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Exploring Public Speaking: 2nd Revision

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Exploring Public Speaking: The Free Dalton State College Public Speaking Textbook



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Chapter 10

Language



Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

- ◇ Recognize language used for power and the power of language choices;
- ◇ Explain the standard of clarity;
- ◇ Choose language appropriate for audiences;
- ◇ Choose clear language;
- ◇ Begin to develop her/his own language ability in speaking.

Chapter Preview

10.1 – What Language Is and Does

10.2 – Standards for Language in Public Speaking

10.3 – Developing Your Ability to Use Effective Language in Public Speaking

10.1 – What Language Is and Does

The Ancient Romans who studied and taught rhetoric divided its study and process into five “canons:” invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery. The term “style” does not refer to clothing styles but language choices. Should a public speaker use very basic language because the audience is unfamiliar with his topic? Or more technical language with many acronyms, abbreviations, and jargon because the audience has expertise in the topic? Or academic language with abstract vocabulary, or flowery, poetic language with lots of metaphors? Perhaps you have never thought about those questions, but they are ones that influence both the clarity of the message as well as the credibility a speaker will gain during the presentation.

However, we would be wrong if we treated language as an “add-on” to the ideas and structure of the speech. Language is a far too complex and foundational aspect of our lives for us to consider it as an afterthought for a speech. In this chapter we will look at how language functions in communication, what standards language choices should meet in public speaking, and how you can become more proficient in using language in public speaking.

Language is any formal system of gestures, signs, sounds, and symbols used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, either through written, enacted, or spoken means. Linguists believe there are far more than 6,900 languages and distinct dialects spoken in the world today (Anderson, 2012). The language spoken by the greatest number of people on the planet is Mandarin (a dialect of Chinese). Other widely spoken languages are English, Spanish, and Arabic. English is spoken widely on every continent (thanks to the British Empire) but Mandarin is spoken by the most people. We have already seen in earlier chapters that public speakers have to make adjustments to language for audiences. For example, spoken language is more wordy and repetitive than written language needs to be or should be. It is accompanied by gestures, vocal emphasis, and facial expressions. Additionally, spoken language includes more personal pronouns and more expressive, emotional, colloquial, slang, and nonstandard words.

The study of language is, believe it or not, controversial. If you are an education, social sciences, pre-law, or English major, you will somewhere in your college career come up against this truth. While we use words everyday and don't think about it, scholars in different fields concern themselves with how we choose words, why we choose words, what effect words have on

Language

any formal system of gestures, signs, sounds, and symbols used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, either through written, enacted, or spoken means

us, and how the powerful people of the world use words. One theory of language, general semantics, says that meaning resides in the person using the word, not in the word (“Basic Understandings,” 2015). It is helpful for the public speaker to keep this mind, especially in regard to **denotative** and **connotative** (see Chapter 1) meaning. Wrench, Goding, Johnson, and Attias (2011) use this example to explain the difference:

When we hear or use the word “blue,” we may be referring to a portion of the visual spectrum dominated by energy with a wavelength of roughly 440–490 nanometers. You could also say that the color in question is an equal mixture of both red and green light. While both of these are technically correct ways to interpret the word “blue,” we’re pretty sure that neither of these definitions is how you thought about the word. When hearing the word “blue,” you may have thought of your favorite color, the color of the sky on a spring day, or the color of a really ugly car you saw in the parking lot. When people think about language, there are two different types of meanings that people must be aware of: denotative and connotative. (p. 407)

Denotative meaning is the specific meaning associated with a word. We sometimes refer to denotative meanings as dictionary definitions. The [scientific] definitions provided above for the word “blue” are examples of definitions that might be found in a dictionary. Connotative meaning is the idea suggested by or associated with a word at a cultural or personal level. In addition to the examples above, the word “blue” can evoke many other ideas:

- State of depression (feeling blue)
- Indication of winning (a blue ribbon)
- Side during the Civil War (blues vs. grays)
- Sudden event (out of the blue).
- States that lean toward the Democratic Party in their voting

Language is not just something we *use*; it is part of who we are and how we think. When we talk about language, we have to use words to do so, and language is also hard to separate from who we are. Each of us has our own way of expressing ourselves. Even more, it is almost impossible to separate language from thinking. Many people think the federal government should enact a law that only English is spoken in the United States (in government offices, schools, etc.). This is opposed by some groups

because it seems discriminatory to immigrants, based on the belief that everyone's language is part of his or her identity and self-definition.

Not only is language about who we are; it is about power. In fact, some educational and political theorists believe that language is all about power. For instance, **euphemisms** are often used to make something unpleasant sound more tolerable. In one of the more well-known examples of the use of euphemisms, the government commonly tries to use language to "soften" what many would see as bad. During the Vietnam War, "air support" was invented to cover the real meaning: "bombing." When you hear air support, you probably think "planes bringing supplies in," not "bombing."

Even today, terms like "revenue enhancement" are used instead of "tax increases." The word euphemism has at its core "eu," (which is a prefix from Greek meaning "good" or "pleasant") and "phem" (a root word for speaking). Just as blasphemy is speaking evil about sacred things, "euphemism" is "pleasant speaking about unpleasant things." We use euphemisms every day, but we have to be careful not to obscure meaning or use them deceptively.

There's an old saying in debate, "He who defines the terms wins the debate." In the 1988 election, George H.W. Bush was running against Michael Dukakis, who was the governor of Massachusetts. Vice President Bush was able to stick a label on Dukakis and it stuck, that of "liberal." He not only labeled Governor Dukakis, but he also defined what "liberal" meant. The word was in disuse after that, and you don't hear it as much now, except by people on the Right to talk about "the enemy." The word in use now is "progressive." Unfortunately, this incident in 1988 politics obscured the fact that the U.S. has always been a "liberal" democratic republic. The word "liberal" has shifted meaning, another trait of language.

To most people "progressive" sounds better, although an historian could argue the word is technically being used incorrectly. It doesn't matter, because a word doesn't "have" meaning; meaning exists in the minds of people using the word. If "progressive" hits people and evokes or stirs up ideas of forward-thinking, young, active, problem-solving people, then good. For most people it doesn't bring up pictures of Woodrow Wilson and suffragettes (now referred to as "suffragists" because "-ettes" is seen as connoting women as "less than" men).

These examples bring up another issue with language: words change meaning over time, or more specifically, the

Euphemism

language devices often used to make something unpleasant sound more tolerable

meaning we attached to them changes. “Pretty” used to mean “clever” 250 years ago. “Prevent” meant to “precede,” not to keep from happening. Language is simply not static, as much as we might like it to be. One of the main reasons we find Shakespeare daunting is that so many of the Elizabethan words either no longer are used or they have changed meanings.

With regard to the use of language for power, even unknowingly, feminists in the 1970s argued that the common way we use English language was biased against women. King-sized means “big,” but “queen-sized” means “for heavy women.” “Master” was not equivalent to “mistress.” “Madame” had taken on a bad connotation, even though it should have been equivalent to “sir.” Many words referring to women had to add a suffix that was often “less than,” such as “-ess” or “-ette” or “co-ed.” In the last thirty years we have gotten away from that, so that you often hear a female actor referred to as “actor” rather than “actress,” but old habits die hard.

We see another example of power in language in the abortion debate. Prior to 1973, abortions could be obtained legally, to some extent, in three states: California, New York, and Hawaii. After the Roe v. Wade decision in January of 1973, they could, at least theoretically, be obtained in all fifty states. Roe v. Wade did not make abortions legal so much as it made anti-abortion laws illegal or unconstitutional, so the effect was generally the same. The people who were against abortion were now on the defensive, and they had to start fighting. It's generally better to be “pro-”something rather than “anti-”something, so they became “pro-life.” Those favoring abortion rights then automatically became “pro-death.” One side had defined the terms of the debate, and the other had to come up with something comparable. “Pro-choice” takes advantage of the American belief in capitalism and freedoms.

These examples show how “defining the terms” gives a person control of the discourse. As you progress as a public speaker, you will become more aware of the power certain words have over audiences. An ethical communicator will use language in a way that encourages respect for others, freedom of thought, and decision making. First, however, a speaker should seek to meet the standards of clarity, effectiveness, appropriateness, and elegance in language, which are discussed in the next section.

10.2 – Standards for Language in Public Speaking

Clear language is powerful language. Clarity is the first concern of a public speaker when it comes to choosing how to

phrase the ideas of his or her speech. If you are not clear, specific, precise, detailed, and sensory with your language, you won't have to worry about being emotional or persuasive, because you won't be understood. There are many aspects of clarity in language, listed below.

Achieving Clarity

The first aspect of clarity is concreteness. We usually think of concreteness as the opposite of abstraction. Language that evokes many different visual images in the minds of your audience is **abstract language**. Unfortunately, when abstract language is used, the images evoked might not be the ones you really want to evoke. A word such as “art” is very abstract; it brings up a range of mental pictures or associations: dance, theatre, painting, drama, a child's drawing on a refrigerator, sculpture, music, etc. When asked to identify what an abstract term like “art” means, twenty people will have twenty different ideas.

