

THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

PERFORMANCE COACHING FOR BUSINESS AND EDUCATION

Identify your habits when giving a talk

The following are a sample of poor characteristics for oral presentations. Be honest with yourself and tick those behaviours that are sometimes a part of your talks.

| Characteristic | Why we tend to do this | Effect on your audience |
|---|---|---|
| Little or no eye contact with your audience | I feel too nervous to look at people looking at me. If I don't look at them I feel less nervous. | 'Hello' we are still here or haven't you noticed us? |
| Mumbling | I am not a confident speaker and feel that if I mumble the audience won't notice my mistakes. Mumbling means that your voice is too quiet. Always project your voice to the back of the room and never to the front row. | What is he/she talking about? After trying to understand you for a while, your audience will give up and start to feel irritated. |
| Monotonous voice | We all tend to have a monotonous voice when we read a written text. It is best to have some notes on a card as a prompts only. If you feel too nervous to do this make your text a large print (harder to read too quickly in a monotone) | A monotonous voice will send your audience to sleep or they will daydream. |

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| | <p>and put in prompts to yourself to look at the audience and pause. Remember your voice needs to format your speech with pauses, pitch variation and speed.</p> | |
| <p>Little or no structure to your talk</p> | <p>This usually means you are not well prepared. You may know your subject very well but you haven't been able to organise the material or an appropriate 'take home message' for this audience.</p> | <p>Your audience will feel "What is this all about?" they will try to work out a structure but after about 6 minutes they will give up, get annoyed and start focusing on you instead of the content!</p> |
| <p>Too much information</p> | <p>You know your topic really well but don't know how to prioritise what this audience needs to know. You may find that you have too many tightly packed slides with what you think is absolutely vital information</p> | <p>Your audience will start to feel desperate and feel they cannot read another slide. They have reached overload and you have lost them.</p> |
| <p>Bad visuals</p> | <p>This usually means you haven't prepared properly. Bad visuals can be irrelevant images to your text, or unreadable images.</p> <p>Always check why an image is there and if you are not going to talk about it, then don't put it in.</p> <p>You may put in an unreadable visual from a distance because you think they just need to know this chart or form exists or that you have done the work. If they</p> | <p>Again this is just annoying for your audience. If they can't read it, why is it there?</p> |

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| | <p>need to SEE your image and you know the print is small, give it as a handout.</p> | |
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From the list above which of those behaviours have you found yourself doing? How many of those behaviours have you seen from other speakers? Think carefully how you can eliminate those behaviours.

When we change these characteristics this is how it feels for your audience:

- A speaker **engaged with the audience** – the audience feel included in your talk and ‘think with you’ during the session.
- **Clear and animated speaker** – the audience can understand what is said because it is not too fast or too slow, the diction is clear and the voice is animated so that the audience can follow more easily. This also applies to not reading from a paper.
- With a **clear structure** – you say what you are going to discuss in the session and then deliver. If your structure is clear and your audience stay with you, you can always put in some unexpected surprises.
- **Clear visuals** – your audience see that you have adjusted visuals to meet the target of the talk and as you discuss the visuals they can see what is meant and stay with you.
- The **amount of information is just right** – your audience are thankful that you have tailored the important information to meet their needs. Once again your audience stays with you throughout your talk and go away with the ‘take home message’ you wanted.

References

1. Ramsay, Paul, Maier, Pat, Price, Geraldine (2010) *Study Skills for Business & Management Students*, Pearsons, Essex, UK. See chapter 6 ‘Presenting your work’.
2. Maier, Pat, Barney Anna, Price Geraldine (2009) *Study Skills for Science, Engineering & Technology Students*, Pearsons, Essex, UK. See chapter 6 ‘Presenting your work’.

These two study skills books have adapted material for different student bodies.