variety exercise at the end of this chapter. Vocal variety is a natural feature of ordinary conversation. There is no reason it should not be as natural a feature of your speeches.

Pronunciation

We all mispronounce words now and again. Here, for example, are six words with which you are probably familiar. Say each one aloud.

genuine	err
arctic	nuclear
theater	February

Very likely you made a mistake on at least one, for they are among the most frequently mispronounced words in the English language. Let's see:

Word	Common Error	Correct Pronunciation
genuine	gen-u-wine	gen-u-win
arctic	ar-tic	arc-tic
theater	thee-ate'-er	thee'-a-ter
err	air	ur
nuclear	nu-cu-lar	nu-cle-ar
February	Feb-u-ary	Feb-ru-ary

Every word leads a triple life: it is read, written, and spoken. Most people recognize and understand many more words in reading than they use in ordinary writing, and about three times as many as occur in spontaneous speech.⁷ This is why we occasionally stumble when speaking words that are part of our reading or writing vocabularies. In other cases, we may mispronounce the most commonplace words out of habit.

pronunciation

The accepted standard of sound and rhythm for words in a given language

The problem is that we usually don't *know* when we are mispronouncing a word; otherwise we would say it correctly. If we are lucky, we learn the right pronunciation by hearing someone else say the word properly or by having someone gently correct us in private. If we are unlucky, we mispronounce the word in front of a roomful of people, who may raise their eyebrows, groan, or laugh. Even experienced speakers sometimes fall into this trap. In reporting about a recent presidential election, a local TV news anchor referred several times to the number of votes needed to capture a majority in the e-lec-tor'-e-al college. When he had finished, his coanchor said (on the air!), "And it also takes 270 votes to win a majority in the e-lec'-tor-al college." The first announcer tried to shrug it off, but he was noticeably embarrassed.

All of this argues for practicing your speech in front of as many trusted friends and relatives as you can corner. If you have any doubts about the proper pronunciation of certain words, be sure to check a dictionary.

Articulation**articulation**

The physical production of particular speech sounds.

Articulation and pronunciation are not identical. Sloppy articulation is the failure to form particular speech sounds crisply and distinctly. It is one of several causes of mispronunciation; but not all errors in pronunciation stem from poor articulation. You can articulate a word sharply and still mispronounce it. For example, if you say the "s" in "Illinois" or the "p" in "pneumonia," you are making a mistake in pronunciation, regardless of how precisely you articulate the sounds.

Errors in articulation can be caused by a cleft palate, by an overly large tongue, by a misaligned jaw, even by a poorly fitted dental plate or braces on the teeth. Serious problems require the aid of a certified speech therapist. But most of the time poor articulation is caused by laziness—by failing to manipulate the lips, tongue, jaw, and soft palate so as to produce speech sounds clearly and precisely. People in the U.S. seem particularly prone to poor articulation. We habitually chop, slur, and mumble our words, rather than enunciating them plainly.

Among college students, poor articulation is more common than ignorance of correct pronunciation. We know that "let me" is not "lemme," that "going to" is not "gonna," that "did you" is not "didja," yet we persist in articulating these words improperly. Here are some other common errors in articulation you should work to avoid:

Word	Misarticulation
ought to	otta
didn't	dint
for	fur
don't know	dunno
have to	hafta
them	em
want to	wanna
will you	wilya

If you have sloppy articulation, work on identifying and eliminating your most common errors. Like other bad habits, careless articulation can be broken only by persistent effort—but the results are well worth it. Not only will your speeches be more intelligible, but employers will be more likely to hire you, to place you in positions of responsibility, and to promote you. As Shakespeare advised, “Mend your speech a little, lest you may mar your fortunes.”

Dialect

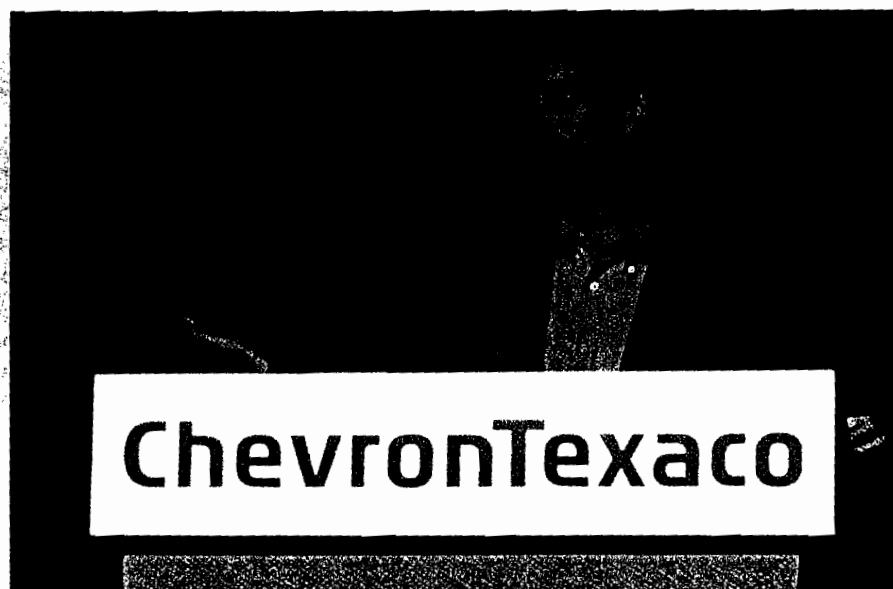
Most languages have dialects, each with a distinctive accent, grammar, and vocabulary. Dialects are usually based on regional or ethnic speech patterns. The United States has four major regional dialects—Eastern, New England, Southern, and General American. These dialects affect the way people talk in different parts of the country. In Boston people may get “idears” about “dee-ah” friends. In Alabama parents tell their children to stop “squinching” their eyes while watching television and to go clean up their rooms “rat” now. In Utah people praise the “lard” and put the “lord” in the refrigerator.⁸

There are also several well-established ethnic dialects in the United States, including Black English, Jewish English, Hispanic English, and Cajun English. In recent years we have also seen the emergence of newer dialects such as Haitian English and Cuban English. As the United States becomes more diverse culturally, it is also becoming more diverse linguistically.

Over the years linguists have done a great deal of research on dialects. They have concluded that no dialect is inherently better or worse than another. There is no such thing as a right or wrong dialect. Dialects are not linguistic badges of superiority or inferiority. They are usually shaped by our regional or ethnic background, and every dialect is “right” for the community of people who use it.

dialect

A variety of a language distinguished by variations of accent, grammar, or vocabulary.



Good speakers use a lively voice to help bring their ideas to life. They also use gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions to create a strong bond with members of the audience.

When is a given dialect appropriate in public speaking? The answer depends above all on the composition of your audience. Heavy use of any dialect—regional or ethnic—can be troublesome for a speaker when the audience does not share that dialect. In such a situation, the dialect may cause listeners to make negative judgments about the speaker's personality, intelligence, and competence. This is why professional speakers have been known to invest large amounts of time (and money) to master the General American dialect used by most television news broadcasters. This dialect has become so widely accepted throughout the United States that it is suitable for almost any audience.

Does this mean you must talk like a television news broadcaster if you want to be successful in your speeches? Not at all. Regional or ethnic dialects do not pose a problem as long as the audience is familiar with them and finds them appropriate to the occasion. When speaking in the North, for example, a southern politician will probably avoid heavy use of regional dialect. But when addressing audiences in the South, the same politician may intentionally include regional dialect as a way of creating common ground with his or her listeners.

Although not strictly speaking a matter of dialect, the proficiency of non-native speakers of English often arises in the speech classroom. Fortunately, teachers and students alike usually go out of their way to be helpful and encouraging to international students and others for whom English is not the primary language. Over the years many non-native speakers of English have found speech class a supportive environment in which to improve their proficiency in spoken English.⁹

The Speaker's Body

Imagine you are at a party. During the evening you form impressions about the people around you. Jonte seems relaxed and even-tempered, Nicole tense and irritable. Kyndra seems open and straightforward, Bekah hostile and evasive. Amin seems happy to see you; Seth definitely is not.

How do you reach these conclusions? To a surprising extent, you reach them not on the basis of what people say with words, but because of what they say with their posture, gestures, eyes, and facial expressions. Suppose you are sitting next to Amin, and he says, "This is a great party. I'm really glad to be here with you." However, his body is turned slightly away from you, and he keeps looking at someone across the room. Despite what he says, you know he is *not* glad to be there with you.

Much the same thing happens in speechmaking. Here is the story of one student's first two classroom speeches and the effect created by his physical actions on each occasion:

Sean O'Connor's first speech did not go very well. Even though he had chosen an interesting topic, researched the speech with care, and practiced it faithfully, he did not take into account the importance of using his body effectively. When the time came for him to speak, a stricken look crossed his face. He got up from his chair like a

condemned man and plodded to the lectern as though going to the guillotine. His vocal delivery was good enough, but all the while his hands were living a life of their own. They fidgeted with his notes, played with the buttons of his shirt, and drummed on the lectern. Throughout the speech Sean kept his head down, and he looked at his watch repeatedly. Regardless of what his *words* were saying, his *body* was saying, "I don't want to be here!"

Finally it was over. Sean rushed to his seat and collapsed into it, looking enormously relieved. Needless to say, his speech was not a great success.

Fortunately, when Sean's problem was pointed out to him, he worked hard to correct it. His next speech was quite a different story. This time he got up from his chair and strode to the lectern confidently. He kept his hands under control and concentrated on making eye contact with his listeners. This was truly an achievement, because Sean was just as nervous as the first time. However, he found that the more he made himself *look* confident, the more confident he *became*. After the speech his classmates were enthusiastic. "Great speech," they said. "You really seemed to care about the subject, and you brought this caring to the audience."

In fact, the wording of Sean's second speech wasn't much better than that of the first. It was his physical actions that made all the difference. From the time he left his seat until he returned, his body said, "I am confident and in control of the situation. I have something worthwhile to say, and I want you to think so too."

Posture, facial expression, gestures, eye contact—all affect the way listeners respond to a speaker. How we use these and other body motions to communicate is the subject of a fascinating area of study called kinesics. One of its founders, Ray Birdwhistell, estimated that more than 700,000 physical signals can be sent through bodily movement. Studies have shown that these signals have a significant impact on the meaning communicated by speakers. Research has also confirmed what the Greek historian Herodotus observed more than 2,400 years ago: "People trust their ears less than their eyes." When a speaker's body language is inconsistent with his or her words, listeners often believe the body language rather than the words.¹⁰

Here are the major aspects of physical action that will affect the outcome of your speeches.

Personal Appearance

If you were Jennifer Lopez, you could show up to make an Academy Award presentation speech wearing a bizarre creation that left little to the imagination. If you were Albert Einstein, you could show up to address an international science conference wearing wrinkled trousers, a sweater, and tennis shoes. While the members of your audience would certainly comment on your attire, your reputation would not be harmed. In fact, it might be enhanced. You would be one of the few, the very few, who live outside the rules, who are expected to be unusual.

Now imagine what would happen if the president of a corporation showed up to address a stockholders' meeting attired like Jennifer Lopez, or if the President of the United States spoke on national television wearing wrinkled clothes and tennis shoes. Both presidents would soon be looking for work. Barring the occasional eccentric, every speaker is expected by her

kinesics

The study of body motion as a systematic mode of communication

or his audience to exhibit a personal appearance in keeping with the occasion of the speech.

The President of the United States can be photographed in hiking clothes for a quick weekend interview at Camp David, but that same president will don a conservative suit and tie to address a joint session of Congress. Similarly, a business executive speaking at a winter sales conference in Acapulco would probably wear slacks and a casual shirt or blouse because a business suit, in this atmosphere, would seem too formal. But back home in San Francisco, Chicago, or New York, the same executive will be immaculately dressed in a well-tailored suit.

A number of studies have confirmed that personal appearance plays an important role in speechmaking.¹¹ Listeners always see you before they hear you. Just as you adapt your language to the audience and the occasion, so should you dress and groom appropriately. Although the force of your speech can sometimes overcome a poor impression created by personal appearance, the odds are against it. Regardless of the speaking situation, you should try to evoke a favorable first impression—an impression that is likely to make listeners more receptive to what you say.

Movement

Novice speakers are often unsure about what to do with their body while giving a speech. Some pace nonstop back and forth across the podium, fearing that if they stop, they will forget everything. Others are perpetual-motion machines, constantly shifting their weight from one foot to the other, bobbing their shoulders, fidgeting with their notes, or jingling coins in their pockets. Still others turn into statues, standing rigid and expressionless from beginning to end.

Such quirks usually stem from nervousness. If you are prone to distracting mannerisms, your teacher will identify them so you can work on controlling them in later speeches. With a little concentration, these mannerisms should disappear as you become more comfortable speaking in front of an audience.

As important as how you act during the speech is what you do just *before* you begin and *after* you finish. As you rise to speak, try to appear calm, poised, and confident, despite the butterflies in your stomach. When you reach the lectern, don't lean on it, and don't rush into your speech. Give yourself time to get set. Arrange your notes just the way you want them. Stand quietly as you wait to make sure the audience is paying attention. Establish eye contact with your listeners. Then—and only then—should you start to talk.

When you reach the end of your speech, maintain eye contact for a few moments after you stop talking. This will give your closing line time to sink in. Unless you are staying at the lectern to answer questions, collect your notes and return to your seat. As you do so, maintain your cool, collected demeanor. Whatever you do, don't start to gather your notes before you have finished talking; and don't cap off your speech with a huge sigh of relief or some remark like, "Whew! Am I glad that's over!"

All this advice is common sense; yet you would be surprised how many people need it. When practicing your speeches, spend a little time rehearsing

how you will behave at the beginning and at the end. It is one of the easiest—and one of the most effective—things you can do to improve your image with an audience.

Gestures

Few aspects of delivery seem to cause students more anguish than deciding what to do with their hands. “Should I clasp them behind my back? Let them hang at my sides? Put them in my pockets? Rest them on the lectern? And what about gesturing? When should I do that—and how?” Even people who normally use their hands expressively in everyday conversation seem to regard them as awkward appendages when speaking before an audience.

Over the years, more nonsense has been written about gesturing than about any other aspect of speech delivery. Adroit gestures *can* add to the impact of a speech; but there is nothing to the popular notion that public speakers must have a vast repertoire of graceful gestures. Some accomplished speakers gesture frequently, others hardly at all. The primary rule is this: Whatever gestures you make should not draw attention to themselves and distract from your message. They should *appear* natural and spontaneous, help clarify or reinforce your ideas, and be suited to the audience and occasion.

At this stage of your speaking career, you have many more important things to concentrate on than how to gesture. Gesturing tends to work itself out as you acquire experience and confidence. In the meantime, make sure your hands do not upstage your ideas. Avoid flailing them about, wringing them together, cracking your knuckles, or toying with your rings. Once you have eliminated these distractions, forget about your hands. Think about communicating with your listeners, and your gestures will probably take care of themselves—just as they do in conversation.

Eye Contact

The eyeball itself expresses no emotion. Yet by manipulating the eyeball and the areas of the face around it—especially the upper eyelids and the eyebrows—we are able to convey an intricate array of nonverbal messages. So revealing are these messages that we think of the eyes as “the windows of the soul.” We look to them to help gauge the truthfulness, intelligence, attitudes, and feelings of a speaker.

Like many aspects of communication, eye contact is influenced by cultural background. When engaged in conversation, Arabs, Latin Americans, and Southern Europeans tend to look directly at the person with whom they are talking. People from Asian countries and parts of Africa tend to engage in less eye contact. In Kenya a discussion between a woman and her son-in-law may well be conducted with each person turning her or his back to the other!¹²

When it comes to public speaking, there appears to be fairly wide agreement across cultures on the importance of some degree of eye contact.¹³ In most circumstances, one of the quickest ways to establish a communicative bond with your listeners is to look at them personally and pleasantly. Avoiding

gestures

Motions of a speaker's hands or arms during a speech.

eye contact

Direct visual contact with the eyes of another person.

Research shows that eye contact is one of the most important elements in effective speech delivery. No matter what the situation, you want your eyes to convey confidence, sincerity, and conviction.



their gaze is one of the surest ways to lose them. There is a great deal of research to show that speakers in the United States who refuse to establish eye contact are perceived as tentative or ill at ease and may be seen as insincere or dishonest. It is no wonder, then, that teachers urge students to look at the audience 80 to 90 percent of the time they are talking.

You may find this disconcerting at first. But after one or two speeches, you should be able to meet the gaze of your audience fairly comfortably. As you look at your listeners, be alert for their reactions. Can they hear you? Do they understand you? Are they awake? Your eyes will help you answer these questions.

It isn't enough just to look at your listeners; *how* you look at them also counts. A blank stare is almost as bad as no eye contact at all. So is a fierce, hostile glower or a series of frightened, bewildered glances. Also beware of the tendency to gaze intently at one part of the audience while ignoring the rest. In speech class some students look only at the section of the room where the teacher is sitting. Others avoid looking anywhere near the teacher and focus on one or two sympathetic friends. You should try to establish eye contact with your whole audience.

Look at CD 1, Video 12.3 for an excellent example of eye contact. The speech is by Kristin Berg, a student in a beginning speech course. Kristin's assignment was to interview one of her classmates, Reva, and to give a brief talk introducing her to the rest of the class. In her speech, Kristin explained how Reva's parents had worked to help their growing family adapt to a new culture after immigrating to the United States. As you can see from the CD, the impact of Kristin's speech was greatly enhanced by her strong eye contact (as well by her vocal variety and communicative gestures).