In order to show how language should be more specific, the “ladder of abstraction” (Hayakawa, 1939) was developed. The ladder of abstraction in Figure 10.1 helps us see how our language can range from abstract (general and sometimes vague) to very precise and specific (such as an actual person that everyone in your audience will know). You probably understood the ladder in Figure 10.2 until it came to the word “Baroque.” At Bernini's, you might get confused if you do not know much about art history. If the top level said “Bernini's David,” a specific sculpture, that would be misleading because almost everyone is familiar with Michelangelo's *David*,

Abstract language

language that evokes many different visual images in the minds of your audience

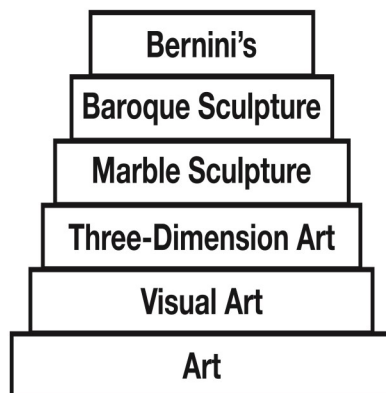


Figure 10.1—Ladder of Abstraction

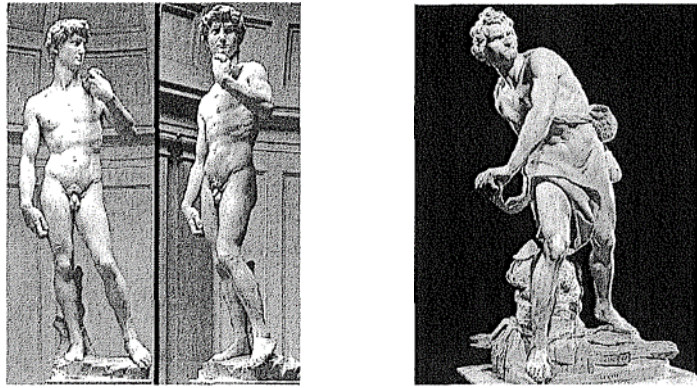


Figure 10.2—Renaissance *David* (Michelangelo) vs. Bernini's *David*

but Bernini's version is very different. It's life-sized, moving, and clothed. Bernini's is as much a symbol of the Baroque Age as Michelangelo's is of the Renaissance. But unless you've taken an art history course, the reference, though very specific, is meaningless to you, and even worse, it might strike you as showing off. In fact, to make my point, here they are in Figure 10.2. A picture is worth a thousand words, right?

Related to the issue of specific vs. abstract is the use of the right word. Mark Twain said, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug." For example, the words "prosecute" and "persecute" are commonly confused, but not interchangeable. Two others are preemptory/pre-emptive and prerequisites/perquisites. Can you think of other such word pair confusion?

In the attempt to be clear, which is your first concern, you will also want to be simple and familiar in your language. Familiarity is a factor of attention (Chapter 7); familiar language draws in the audience. Simple does not mean simplistic, but the avoidance of multi-syllable words. If a speaker said, "A collection of pre-adolescence fabricated an obese personification comprised of compressed mounds of minute aquatic crystals," you might recognize it as "Some children made a snowman," but maybe not. The language is not simple or familiar and therefore does not communicate well, although the words are correct and do mean the same thing, technically.

Along with language needing to be specific and correct, language can use appropriate similes and metaphors to become

clearer. **Literal language** does not use comparisons like similes and metaphors; **figurative language** uses comparisons with objects, animals, activities, roles, or historical or literary figures. Literal says, “The truck is fast.” Figurative says “The truck is as fast as . . .” or “The truck runs like . . .” or “He drives that truck like Kyle Busch at Daytona.” **Similes** use some form of “like” or “as” in the comparisons. **Metaphors** are direct comparisons, such as “He is Kyle Busch when he gets behind the wheel of that truck.” Here are some more examples of metaphors:

Love is a *battlefield*.

Upon hearing the charges, the accused *clammed up* and refused to speak without a lawyer.

Every year a new *crop* of activists are *born*.

For rhetorical purposes, metaphors are considered stronger, but both can help you achieve clearer language, if chosen wisely. To think about how metaphor is stronger than simile, think of the difference “Love is a battlefield” and “Love is *like* a battlefield.” Speakers are encouraged to pick their metaphors and not overuse them. Also, avoid mixed metaphors, as in this example: “That’s awfully thin gruel for the right wing to hang their hats on.” Or “He found himself up a river and had to change horses.” The mixed metaphor here is the use of “up a river” and “change horses” together; you would either need to use an all river-based metaphor (dealing with boats, water, tides, etc.) or a metaphor dealing specifically with horses. The example above about a “new crop” “being born,” is actually a mixed metaphor, since crops aren’t born, but planted and harvested. Additionally, in choosing metaphors and similes, speakers want to avoid clichés, discussed next.

Clichés are expressions, usually similes, that are predictable. You know what comes next because they are overused and sometimes out of date. Clichés do not have to be linguistic—we often see clichés in movies, such as teen horror films where you know exactly what will happen next! It is not hard to think of clichés: “Scared out of my . . .” or “When life gives you lemons. . .” or “All is fair in. . .” or, when describing a reckless driver, “She drives like a . . .” If you filled in the blanks with “wits,” “make lemonade,” “love and war,” or “maniac,” those are clichés.

Clichés are not just a problem because they are overused and boring; they also sometimes do not communicate what you need, especially to audiences whose second language is English. “I

Literal language

language that does not use comparisons like similes and metaphors

Figurative language

language that uses metaphors and similes to compare things that may not be literally alike

Similes

a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind (specifically using the terms “like” or “as”), used to make a description more emphatic or vivid

Metaphors

a figure of speech that identifies something as being the same as some unrelated thing for rhetorical effect, thus highlighting the similarities between the two

Clichés

predictable and generally overused expressions; usually similes

will give you a ballpark figure” is not as clear as “I will give you an estimate,” and assumes the person is familiar with American sports. Therefore, they also will make you appear less credible in the eyes of the audience because you are not analyzing them and taking their knowledge, background, and needs into account. As the United States becomes more diverse, being aware of your audience members whose first language is not English is a valuable tool for a speaker.

Additionally, some clichés are so outdated that no one knows what they mean. “The puppy was as cute as a button” is an example. You might hear your great-grandmother say this, but who really thinks buttons are cute nowadays? Clichés are also imprecise. Although clichés do have a comfort level to them, comfort puts people to sleep. Find fresh ways, or just use basic, literal language. “The bear was big” is imprecise in terms of giving your audience an idea of how frightful an experience faced by a bear would be. “The bear was as big as a house” is a cliché and an exaggeration, therefore imprecise. A better alternative might be, “The bear was two feet taller than I am when he stood on his back legs.” The opposite of clichés is clear, vivid, and fresh language.

In trying to avoid clichés, use language with **imagery**, or sensory language. This is language that makes the recipient smell, taste, see, hear, and feel a sensation. Think of the word “ripe.” What is “ripe?” Do ripe fruits feel a certain way? Smell a

Imagery

language that makes the recipient smell, taste, see, hear, and feel a sensation; also known as sensory language



certain way? Taste a certain way? Ripe is a sensory word. Most words just appeal to one sense, like vision. Think of color. How can you make the word "blue" more sensory? How can you make the word "loud" more sensory? How would you describe the current state of your bedroom or dorm room to leave a sensory impression? How would you describe your favorite meal to leave a sensory impression? A thunderstorm to leave a sensory impression?

Poetry uses much imagery, so to end this section on fresh, clear language, here is a verse from "Daffodils" by William Wordsworth. Notice the metaphors ("daffodils dancing," "host," which brings to mind great heavenly numbers), simile (as the stars) and the imagery ("golden" rather than "yellow," and other appeals to feeling and sight):

A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way.

Effectiveness

Language achieves effectiveness by communicating the right message to the audience. Clarity contributes to effectiveness, but there are some other aspects of effectiveness. To that end, language should be a means of inclusion and identification, rather than exclusion. Let's establish this truth: Language is for communication; communication is symbolic, and language is the main (but not only) symbol system we use for communication. If language is for communication, then its goal should be to bring people together and to create understanding.

Unfortunately, we habitually use language for exclusion rather than inclusion. We can push people away with our word choices rather than bringing them together. We discussed the concepts of stereotyping and totalizing in Chapter 2, but they serve as examples of what we're talking about here. What follows are some examples of language that can exclude members of your audience from understanding what you are saying.

Jargon

Jargon (which we discussed in Chapter 2) used in your profession or hobby should only be used with audiences who share your profession or hobby. Not only will the audience members who don't share your profession or hobby miss your

Jargon

language used in a specific field that may or may not be understood by others

meaning, but they will feel that you are not making an honest effort to communicate or are setting yourself above them in intelligence or rank. Lawyers are often accused of using “legalese,” but other professions and groups do the same. If an audience member does not understand your references, jargon, or vocabulary, it is unlikely that he or she will sit there and say, “This person is so smart! I wish I could be smart like this speaker.” The audience member is more likely to be thinking, “Why can’t this speaker use words we understand and get off the high horse?” (which I admit, is a cliché!)

What this means for you is that you need to be careful about assumptions of your audience’s knowledge and their ability to interpret jargon. For example, if you are trying to register for a class at Dalton State and your adviser asks for the CRN, that would be jargon that makes sense to the two of you, but almost anyone else in the world would have no idea what you are talking about. Acronyms, such as NPO, are another example. Those trained in the medical field know it is based on the Latin for “nothing by mouth.” The military has many acronyms, such as MOS (military occupational specialty, or career field in civilian talk). If you are speaking to an audience who does not know the jargon of your field, using it will only make them annoyed by the lack of clarity.

Sometimes we are not even aware of our jargon and its inadvertent effects. A student once complained to one of the authors about her reaction when she heard that she had been “purged.” The word sounds much worse than the meaning it had in that context, which that her name was taken off the official roll for nonpayment at the beginning of the semester.

Slang

Slang

a type of language that consists of words and phrases that are specific to a subculture or group that others may not understand

The whole point of **slang** is for a subculture or group to have its own code, almost like secret words. Once slang is understood by the larger culture, is no longer slang and may be classified as “informal” or “colloquial” language. “Bling” was slang; now it’s in the dictionary. Sports have a great deal of slang used by the players and fans that then gets used in everyday language. For example, “That was a slam dunk” is used to describe something easy, not just in basketball. At Dalton State, many groups and organizations “paint the rock” located on the campus quad. Anyone not affiliated with DSC would probably be a little lost if you excitedly told them that you “painted the rock for spirit week” and might feel excluded from that conversation.

Complicated vocabulary

If a speaker used the word "recalcitrant," some audience members would know the meaning or figure it out ("Calci-" is like calcium, calcium is hard, etc.), but many would not. It would make much more sense for them to use a word readily understandable--"stubborn." Especially in oral communication, we should use language that is immediately accessible. However, do not take this to mean "dumb down for your audience." It means being clear and not showing off. For a speaker to say "I am cognizant of the fact that. . ." instead of "I know" or "I am aware of. . ." adds nothing to communication.

Profanity and cursing

It is difficult to think of many examples, other than artistic or comedy venues, where profanity or cursing would be effective or useful with most audiences, so this kind of language is generally discouraged.

Credibility

Another aspect of effectiveness is that your language should enhance your credibility. First, audiences trust speakers who use clear, vivid, respectful, engaging, and honest language. On the other hand, audiences tend *not* to trust speakers who use language that excludes others or who exhibit uneducated language patterns. All of us make an occasional grammatical or usage error. However, constant verb and pronoun errors and just plain getting words confused will hurt the audience's belief that you are competent and know what you are talking about. In addition, a speaker who uses language and references that are not immediately accessible or that are unfamiliar will have diminished credibility. Finally, you should avoid the phrase "I guess" in a speech. A credible speaker should know what he/she is talking about.

Rhetorical Techniques

There are several traditional techniques that have been used to engage audiences and make ideas more attention-getting and memorable. These are called rhetorical techniques. Although "rhetorical" is associated with persuasive speech, these techniques are also effective with other types of speeches. We will not mention all of them here, but some important ones are listed below. Several of them are based on a form of repetition. You can refer to an Internet source for a full list of the dozens of rhetorical devices.

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in a sentence or passage. As such, it is a kind of rhyme. Minister Tony

Assonance
the repetition of
vowel sounds in a
sentence or passage

Alliteration

the repetition of initial consonant sounds in a sentence or passage

Campolo said, "When Jesus told his disciples to pray for the kingdom, this was no **pie** in the **sky** **by** and **by** when you **die** **kind** of prayer."

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in a sentence or passage. In his "I Have a Dream Speech," Dr. Martin Luther King said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the **color** of their **skin** but by the **content** of their **character**." Not only does this sentence use alliteration, it also uses the next rhetorical technique on our list, antithesis.

Antithesis

the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced or parallel words, phrases, or grammatical structures

Antithesis is the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced or parallel words, phrases, or grammatical structures. Usually antithesis goes: Not this, but this. John F. Kennedy's statement from his 1961 inaugural address is one of the most quoted examples of antithesis: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." In that speech he gave another example, "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."

Parallelism

the repetition of grammatical structures that correspond in sound, meter, and meaning

Parallelism is the repetition of sentence structures. It can be useful for stating your main ideas. Which one of these sounds better?

"Give me liberty or I'd rather die."

"Give me liberty or give me death."

The second one uses parallelism. Quoting again from JFK's inaugural address: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty." The repetition of the three-word phrases in this sentence (including the word "any" in each) is a clear example of parallelism.

Anaphora

the succession of sentences beginning with the same word or group of words

Anaphora is a succession of sentences beginning with the same word or group of words. In his inaugural address, JFK began several succeeding paragraphs with "To": "To those old allies," "To those new states," "To those people," etc.

Hyperbole

intentional exaggeration for effect

Hyperbole is intentional exaggeration for effect. Sometimes it is for serious purposes, other times for humor. Commonly we use hyperbolic language in our everyday speech to emphasize our emotions, such as when we say "I'm having the worst day ever" or "I would kill for a piece of gum right now." Neither of those statements is (hopefully) true, but it stresses to others the way you are feeling. Ronald Reagan, who was often disparaged for being the oldest president, would joke about his

age. In one case he said, “The chamber is celebrating an important milestone this week: your 70th anniversary. I remember the day you started.”

Irony is the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect. Although most people think they understand irony as sarcasm (such as saying to a friend who trips, “That’s graceful”), it is a much more complicated topic. A speaker may use it when he professes to say one thing but clearly means something else, or he says something that is obviously untrue. Irony in oral communication can be difficult to use.

Using these techniques alone will not make you an effective speaker. Dr. King and President Kennedy combined them with strong metaphors and images as well; for example, Dr. King described the promises of the founding fathers as a “blank check” returned with the note “insufficient funds” as far as the black Americans of his time were concerned. That was a very concrete, human, and familiar metaphor to his listeners and still speaks to us today.

Appropriateness

Appropriateness relates to several categories involving how persons and groups should be referred to and addressed based on inclusiveness and context. The term “politically correct” has been overused to describe the growing sensitivity to how the power of language can marginalize or exclude individuals and groups. While there are silly extremes such as the term “vertically challenged” for “short,” these examples overlook the need to be inclusive about language. Overall, people and groups should be respected and referred to in the way they choose to be. Using inclusive language in your speech will help ensure you aren’t alienating or diminishing any members of your audience.

Gender-Inclusive Language

The first common form of non-inclusive language is language that privileges one of the sexes over the other. There are three common problem areas that speakers run into while speaking: using “he” as generic, using “man” to mean all humans, and gender-typing jobs. Consider the statement, “Every morning when an officer of the law puts on his badge, he risks his life to serve and protect his fellow citizens.” Obviously, both male and female police officers risk their lives when they put on their badges.

A better way to word the sentence would be, “Every morning when officers of the law put on their badges, they risk

Irony

the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect

Appropriateness

how persons and groups should be referred to and addressed based on inclusiveness and context

Exclusive Language	Inclusive Language
Policeman	Police officer
Businessman	Businessperson (or better, use specific language such as manager, accountant, business owner, entrepreneur)
Fireman	Firefighter
Stewardess	Flight attendant
Waiters	Wait staff / servers
Mailman	Letter carrier / postal worker

Table 10.1—Gender-inclusive job titles

their lives to serve and protect their fellow citizens.” Notice that in the better sentence, we made the subject plural (“officers”) and used neutral pronouns (“they” and “their”) to avoid the generic “he.” Likewise, speakers of English have traditionally used terms like “man,” and “mankind” when referring to both females and males. Instead of using the word “man,” refer to the “human race.”

The last common area where speakers get into trouble with gender and language has to do with job titles. It is not unusual for people to assume, for example, that doctors are male and nurses are female. As a result, they may say “she is a woman doctor” or “he is a male nurse” when mentioning someone’s occupation, perhaps not realizing that the statements “she is a doctor” and “he is a nurse” already inform the listener as to the sex of the person holding that job. Table 10.1 includes some variations that are gender-inclusive.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity refers to a group an individual identifies with based on a common culture. For example, within the United States we have numerous ethnic groups, including Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Japanese Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Cuban Americans, and Mexican Americans. As with the earlier example of “male nurse,” avoid statements such as “The committee is made up of four women and a Vietnamese man.” All that should be said is, “The committee is made up of five people.”

Ethnic Identity

a group an individual identifies with based on a common culture

Exclusive Language	Inclusive Language
Handicapped People	People with disabilities
Insane Person	Person with a psychiatric disability (or label the psychiatric diagnosis, e.g. “person with schizophrenia”)
Person in a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair
Crippled	Person with a physical disability
Special needs program	Accessible needs program
Mentally retarded	Person with an intellectual disability

Table 10.2—Inclusive Language for Disabilities

If for some reason gender and ethnicity *have* to be mentioned—and usually it does not—the gender and ethnicity of each member should be mentioned equally. “The committee is made up of three European-American women, one Latina, and one Vietnamese male.” In recent years, there has been a trend toward steering inclusive language away from broad terms like “Asians” and “Hispanics” because these terms are not considered precise labels for the groups they actually represent. If you want to be safe, the best thing you can do is ask a couple of people who belong to an ethnic group how they prefer to label themselves.

Disability

The last category of exclusive versus inclusive language that causes problems for some speakers relates to individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities or forms of mental illness. Sometimes it happens that we take a characteristic of someone and make that the totality or all of what that person is. For example, some people are still uncomfortable around persons who use wheelchairs and don't know how to react. They may totalize and think that the wheelchair defines and therefore limits the user. The person in the wheelchair might be a great guitarist, sculptor, parent, public speaker, or scientist, but that's not seen, only the wheelchair. Table 10.2 (“Inclusive Language for Disabilities”) provides some other examples of exclusive versus inclusive language.

Although the terms “visually impaired” and “hearing impaired” are sometimes used for “blind” and “deaf,” this is another situation where the person should be referred to as he or she prefers. “Hearing impaired” denotes a wide range of hearing deficit, as does “visually impaired.” “Deaf” and “blind” are not generally considered offensive by these groups.

Another example is how to refer to what used to be called “autism.” Saying someone is “autistic” is similar to the word “retarded” in that neither is appropriate any longer. Preferable terms are “a person with an autism diagnosis” or “a person on the autism spectrum.” In place of “retarded,” “a person with intellectual disabilities” should be used.

Other Types of Appropriateness

Language in a speech should be appropriate to the speaker and the speaker’s background and personality, to the context, to the audience, and to the topic. Let’s say that you’re an engineering student. If you’re giving a presentation in an engineering class, you can use language that other engineering students will know. On the other hand, if you use that engineering vocabulary in a public speaking class, many audience members will not understand you. As another example, if you are speaking about the Great Depression to an audience of young adults or recent immigrants, you can’t assume they will know the meaning of terms like “New Deal” and “WPA,” which would be familiar to an audience of senior citizens. Audience analysis is a key factor in choosing the language to use in a speech.

Likewise, the language you may employ if you’re addressing a student assembly in a high school auditorium will differ from the language you would use at a business meeting in a hotel ballroom. If you are speaking about the early years of The Walt Disney Company, would you want to refer to Walt Disney as a “thaumaturgic” individual (i.e., one who works wonders or miracles)? While the word “thaumaturgic” may be accurate, is it the most appropriate for the topic at hand?

10.3 – Developing Your Ability to Use Effective Language in Public Speaking

At this point, we will make some applications and suggestions about using language as you grow as a public speaker.

First, get in the habit of using “stipulated definitions” with concrete examples (defining operationally). In other words, define your terms for the audience. If you are using jargon, a technical term, or a word that has multiple meanings in different

contexts or is a misunderstood word, say at the beginning of the body of your speech, "In this speech I am going to be using the word, "X," and what I mean by it is..." And then the best way to define a word is with a picture or example of what you mean, and perhaps also an example of what you *don't* mean (visual aids can help here). Don't worry; this is not insulting to most audiences if the word is technical or unfamiliar to them. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier in the textbook, providing dictionary definitions of common words such as "love" or "loyalty" would be insulting to an audience.

Second, develop specific language. The general semanticist movement suggested ways to develop more specific language and language that reflects the imperfection of our perceptions and the fact that reality changes. You can develop specific language by:

- Distinguishing between individuals and the group (that is, avoid stereotyping). Russian 1 is not Russian 2 is not Russian 3, etc., and none of them are all the Russians in the world.
- Specifying time and place of behavior instead of making broad statements. What was true of a person in 1999 is not necessarily true of the person now.
- Using names for jobs or roles ("accountants," "administrative assistants," "instructors") instead of "people" or "workers."
- Avoid "always/never" language. "Always" and "never" usually do not reflect reality and tend to make listeners defensive.
- Avoid confusing opinion for fact. If I say, "*Forrest Gump* is a stupid movie," I am stating an opinion in the language of fact. If you preface opinions with "I believe," or "It is my opinion" you will be truthful and gain the appearance of being fair-minded and non-dogmatic. What should be said is "The first time I saw *Forrest Gump*, I didn't realize it was a farce, but after I saw it a second time, I understood it better." Notice that "I thought it was insulting to my intelligence" is much more specific and clarifying than "is a stupid movie."

Third, personalize your language. In a speech it's fine to use personal pronouns as opposed to third person. That means "I," "me," "we," "us," "you," etc. are often helpful in a speech. It gives more immediacy to the speech. Be careful of using "you" for examples that might be embarrassing. "Let's say you are

arrested for possession of a concealed weapon," sounds like the audience members are potential criminals!

Finally, develop your vocabulary, but not to show it off. One of the benefits of a college education is that your vocabulary will expand greatly, and it should. A larger vocabulary will give you access to more complicated reading material and allow you to understand the world better. But knowing the meaning of a more complicated word doesn't mean you have to use it with every audience.

Conclusion

Although the placement of this chapter may seem to indicate that language choices, or what the ancient rhetoricians called "style," are not as important as other parts of speaking, language choices are important from the very beginning of your speech preparation, even to your research and choice of search terms. Audience analysis will help you to develop language that is clear, vivid, appropriate, credible, and persuasive.

Something to Think About

What are some of the clichés and slang that have become popular recently? What do they mean? Why would they not be useful in public speaking? As a class, check out the [Banned Words website by Lake Superior State University](#).

Exploring Public Speaking: The Free Dalton State College Public Speaking Textbook Part 2 Chapters 11-15 and Appendices

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Chapter 11

Delivery



Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter the student will be able to:

- ◇ Identify the different methods of speech delivery;
- ◇ Identify key elements in preparing to deliver a speech;
- ◇ Understand the benefits of delivery-related behaviors;
- ◇ Utilize specific techniques to enhance speech delivery.

Chapter Preview

11.1 – The Importance of Delivery

11.2 – Methods of Speech Delivery

11.3 – Preparing For Your Delivery

11.4 – Practicing Your Delivery

11.5 – What to do When Delivering Your Speech

11.1 – The Importance of Delivery

As we stated in Chapter 1, some surveys indicate that more people fear public speaking than they do death, but that is somewhat misleading. No one is afraid of writing their speech or conducting the research: people generally only fear the delivery aspect of the speech, which, compared to the amount of time you will put into writing the speech (days, hopefully), will be the shortest part of the speech giving process (5-8 minutes, generally, for classroom speeches). The irony, of course, is that delivery, being the thing people fear the most, is simultaneously the aspect of public speaking that will require the least amount of time.

Consider this scenario about two students, Bob and Chris. Bob spends weeks doing research and crafting a beautifully written speech that, on the day he gets in front of the class, he messes up a little because of nerves. While he may view it as a complete failure, his audience will have gotten a lot of good information, and most likely written off his mistakes due to nerves (surely they would be nervous in the same situation!).

Chris, on the other hand, does almost no preparation for his speech, but, being charming and comfortable in front of a crowd, smiles a lot while providing virtually nothing of substance. The audience takeaway from Chris's speech is, "I have no idea what he was talking about" and other feelings ranging from "He's good in front of an audience" to "I don't trust him." So the moral here is that a well-written speech that is delivered poorly is still a well-written speech, whereas a poorly-written speech delivered superbly is still a poorly-written speech.

Despite this irony, however, we realize that delivery is what you are probably most concerned about when it comes to giving speeches, so this chapter is designed to help you give the best delivery possible and eliminate some of the nervousness you might be feeling. To do that, we should first dismiss the myth that public speaking is just reading and talking at the same time. You already know how to read, and you already know how to talk, which is why you're taking a class called "public speaking" and not one called "public talking" or "public reading."

Speaking in public has more formality than talking. During a speech, you should present yourself professionally. This doesn't necessarily mean you must wear a suit or "dress up" (unless your instructor asks you to), but it does mean making yourself presentable by being well groomed and wearing clean, appropriate clothes. It also means being prepared to use language correctly and appropriately for the audience and the topic, to make eye

contact with your audience, and to look like you know your topic very well.

While speaking has more formality than talking, it has less formality than reading. Speaking allows for flexibility, meaningful pauses, eye contact, small changes in word order, and vocal emphasis. Reading is a more or less exact replication of words on paper without the use of any nonverbal interpretation. Speaking, as you will realize if you think about excellent speakers you have seen and heard, provides a more animated message.

11.2 – Methods of Speech Delivery

What follows are four methods of delivery that can help you balance between too much and too little formality when giving a speech. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, but you will most likely want to focus on the extemporaneous approach, since that is what your instructor will want from you.

Impromptu Speaking

Impromptu speaking is the presentation of a short message without advance preparation. You have probably done impromptu speaking many times in informal, conversational settings. Self-introductions in group settings are examples of impromptu speaking: “Hi, my name is Steve, and I’m a volunteer with the Homes for the Brave program.” Another example of impromptu speaking occurs when you answer a question such as, “What did you think of the movie?” Your response has not been preplanned, and you are constructing your arguments and points as you speak. Even worse, you might find yourself going into a meeting and your boss says, “I want you to talk about the last stage of the project. . . “ and you had no warning.

The advantage of this kind of speaking is that it’s spontaneous and responsive in an animated group context. The disadvantage is that the speaker is given little or no time to contemplate the central theme of his or her message. As a result, the message may be disorganized and difficult for listeners to follow.

Here is a step-by-step guide that may be useful if you are called upon to give an impromptu speech in public:

1. Take a moment to collect your thoughts and plan the main point you want to make.
2. Thank the person for inviting you to speak. Do not make comments about being unprepared, called upon at the last

Impromptu speaking

the presentation of a short message without advance preparation

moment, on the spot, or uneasy. No one wants to hear that and it will embarrass others and yourself.

3. Deliver your message, making your main point as briefly as you can while still covering it adequately and at a pace your listeners can follow.
4. If you can use a structure, using numbers if possible: “Two main reasons . . .” or “Three parts of our plan. . .” or “Two side effects of this drug. . .” Past, present, and future or East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast are pre-fab structures.
5. Thank the person again for the opportunity to speak.
6. Stop talking (it is easy to “ramble on” when you don’t have something prepared). If in front of an audience, don’t keep talking as you move back to your seat.

As you can see, impromptu speeches are generally most successful when they are brief and focus on a single point.

