

WHEN PUBLIC HEALTH NEEDS TO SPEAK PUBLICLY

Skills of Communication for Greater Impact



The purpose of this supplementary session is to:

- ✦ *understand that language, para-language and body language are the three channels of communicating in person; and*
- ✦ *acquire practical language, para-language and body language skills to achieve greater impact when communicating in person.*



The Script (Language)

The way we speak is different from the way we write, and if your script contains words and phrases that are unnatural and you've never uttered, you won't know what tune to give them. But if you recognise on the page, phrases you've often spoken, you'll know instantly how they should be said. As a result, you'll be more relaxed, find broadcasting easier, and, you'll enjoy it.



Structure

1. ***Know your audience:*** Understand your mission in relation to the audience you seek to influence. Who are they? What's their level of understanding? What will turn them on? Build on this. What is their gender profile? Males are 93% visual - they need to see it. Females are 87% auditory - they need to hear it. If they are hostile, find common ground and then build. Get the hostility dealt with up front to take the fire out of their anger.
2. ***The 'shape' of the presentation*** is important. Most presentations have an introduction, body and an end; although variations are possible - e.g., a number of separate threads that are finally brought together at the end.
3. ***Find a strong start*** to grasp the listener's interest and focus energy. An *opening metaphor* works well especially for grand presentations, to which you can return occasionally during the address and particularly at the end. Avoid false or double starts (delivery of an initial unrelated message before you proceed to the main script). A humorous start can work well provided that it is linked to the mission.
4. ***State your mission:*** The audience needs to feel safe and to know that you are predicable most, but not all, of the time. State your agenda like a table of contents. A useful three-part rule is the following: *Tell them what you are going to say; say it; then tell them what you have said.* Follow a simple logical progression of ideas. The audience will follow you if they know there is a structure. Avoid unfinished thoughts.



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5. ***Ergos, pathos and logos:*** Weaved within the early part of your script, it is useful first to establish your credentials (*ergos*), to empathise with your audience by demonstrating your interest in them as people and that you understand their concerns (*pathos*) and then, having gained credibility and shown you understand their situation, to deliver your argument (*logos*). Statements to enhance credibility may take forms like, 'As you know, I have been working on this for the last' (possibly add humour). However, be careful when establishing credentials to speak with humility. Lead from *pathos* to *logos* by establishing the mind set of the audience; e.g., 'You'll find that'
 6. ***Write in pictures*** to stimulate your listeners' imaginations. Give them new ideas and new imagery for old ideas. Be creative and unique.
 7. ***Add a touch of spice*** here and there to provide greater excitement and to entertain. This may be humour, a contentious or challenging statement, new or surprising information or a new perspective or means of expressing the theme; e.g., an interesting visual. Humour is important and desirable, but must be natural for the presenter. Knowing your audience, it is usually possible to develop a few special scenarios. Things which are familiar to the audience presented in a different light will often bring a laugh since the sort of things that amuse human being are disguised cruelty, remediable misfortune, familiar indignities and sudden relief from tension. They are most happy when laughing at the speaker.
 8. ***Involve the audience*** by using a conversational style, asking rhetorical questions, calling for a show of hands, etc. Posing a question or two brings the presenter down from his/her pedestal: 'I asked myself why is this so?' Admit ignorance about some answers - 'We don't know the answer to this yet.' Another important technique to maximise audience involvement is to use as much benefit language as possible - keep pushing the benefits of your argument for them. The audience needs help to realise the benefits: 'Now let me show you exactly what this could mean for you.' This helps to eliminate scepticism and for the audience to take the steps towards the change you seek. If there is a down side to your argument, put this up front as well.
 9. ***Use an even stronger finish:*** *Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending* (Longfellow). Form a connection between the finish and the introduction so as to complete the 'circle of meaning'. Call them to action to make change as a result of the arguments they've just heard. The penultimate section is vital and tends to underline the message and emotion that the audience will take away. It should incorporate the overall pictorial metaphor. It should start low key and build slowly and sincerely with conviction, bringing to bear both the material which you have explored and the way in which it will impinge on their lives and understandings as well as the changes it should bring about. The final conclusion should be brief so as not to dissipate the effect and should contain a tightly condensed restatement of the message. Avoid double endings and postscripts. The script should assist the audience to recognise that it is the finish. Avoid 'thank you' if you want them to act - they have not finished their part yet.
 10. ***The take-home message:*** It is helpful to design your script around the question, 'what do I want the audience to take away from my presentation and remember?' or 'When it is over, what do I want the audience to do?' It is unrealistic to expect that they will remember much more than one key point (if you perform well). The basis for the take-home message should be set at the start, developed during the body of the talk and driven home with impact at the finish. Make sure that the theme is pitched to the needs and knowledge level of the audience.

Sentences

1. **Construct simple sentences:** Whenever you can, use simple sentences connected by 'and' or 'but'. Be wary of subordinate clauses, and try not to use words like 'however', 'notwithstanding' and 'nevertheless'. Avoid cliches and too much jargon. Opening sentences of paragraphs should be short, punchy and pithy to be elaborated on as the paragraph unfolds.
2. **Turn passives into actives:** It's more direct and vivid. Say 'Brian Johnston described this result', not 'The result was described by Brian Johnston.' (This rule applies also to written communication).
3. **Names and official positions:** Always give the position first as, for example, when opening your presentation. Say 'The Commissioner of Health, Ms Felicity Smith', not 'Ms Felicity Smith, Commissioner of Health.'
4. **Watch lists of points:** Keep them as short as possible.
5. **Avoid too many figures:** Listeners hear the way you express differences in or the size of an amount, more so than the detailed figures.

Words

1. **Use simple, straightforward spoken English:** Ask yourself, 'If I were chatting to a congenial person, who could well be a member of this audience, is this the way I'd say it?' Don't be afraid of simple words. Know your audience and pitch your script to their needs; e.g., according to their stage of development. Think carefully about words like 'unique' and 'automatically'.
2. **Be personal and conversational:** