

Tip Sheet: Public Speaking in the Classroom

Here are a few 'key principles' to keep in mind when you are preparing to speak in front of others, whether it is in the classroom, at a conference, in an interview, or as part of a seminar. The principles are deliberately broad so that they can be applied to a range of disciplines and contexts.

Key Principles of Communication:

- **We are all always communicating.** There are three main registers of communication; **to be as effective as possible, we must be actively aware of them all.**
 - **Body language:** non-verbal communication
 - **Tone:** vocal communication
 - **Content:** the content or message

- **Goal and Audience:** What do you want your given audience to do/remember?
 - **Be clear about your Goal.**
 - **Modify your Goal to appeal to your specific Audience.** (Remember, you can change your goal, but not your audience!)

- **WIIFM: "What's In It For Me?"**
 - This question (asked from the perspective of your audience) must be answered as directly and practically as possible at the beginning of any lecture, interview, conference paper, seminar discussion.
 - **Tell your audience what they will gain from paying attention to and remembering the material you are presenting/discussing?**

- **Credibility:** "Why should I listen to you?"
 - **Tell your audience how you know what you know.** Have you done research/ taken a class/ received your degree/ done this before/ had personal experience in a given area?
 - **Do you have common ground with your audience?** This can also help establish credibility and WIIFM ("I am like you, I know that this information will help you as it has me...").

Tips for Non-verbal and Vocal Communication:

- **Physical Communication**
 - **Take up space**
 - Stand with your feet hip distance apart, fully facing your audience.
 - Build in meaningful movement, commanding space between lectern, computer, chalkboard etc.
 - **Make eye contact**
 - Spend a few seconds with each person you look at.
 - For bigger lecture halls, use an M or a W pattern to spread eye contact throughout the room.
 - **Avoid defensive postures:**
 - Arms crossed, hands in pockets, hands clasped behind or in front of body.
 - These postures limit your gestural ability and will make your audience close off as well.
 - **Avoid fiddling with props**
 - Put down the pen/chalk/remote when you are not using them.
 - If you know you play with jewelry, don't wear it; if you play with your hair, pull it back;
 - Empty your pockets of change and keys that make noise and tempt fiddling.
 - **Stand your ground**

- **Avoid** swaying, pacing
 - **Avoid** the hip-cock
 - **Fake it till you make it**
 - **Smile!!** Even if you don't feel like it; this will put your audience at ease and soon you will feel better!
- **Vocal Communication:**
 - Be aware of your habits in the following areas:
 - **Volume** – how loud you speak in relation to size of space and audience
 - **Pitch** – where in your voice you speak (high/low/monotone)
 - **Rate** – Speed, how slow or fast you speak
 - **Vocal Variety** – how often you change your pitch, rate, and volume
 - Together, these aspects create **Tone**: the emotion, confidence, enthusiasm with which you speak.
 - **Avoid filler words:** um, uh, sort of, like, you know
 - What to do?**
 - Enlist a monitor or tape yourself; you need to hear it to change it.
 - Replace these with silence: **Pauses** are good for you (sound well considered) and your audience (time to process info)!
 - **Avoid upspeak:** when you turn statements into questions, upward inflection after all statements.
 - What to do?**
 - Enlist a monitor or tape yourself; you need to hear it to change it.
 - Picture exclamation points after your statements; vocally send your points in a parabola that lands with your audience; silently say “dammit” after a declarative statement, such as your name.

Know Yourself to Help Yourself: How do your nerves manifest themselves?

- **Note what happens when you get up to speak**
 - Do you sweat/ shake/ mind goes blank/ pace/ talk too fast/ and so on?
 - Knowing what to expect will keep you from feeling thrown off in the moment.
 - Mind shift: this is normal and even necessary! It is your body's way of getting ready to perform. Anxiety = Energy!
- **Anticipate and prepare:**
 - Wear dark colors if you know sweat; write yourself notes to SLOW DOWN in the margins of you notes; take a deep breath when your mind goes blank
 - Warm-up and get some exercise before hand to release nervous energy in your body
 - Do not drink too much caffeine before presenting
 - Build in some meaningful movement (not pacing!) to use some of that nervous energy
 - Bring water
 - Make sure your blood sugar is not too low (don't forget to eat!)
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- **DO NOT tell your audience you are nervous.** Things are never as apparent from the outside as the inside.
- **Be other-centered:** Remember that you are speaking in service of you audience. Everything you do is to help them learn/ remember/ take action. The less you focus on yourself, the less nervous you will be.

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