Manuscript Speaking

Manuscript speaking

the word-for-word iteration of a written message

Manuscript speaking is the word-for-word iteration of a written message. In a manuscript speech, the speaker maintains his or her attention on the printed page except when using visual aids. The advantage to reading from a manuscript is the exact repetition of original words. In some circumstances this can be extremely important. For example, reading a statement about your organization’s legal responsibilities to customers may require that the original words be exact. In reading one word at a time, in order, the only errors would typically be mispronunciation of a word or stumbling over complex sentence structure. A manuscript speech may also be appropriate at a more formal affair (like a funeral), when your speech must be said exactly as written in order to convey the proper emotion or decorum the situation deserves.

However, there are costs involved in manuscript speaking. First, it’s typically an uninteresting way to present. Unless the speaker has rehearsed the reading as a complete performance animated with vocal expression and gestures (well-known authors often do this for book readings), the presentation tends to be dull. Keeping one’s eyes glued to the script prevents eye contact with the audience. For this kind of “straight” manuscript speech to hold audience attention, the audience must be already interested in the message and speaker before the delivery begins.

It is worth noting that professional speakers, actors, news reporters, and politicians often read from an autocue device, such as a TelePrompTer, especially when appearing on television, where eye contact with the camera is crucial. With practice, a speaker can achieve a conversational tone and give the impression of speaking extemporaneously and maintaining eye contact while using an autocue device. However, success in this medium depends on two factors: (1) the speaker is already an accomplished public speaker who has learned to use a conversational tone while delivering a prepared script, and (2) the speech is written in a style that sounds conversational and in spoken rather than written, edited English.

For the purposes of your public speaking class, you will not be encouraged to read your speech. Instead, you will be asked to give an extemporaneous presentation.

Extemporaneous Speaking

Extemporaneous speaking is the presentation of a carefully planned and rehearsed speech, spoken in a conversational manner using brief notes. By using notes rather than a full manuscript, the extemporaneous speaker can establish and maintain eye contact with the audience and assess how well they are understanding the speech as it progresses. And since you will be graded (to some degree) on establishing and maintaining eye contact with your audience, extemporaneous speaking can be extremely beneficial in that regard. Without all the words on the page to read, you have little choice but to look up and make eye contact with your audience. In some cases, your instructor will require you to prepare strong outlines as a foundation for your speech; this topic is addressed in Chapter 6.

Speaking extemporaneously has some advantages. It promotes the likelihood that you, the speaker, will be perceived as knowledgeable and credible since you know the speech well enough that you don't need to read it. In addition, your audience is likely to pay better attention to the message because it is engaging both verbally and nonverbally. It also allows flexibility; you are working from the strong foundation of an outline, but if you need to delete, add, or rephrase something at the last minute or to adapt to your audience, you can do so.

The disadvantage of extemporaneous speaking is that in some cases it does not allow for the verbal and the nonverbal preparation that are almost always required for a good speech. Adequate preparation cannot be achieved the day before you're

Extemporaneous speaking

the presentation of a carefully planned and rehearsed speech, spoken in a conversational manner using brief notes

scheduled to speak, so be aware that if you want to present a credibly delivered speech, you will need to practice many times. Because extemporaneous speaking is the style used in the great majority of public speaking situations, most of the information in the subsequent sections of this chapter is targeted toward this kind of speaking.

Memorized Speaking

Memorized speaking

the rote recitation of a written message that the speaker has committed to memory

Memorized speaking is the rote recitation of a written message that the speaker has committed to memory. Actors, of course, recite from memory whenever they perform from a script in a stage play, television program, or movie scene. When it comes to speeches, memorization can be useful when the message needs to be exact and the speaker doesn't want to be confined by notes.

The advantage to memorization is that it enables the speaker to maintain eye contact with the audience throughout the speech. Being free of notes means that you can move freely around the stage and use your hands to make gestures. If your speech uses visual aids, this freedom is even more of an advantage.

Vocal cues

the subtle but meaningful variations in speech delivery, which can include the use of pitch, tone, volume, and pace

However, there are some real and potential costs. First, unless you also plan and memorize every **vocal cue** (the subtle but meaningful variations in speech delivery, which can include the use of pitch, tone, volume, and pace), gesture, and facial expression, your presentation will be flat and uninteresting, and even the most fascinating topic will suffer. You might end up speaking in a monotone or a sing-song repetitive delivery pattern. You might also present your speech in a rapid "machine-gun" style that fails to emphasize the most important points.

Second, if you lose your place and start trying to ad lib, the contrast in your style of delivery will alert your audience that something is wrong. More frighteningly, if you go completely blank during the presentation, it will be extremely difficult to find your place and keep going. Obviously, memorizing a typical seven-minute classroom speech takes a great deal of time and effort, and if you aren't used to memorizing, it is very difficult to pull off. Realistically, you probably will not have the time necessary to give a completely memorized speech. However, if you practice adequately, you will approach the feeling of memorized while still being extemporaneous.

As we said earlier, for the purposes of this class you will use extemporaneous speaking. Many professional speakers who

are paid to make speeches use this approach because, while they may largely know what they want to say, they usually make changes and adjustments based on the audience or event. This approach also incorporates most of the benefits of memorized speaking (knowing what you want to say; being very thoroughly rehearsed) and manuscript speaking (having some words in front of you to refer to) without the inherent pitfalls those approaches bring with them.

11.3 – Preparing For Your Delivery

In the 1970s, before he was an author, playwright, and film actor, Steve Martin was an up-and-coming stand-up comedian whose popularity soared as a result of his early appearances on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson and *Saturday Night Live*. As Martin notes in his autobiography, *Born Standing Up* (2008), as the audiences for his act got bigger and bigger, he needed to adapt his delivery to accommodate:

Some promoters got on board and booked me into a theater in Dallas. Before the show I asked one of them, “How many people are out there?” “Two thousand,” he said. Two thousand? How could there be two thousand? That night I did my usual bit of taking people outside, but it was starting to get dangerous and difficult. First, people were standing in the streets, where they could be hit by a car. Second, only a small number of the audience could hear or see me (could Charlton Heston really have been audible when he was addressing a thousand extras?). Third, it didn’t seem as funny or direct with so many people; I reluctantly dropped it from my repertoire. (p. 168)

Martin’s audiences would grow to be around 50,000 at the height of his popularity as a stand-up, again requiring him to make adjustments to his delivery (he began wearing his iconic all-white suit so that people in the nosebleed seats at his shows could still see his frenetic movements from afar). Most of us will never speak to so many people at once, but even though you don’t expect an audience of such size, you should still be prepared to adapt to the setting in which you will speak.

Your audiences, circumstances, and physical contexts for public speaking will vary. At some point in your life you may run for public office or rise to a leadership role in a business or volunteer organization. Or you may be responsible for informing coworkers about a new policy, regulation, or opportunity. You

may be asked to deliver remarks in the context of a worship service, wedding, or funeral. You may be asked to introduce a keynote speaker or simply to make an important announcement in some context. Sometimes you will speak in a familiar environment, while at other times you may be faced with an unfamiliar location and very little time to get used to speaking with a microphone. Being prepared to deal with different speaking situations will help reduce anxiety you may have about giving a speech, so let's look at factors you need to keep in mind as you prepare for your speech in this class, as well as future speeches you may need to give.

Using Lecterns

Lectern

a small raised surface, usually with a slanted top, where a speaker can place notes during a speech

A **lectern** is a small raised surface, usually with a slanted top, where a speaker can place notes during a speech. While a lectern adds a measure of formality to the speaking situation, it also allows speakers the freedom to do two things: to come out from behind the lectern to establish more immediate contact with the audience and to use both hands for gestures.

However, for inexperienced speakers who feel anxious, it is all too tempting to grip the edges of the lectern with both hands for security. You might even wish you could hide behind it. Be aware of these temptations so you can manage them effectively and present yourself to your audience in a manner they will perceive as confident. One way to achieve this is by limiting your use of the lectern to a place to rest your notes only. Try stepping to the side or front of the lectern when speaking with free hands, only occasionally standing at the lectern to consult your notes. This will enhance your eye contact as well as free up your hands for gesturing. Figures 11.1-11.3 on page 259 give some examples of posture for speaking with a lectern.

Speaking in a Small or Large Physical Space

If you are accustomed to being in a classroom of a certain size, you will need to make adjustments when speaking in a smaller or larger space than what you are used to. A large auditorium can be intimidating, especially for speakers who feel shy and “exposed” when facing an audience. However, the maxim that “proper preparation prevents poor performance” is just as true here as anywhere. If you have prepared and practiced well, you can approach a large-venue speaking engagement with confidence.

In terms of practical adjustments, be aware that your voice is likely to echo, especially if far fewer people are in the space than

it can hold, so you will want to speak more slowly than usual and make use of pauses to mark the ends of phrases and sentences. Similarly, your facial expressions and gestures should be larger so that they are visible from farther away. If you are using visual aids, they need to be large enough to be visible from the back of the auditorium. Of course, if you can get the audience to move to the front, that is the best situation, but it tends not to happen.

Limited space is not as disconcerting for most speakers as enormous space, and it has the advantage of minimizing the tendency to pace back and forth while you speak. A small space also calls for more careful management of note cards and visual aids, as your audience will be able to see up close what you are doing with your hands. Do your best to minimize fumbling, including setting up in advance or arriving early to decide how to organize your materials in the physical space. Of course, if you have any control over the location of the presentation, you should choose one that fits the size of your audience.