CD 1: VIDEO 12.3

View an excerpt from "A Family Tradition"

When addressing a small audience such as your class, you can usually look briefly, as Kristin did, from one person to another. For a larger group, you will probably scan the audience rather than try to engage the eyes of each person individually. No matter what the size of your audience, you want your eyes to convey confidence, sincerity, and conviction. They should say, “I am pleased to be able to talk with you. I believe deeply in what I am saying, and I want you to believe in it too.”

Practicing Delivery

Popular wisdom promises that practice makes perfect. This is true, but only if we practice properly. No matter how long and hard you practice playing the piano, you will never make beautiful music if you don't know the difference between a sharp and a flat. By the same token, you will do little to improve your speech delivery unless you practice the right things in the right ways. Here is a five-step method that has worked well for many students:

1. Go through your preparation outline *aloud* to check how what you have written translates into spoken discourse. Is it too long? Too short? Are the main points clear when you speak them? Are the supporting materials distinct, convincing, interesting? Do the introduction and conclusion come across well? As you answer these questions, revise the speech as needed.
2. Prepare your speaking outline. In doing so, be sure to follow the guidelines discussed in Chapter 10. Use the same visual framework as in the preparation outline. Make sure the speaking outline is easy to read at a glance. Keep the outline as brief as possible. Give yourself cues on the outline for delivering the speech.
3. Practice the speech aloud several times using only the speaking outline. Be sure to “talk through” all examples and to recite in full all quotations and statistics. If your speech includes visual aids, use them as you practice. The first couple of times you will probably forget something or make a mistake, but don't worry about that. Keep going and complete the speech as well as you can. Concentrate on gaining control of the *ideas*; don't try to learn the speech word for word. After a few tries you should be able to get through the speech extemporaneously with surprising ease.
4. Now begin to polish and refine your delivery. Practice the speech in front of a mirror to check for eye contact and distracting mannerisms. Record the speech to gauge volume, pitch, rate, pauses, and vocal variety. Most important, try it out on friends, roommates, family members—anyone who will listen and give you an honest appraisal. Don't be shy about asking. Most people love to give their opinion about something. Since your speech is designed for people rather than for mirrors or recorders, you need to find out ahead of time how it goes over with people.
5. Finally, give your speech a dress rehearsal under conditions as close as possible to those you will face in class. Some students like to try the speech a couple of times in an empty classroom the day before the speech is due.

No matter where you hold your last practice session, you should leave it feeling confident and looking forward to speaking in your class.

If this or any practice method is to work, you must start early. Don't wait until the day of your speech, or even the night before, to begin working on delivery. A single practice session—no matter how long—is rarely enough. Allow yourself *at least* a couple of days, preferably more, to gain command of the speech and its presentation. No matter how brilliant your preparation outline, what counts is how the speech comes across when you deliver it. Give yourself plenty of time to make sure it comes across well.

Answering Audience Questions

As superintendent of the city's municipal building, Delia Sedano was responsible for presenting a new security plan to the public. Employees, citizens, and reporters gathered in the auditorium to hear her plan. After briefly setting forth her main points, Delia offered to answer questions about the plan.

Because the plan was expensive and potentially controversial, Delia had anticipated a large number of questions, so she was not surprised to see many hands go up. First, an employee asked, "Will the new system create long lines to get into the building, like the lines at airport security checks?" Delia had anticipated this question. She explained that enough security guards would be working at peak hours to avoid long lines.

The next question was more confrontational: "Where will the money come from to pay for all this?" The reporter who asked the question seemed hostile, but Delia was careful not to sound defensive. She stated that money would come from the city's general budget. "I know these are tough times," she added, "but everyone agrees that it's important to safeguard our employees and the citizens who come into the building."

The third question was about the training of security guards. After clarifying the question, Delia introduced the city's director of security and asked him to provide a detailed answer.

Near the end of the time she had allotted for her presentation, Delia announced that she would take two more questions. When those were finished, she concluded with a brief restatement of how the new system would improve the security of the municipal building.

After Delia closed, Art Shafer, a member of the security committee, congratulated her on a successful briefing. "Your presentation was great," he said, "but the Q&A was especially impressive. It showed the audience that we've looked at this from all angles."

If you have ever watched a press conference or heard a speaker answer questions after a talk, you know the question-and-answer session can make or break a presentation. A speaker who handles questions well, as Delia Sedano did, can enhance her credibility and strengthen the impact of her speech. On the other hand, a speaker who evades questions or shows annoyance will almost certainly create the opposite effect.

The question-and-answer session is a common part of public speaking, whether the occasion is a press conference, business presentation, public hearing, or classroom assignment. Depending on the situation, questioning may take place throughout the presentation, or it may be reserved until after the speaker has completed his or her remarks. In either case, an answer to