Speaking Outdoors

Outdoor settings can be charming, but they are prone to distractions. If you're giving a speech in a setting that is picturesque beautiful or prone to noise such as from cars, it may be difficult to maintain the audience's attention. If you know this ahead of time, you might plan your speech to focus more on mood than information and perhaps to make reference to the lovely view.

More typically, outdoor speech venues can pose challenges with weather, sun glare, and uninvited guests, such as insects and pigeons. If the venue is located near a busy highway, it might be difficult to make yourself heard over the ambient noise. You might lack the usual accommodations, such as a lectern or table. Whatever the situation, you will need to use your best efforts to project your voice clearly without sounding like you're yelling or straining your voice.

Using a Microphone

Most people today are familiar with microphones that are built into video recorders, phones, and other electronic devices, but they may be new at using a microphone to deliver a speech. One overall principle to remember is that a microphone only amplifies, it does not clarify. If you are not enunciating clearly, the microphone will merely enable your audience to hear amplified mumbling.

Microphones come in a wide range of styles and sizes. Generally, the easiest microphone to use is the clip-on style worn on the front of your shirt or blouse. If you look closely at many television personalities and news anchors, you will notice these tiny microphones clipped to their clothing. They require very little adaptation. You simply have to avoid looking down—at your notes, for instance—because your voice will be amplified when you do so. If you have to use a hand-held microphone, making gestures and using notes becomes very difficult.

Lectern and handheld microphones require more adaptation. If they're too close to your mouth, they can screech. If they're too far away, they might not pick up your voice. Some microphones are directional, meaning that they are only effective when you speak directly into them. If there is any opportunity to do so, ask for tips about how to use a particular microphone and practice with it for a few minutes while you have someone listen from a middle row in the audience and signal whether you can be heard well. The best plan, of course, would be to have access to the microphone for practice ahead of the speaking date.

Often a microphone is provided when it isn't necessary. If the room is small or the audience is close to you, do not feel obligated to use the microphone. Sometimes an amplified voice can feel less natural and less compelling than a direct voice. However, if you forgo the microphone, make sure to speak loudly enough for all audience members to hear you—not just those in front.

Audience Size

A small audience is an opportunity for a more intimate, minimally formal tone. If your audience has only eight to twelve people, you can generate greater audience contact. Make use of all the preparation you have done. You do not have to revamp your speech just because the audience is small. When the presentation is over, there will most likely be opportunities to answer questions and have individual contact with your listeners.

One problem with a small audience is that some people will feel it is their right, or they have permission, to interrupt you or raise their hands to ask questions in the middle of your speech. This makes for a difficult situation, because the question may be irrelevant to your topic or cause you to go on a side track if answered. The best you can do is say you'll try to deal with that question at the end of the speech if you have time and hope they take the hint. Better, good rules should be established at the beginning that state there is limited time but discussion may be possible at the end.



Figure 11.1

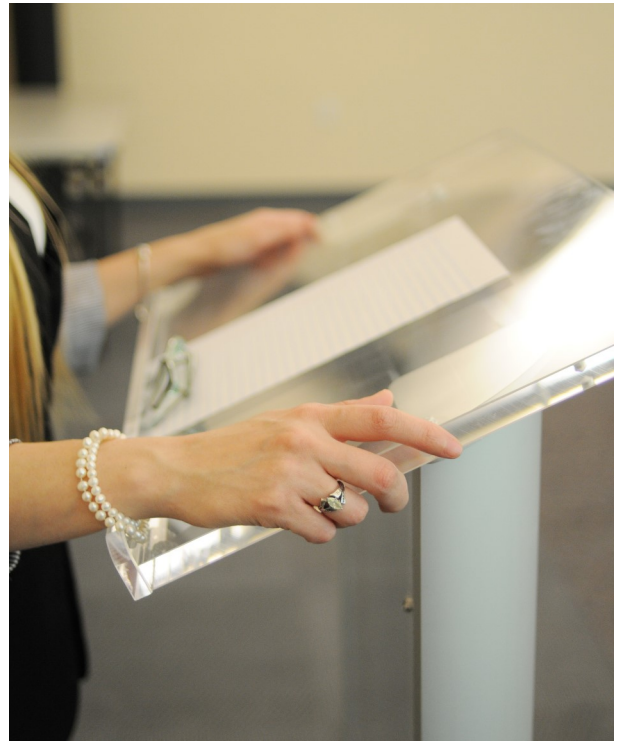


Figure 11.2



Figure 11.3

Your classroom audience may be as many as twenty to thirty students. The format for an audience of this size is still formal but conversational. Depending on how your instructor structures the class, you may or may not be asked to leave time after your speech for questions and answers. Some audiences are much larger. If you have an audience that fills an auditorium, or if you have an auditorium with only a few people in it, you still have a clearly formal task, and you should be guided as much as possible by your preparation.

11.4 – Practicing Your Delivery

There is no foolproof recipe for good delivery. Each of us is unique, and we each embody different experiences and interests. This means each person has an approach, or a style, that is effective for her or him. This further means that anxiety can accompany even the most carefully researched and interesting message. But there are some techniques you can use to minimize that anxious feeling and put yourself in the best possible position to succeed on speech day.

If you've ever watched your favorite college football team practice, you may have noticed that sometimes they blare obnoxiously loud crowd noise over the speaker system in the stadium. The reason is because they know that the crowd, whether home or away, will be raucous and noisy on game day. So to prepare, they practice in as realistic an environment as possible. You need to prepare for your speech in a similar way. What follows are some general tips you should keep in mind, but they all essentially derive from one very straight-forward premise:

Practice your speech beforehand, at home or elsewhere, the way you will give it in class.

Practice Your Speech Out Loud

We sometimes think that the purpose of practicing a speech is to learn the words and be prepared for what we will need to say. Certainly that is part of it, but practice also lets you know where potential problems lie. For example, if you only read your speech in your head, or whisper the words quietly so no one in the next room can hear, you're not really practicing what you will be doing in front of the class. Since you will be speaking with a normal volume for your assignment, you need to practice that way, even at home. Not only will this help you learn the speech, but it will help identify any places where you tend to mispronounce words. Also, sentences on paper do not always translate

well to the spoken medium. Practicing out loud allows you to actually hear where you have trouble and fix it before getting up in front of the audience.

Practice Your Speech Standing Up

In all the time that the authors of this book have been teaching speech, not once have either of us come into a classroom and seen a bed behind the lectern for students to speak from. This is to say that when you practice at home, lying on your bed reading your speech really only prepares you for one thing: lying on a bed reading a speech. Since you will be standing in front of your class, you need to practice that way. As we mention in more detail below, the default position for delivering a speech is with your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees slightly bent. Practicing this way will help develop muscle memory and will make it feel more natural when you are doing it for real.

Practice Your Speech with a Lectern

One of the biggest challenges with practicing a speech as you're going to give it is usually the fact that most of us don't own a lectern. This is problematic, since you don't want to practice giving your speech while holding your notes in front of you because that is what will feel comfortable when you give your speech for real. So the solution is to practice your speech while standing behind something that approximates the lectern you will have in your classroom. Sometime this may be a kitchen counter or maybe even a dresser you pull away from the wall. One particularly creative idea that has been used in the past is to pull out an ironing board and stand behind that. The point is that you want to get experience standing behind something and resting your speech on it.

Of course, if you really want to practice with an actual lectern, it might be worth the time to see if your classroom is empty later in the day or find out if another classroom has the same type of lectern in it. Practicing with the real thing is always ideal, and Dalton State provides plenty of classroom space to do just that if you look hard enough. The presentation lab in Roberts Library is another option.

Practice Your Speech with an Audience

Obviously on the day you give your speech you will have an audience of your fellow students and your professor watching you. The best way to prepare for the feeling of having someone watch you while giving a speech is to have someone watch you

while you *practice* giving a speech. We don't mean a collection of stuffed animals arranged on your bed or locking your pets in the room with you, but actual human beings. Ask your parents, siblings, friends, or significant other to listen to you while running through what you will say. Not only will you get practice in front of an audience, but they may be able to tell you about any parts that were unclear or problems you might encounter when you give it for a grade.

Not to overcomplicate the issue, but remember that when you speak to your class, you will have an entire room full of people watching, so if you only have one person watching you practice, be sure to simulate an entire audience by looking around the room and not focusing on just that one person. When you give your speech for real, you will want to make eye contact with the people on the left side of the room as well as the right; with the people in the front as well as in the back. You also want the eye contact to be around 5 second long, not just a glance; the idea is that you are talking to individuals, not just a glob of people. During practice, it may help to pick out some strategically placed objects around the room to occasionally glance at just to get into the habit of looking around more often.

Practice Your Speech for Time

You will undoubtedly be given a time limit for each of your speeches, and points will be deducted if you go over or under that time. Therefore, you want to make sure you are well within time. As a general rule, if your speech window is 5-7 minutes, your ideal speech time is going to be 6 minutes; this gives you an extra 60 seconds at the beginning in case you talk very fast and race through it, and 60 second on the back end in case you get lost or something goes wrong. If you practice at home and your 5-7 minute speech lasts 5:06, you are probably going to be in trouble on speech day. Most likely your nerves will cause you to speak slightly faster and put you under the 5:00 mark.

When practicing your speech at home for time, it is a good idea to time yourself at least three times. This way you can see if you are generally coming in around the same time and feel pretty good that it is an accurate reflection of how long you will speak. Conversely, if during your three rehearsals your times are 5:45, 5:12, and 6:37, then that is a clear indicator that you need to be more consistent in what you are saying and doing.

Although we are using examples of practicing for classroom speeches, the principle is even more important for non-classroom speeches. One of the authors had to give a very important presentation about the college to an accreditation

board . She practiced about 15 times, to make sure the time was right, that her transitions made sense, that she was fluid, and that the presentational slides and her speech matched. Each time something improved.

Practice Your Speech by Filming Yourself

There is nothing that gets us to change what we're doing or correct a problem quicker than seeing ourselves doing something we don't like on video. Your instructor may film your speech in class and have you critique it afterwards, but it may be more helpful to do that in *advance* of giving your speech. By watching yourself, you will notice all the small things you do that might prove to be distracting (or cost you points) during the actual speech. Many times students aren't aware that they have low energy, bounce, sway, pull at their clothes, play with hair or jewelry, or make other unusual and distracting movements until they see themselves doing it. And, since we are generally our own harshest critics, you will be quick to notice any flaws in your speech and correct them.

It is important enough that it deserves reiterating:

Practice your speech beforehand, at home or elsewhere, the way you will give it in class.

Following these steps will not only prepare you better for delivering the speech, but they may also help reduce anxiety since



you will feel more familiar with the situation you find yourself in when faced with a speaking engagement. Additionally, the more you speak publicly, whether for practice or in front of a live audience, the more fluid you will become for later speeches.

11.5 – What to Do When Delivering Your Speech

The interplay between the verbal and nonverbal components of your speech can either bring the message vividly to life or confuse or bore the audience. Therefore, it is best that you neither overdramatize your speech delivery behaviors nor downplay them. This is a balance achieved through rehearsal, trial and error, and experience. One way to think of this is in terms of the Goldilocks paradigm: you don't want to overdo the delivery because you might distract your audience by looking hyper or overly animated. Conversely, someone whose delivery is too understated (meaning they don't move their hands or feet at all) looks unnatural and uncomfortable, which can also distract. Just like Goldilocks, you want a delivery that is “just right” (Figure 11.4, page 266). This middle ground between too much and too little is a much more natural approach to public speaking delivery, which will be covered in more specific detail in the following sections where we discuss specific aspects of your delivery and what you need to think about while actually giving your speech.

Hands

Everyone who gives a speech in public gets scared or nervous. Even professionals who do this for a living feel that way, but they have learned how to combat those nerves through practice. When we get scared or nervous, our bodies emit adrenaline into our systems so we can deal with whatever problem is causing us to feel that way. Unfortunately, you will need to be standing relatively still for the next 5-7 minutes, so that burst of adrenaline is going to try to work its way out of your body somehow, which can manifest itself through your hands.

It may sound funny, but we have seen more than one student unknowingly incorporate “jazz hands” (shaking your hands at your sides with fingers opened wide) at various points in their speech. While certainly an extreme example, this and behaviors like it can easily become distracting. At the other end of the scale, people who don't know what to do with their hands or use them “too little” sometimes hold their arms stiffly at their

sides, behind their backs, or in their pockets, all of which can also look unnatural and distracting.

The key for knowing what to do with your hands is to use them naturally as you would in normal conversation. If you were standing around talking to your friends and wanted to list three reasons why you should all take a road trip this weekend, you would probably hold up your fingers as you counted off the reasons (“First, we hardly ever get this opportunity. Second, we can...”). Try to pay attention to what you do with your hands in regular conversations and incorporate that into your delivery.

However, with all that said, if you have nothing else to do with your hands, the default position for them is to be resting gently on the sides of the lectern (see Figure 11.2). You don’t want to grip the lectern tightly, but resting them on the edges keeps them in position to move your notes on if you need to or use them to gesture. As stated above, you want to practice this way beforehand so you are used to speaking this way when you come to class.

Feet

Just like your hands, a lot of nervous energy is going to try to work its way out of your body through your feet. On the “too much” end, this is most common when people start “dancing” behind the lectern. Another variation is twisting feet around each other or the lower leg. On the other end are those who put their feet together, lock their knees, and never move from that position. Both of these options look unnatural, and therefore will prove to be distracting to your audience. (Locking your knees can also lead to loss of oxygen in your brain, not a good state to be in!)

The default position for your feet, then, is to have them shoulder-width apart with your knees slightly bent (see Figure 11.3). Since public speaking often results in some degree of physical exertion (see Chapter 1), you need to treat speaking as a physical activity like weight lifting or aerobics. Again, you want to look and feel natural, so it is fine to adjust your weight or move out from behind the lectern, but constant motion (or perpetual stillness) will do much more harm than good.

Objects

There is a very simple rule when it comes to what you should bring with you to the lectern when you give your speech: **Only bring to the lectern what you absolutely need to give the speech.** Anything else you have with you will only serve as a distraction for both you and the audience. For the purposes of this class, the only objects you should need to give

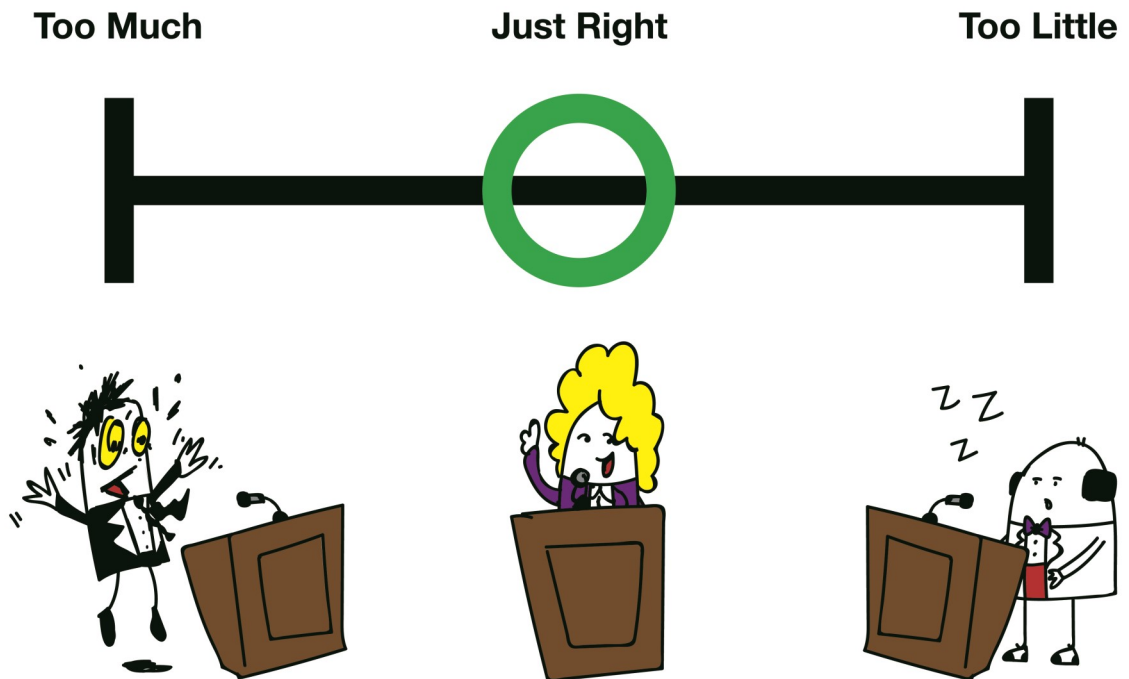


Figure 11.4 – The Goldilocks Paradigm of Delivery

your speech are whatever materials you are speaking from, and possibly a visual aid if you are using one. Beyond that, don't bring pens, laptops, phones, lucky charms, or notebooks with you to the lectern. Invariable these extra items are hassles, and can ultimately become a distraction themselves when they fall off the lectern or get in your way. Some students like to bring their electronic tablet, laptop computer, or cell phone with them, but there are some obvious disadvantages to these items (especially if you don't turn the ringer on your cell phone off!).

Not only do you need to be aware of what you bring with you, but you should also be aware of what you have on your person as well. Sometimes, in the course of dressing up for a speech, we can overlook simple issues that can cause problems while speaking. Some of these can include:

- Jewelry that 'jingles' when you move;
- Uncomfortable shoes or shoes that you are not used to (don't make speech day the first time you try wearing high heels);

- Anything with fringe, zippers, or things hanging off it. Like a cat, these become irresistible to play with while speaking (another way nervous energy manifests);
- For those with longer hair, remember that you will be looking down at your notes and then looking back up. Don't be forced to "fix" your hair or tuck it behind your ear every time you look up. Use a barrette, hairspray, or some other method to keep your hair totally out of your face so that the audience can see your eyes and you won't have to adjust your hair. It can be very distracting to an audience to watch a speaker pull hair of his or her face after every sentence.

The lectern

We have already discussed the lectern, but it is worth mentioning again briefly here. The lectern is a tool for you to use that should ultimately make your speech easier to give, and you need to use it that way. On the "too much" end, some people want to trick their audience into thinking they are not nervous by leaning on the podium in a relaxed manner, sometime going so far as to actually begin tipping the podium forward. Your lectern is not part of your skeletal system, to prop you up, so don't do this. On the "too little" end are those who are afraid to touch it, worried that they will use it incorrectly or somehow knock it over (you won't!).

As always, you want the "Goldilocks" middle ground. As stated above, rest your notes and hands on it, but don't lean on the lectern or "hug" it. Practicing with a lectern (or something similar to a lectern) will eliminate most of your fears about using it.

Eye Contact

As we've said consistently throughout this book, your audience is the single biggest factor that influences every aspect of your speech. And since eye contact is how you establish and maintain a rapport with your audience during your speech, it is an extremely important element of your delivery. The general rule of thumb is that 80% of your total speech time should be spent making eye contact with your audience (Lucas, 2015, p. 250). Your professor may or may not hold you to that standard, but regardless he or she will absolutely want to see you making an effort to engage your audience through looking directly at them.

What is important to note here is that you want to establish genuine eye contact with your audience, and not "fake" eye contact. There have been a lot of techniques generated for

“faking” eye contact, and none of them look natural. For example, these are not good ideas:

- Three points on the back wall – You may have heard that instead of making eye contact, you can just pick three points on the back wall and look at those. What ends up happening, though, is you look like you are staring off into space and your audience will spend the majority of your speech trying to figure out what you are looking at. To avoid this, look around the entire room, including the front, back, left, and right sides of the space.
- The swimming method – This happens when someone is reading his or her speech and looks up quickly and briefly to try to make it seem like they are making eye contact, not unlike a swimmer who pops his head out of the water for a breath before going back under. Eye contact is more than just physically moving your head; it is about looking at your audience and establishing a connection. In general, your eye contact should last at least five seconds at a time and should be with individuals throughout the room.
- The stare down – Since you will, to some degree, be graded on your eye contact, some students think (either consciously or not), that the best way to ensure they get credit for establishing eye contact is to always and exclusively look directly at their professor. While we certainly appreciate the attention, we want to see that you are establishing eye contact with your *entire* audience, not just one person. Also, this is probably uncomfortable for the instructor.

Volume

Volume

the relative softness or loudness of your voice

Volume refers to the relative softness or loudness of your voice. Like most of the other issues we’ve discussed in this section, the proper volume for a given speaking engagement usually falls on the scale in Figure 11.4. If you speak too softly (“too little” volume), your audience will struggle to hear and understand you and may give up trying to listen. If you speak with “too much” volume, your audience may feel that you are yelling at them, or at least feel uncomfortable with you shouting. The volume you use should fit the size of the audience and the room. Fortunately, for the purposes of this class, your normal speaking voice will probably work just fine since you are in a relatively small space with around twenty people. However, if you know that you are naturally a soft-spoken person or naturally a

very loud talker, you may want to make adjustments when giving your speech. Obviously this will all change if you are asked to speak in a larger venue or given a microphone to use.

Pitch

Pitch is the relative highness or lowness of your voice, and like everything, you can have too much or too little (with regard to variation of it). Too much pitch variation occurs when people “sing” their speeches, and their voices oscillate between very high pitched and very low pitched. While uncommon, this is sometimes attributed to nerves. More common is too little variation in pitch, which is known as being **monotone**.

Delivering a speech in a monotone manner is usually caused by reading too much; generally the speaker’s focus is on saying the words correctly (because they have not practiced) and they forget to speak normally to show their interest in the topic, as we would in everyday conversation. For most people, pitch isn’t a major issue, but if you think it might be for you, ask the people in your practice audience what they think. Generally, if we are interested in and passionate about communicating our thoughts, we are not likely to be monotone. We are rarely monotone when talking to friends and family about matters of importance to us, so pick topics you care about.

Rate

How quickly or slowly you say the words of your speech is the **rate**. Too little rate (i.e. speaking too slowly) will make it sound like you may not fully know your speech or what you are talking about, and will ultimately cost you some credibility with your audience. It may also result in the audience being bored and lose focus on what you are saying. By contrast, too much rate (i.e. speaking too fast) can be overly taxing on an audience’s ability to keep up with and digest what you are saying. It sometimes helps to imagine that your speech is a jog or run that you and your friends (the audience) are taking together. You (as the speaker) are setting the pace based on how quickly you speak. If you start sprinting, it may be too difficult for your audience to keep up and they may give up halfway through. Most people who speak very quickly know they speak quickly, and if that applies to you just be sure to practice slowing down and writing yourself delivery cues in your notes (see Chapter 6) to maintain a more comfortable rate.

You especially will want to maintain a good, deliberate rate at the beginning of your speech because your audience will be getting used to your voice. We have all called a business where the

Pitch

the relative highness or lowness of your voice

Monotone

a continuing sound, especially of someone's voice, that is unchanging in pitch and without intonation

Rate

the speed at which you speak; how quickly or slowly a speaker talks

person answering the phone mumbles the name of the business in a rushed way. We aren't sure if we called the right number. Since the introduction is designed to get the audience's attention and interest in your speech, you will want to focus on clear delivery there. Regulating rate is another reason why video-recording yourself can be so helpful because we often do not realize how fast we speak.

Pauses

The common misconception for public speaking students is that pausing during your speech is bad, but that isn't necessarily true. You pause in normal conversations, so you shouldn't be afraid of pausing while speaking. This is especially true if you are making a particularly important point or want for a statement to have a more powerful impact: you will want to give the audience a moment to digest what you have said.

For example, consider the following statement: "Because of issues like pollution and overpopulation, in 50 years the earth's natural resources will be so depleted that it will become difficult for most people to obtain enough food to survive." Following a statement like this, you want to give your audience just a brief moment to fully consider what you are saying. Hopefully they will think something along the lines of *What if I'm still alive then?* or *What will my children do?* and become more interested in hearing what you have to say.

Of course, there is such a thing as pausing too much, both in terms of frequency and length. Someone who pauses too often (after each sentence) may come off seeming like they don't know their speech very well. Someone who pauses too long (more than a few seconds), runs the risk of the audience feeling uncomfortable or, even worse becoming distracted or letting their attention wander. We are capable of processing words (input) more quickly than anyone can speak clearly, which is one of the reasons listening is difficult. Pauses should be controlled to maintain attention of the audience.

Vocalized pauses

pauses that incorporate some sort of sound or word that is unrelated to what is being said; "uh," "um," and "like" are well known examples

Vocalized pauses

At various points during your speech, you may find yourself in need of a brief moment to collect your thoughts or prepare for the next section of your speech. At those moments, you will be pausing, but we don't always like to let people know that we're pausing. So what many of us do in an attempt to "trick" the audience is fill in those pauses with sounds so that it appears that we haven't actually paused. These are known as **vocalized pauses**, or sometimes "fillers." Another term for them is "nonfluencies."

Everyone uses vocalized pauses to some degree, but not everyone's are problematic. This obviously becomes an issue when the vocalized pauses become distracting due to their over-use. We have little doubt that you can remember a time when you were speaking to someone who said the word "like" after every three words and you became focused on it. One of your authors remembers attending a wedding and (inadvertently) began counting the number of times the best man said "like" during his toast (22 was the final count). The most common vocalized pause is "uh," but then there are others. Can you think of any?

The bad news here is that there is no quick fix for getting rid of your vocalized pauses. They are so ingrained into all of our speech patterns that getting rid of them is a challenge. However, there is a two-step process you can employ to begin eliminating them. First, you need to identify what your particular vocalized pause is. Do you say "um," "well," or "now" before each sentence? Do you finish each thought with, "you know?" Do you use "like" before every adjective (as in "he was like so unhappy.")

After figuring out what your vocalized pause is, the second step is to carefully and meticulously try to catch yourself when you say it. If you hear yourself saying "uh," remind yourself, *I need to try to not say that*. Catching yourself and being aware of how often you use vocalized pauses will help you begin the process of reducing your dependence on them and hopefully get rid of them completely.

One of the authors uses a game in her class that she adopted from a couple of disc jockeys she used to hear. It is called the "uh game." The callers had to name six things in a named category (items in a refrigerator, pro-football teams, makes of cars, etc.) in 20 second without saying a vocalized pause word or phrase. It sounds easy, but it isn't. It is a good way to practice focusing on the content and not saying a nonfluency.

The ten items listed above represent the major delivery issues you will want to be aware of when giving a speech, but it is by no means an exhaustive list. There is however, one final piece of delivery advice we would like to offer. We know that no matter how hard you practice and how diligent you are in preparing for your speech, you are most likely going to mess up some aspect of your speech when you give it in class, at least a little. That's normal. Everyone does it. The key is to not make a big deal about it or let the audience *know* you messed up. Odds are that they will never even realize your mistake if you don't tell them there was a mistake. Saying something like "I can't believe I messed that up" or "Can I start over?" just telegraphs to the audience your mis-

take. In fact, you have most likely never heard a perfect speech delivered in your life. It is likely that you just didn't realize that the speaker missed a line or briefly forgot what she wanted to say.

As has been the driving maxim of this chapter, this means that you need to

Practice your speech beforehand, at home or elsewhere, the way you will give it in class.

Since you know you are likely going to make some sort of mistake in class, use your practice time at home to work on how you will deal with those mistakes. If you say a word incorrectly or start reading the wrong sentence, don't go back and begin that section anew. That's not what you would do in class, so just correct yourself and move on. If you practice dealing with your mistakes at home, you will be better prepared for the inevitable errors that will find their way into your speech in class.

Conclusion

Good delivery is meant to augment your speech and help convey your information to the audience. Anything that potentially distracts your audience means that fewer people will be informed, persuaded, or entertained by what you have said. Practicing your speech in an environment that closely resembles the actual situation that you will be speaking in will better prepare you for what to do and how to deliver your speech when it really counts.

Something to Think About

Each of us struggles with a certain aspect of delivery: voice, posture, eye contact, distracting movement, vocalized pauses, etc. What is yours? Based on this chapter and what you have already experienced in class, what is your biggest takeaway about improving delivery?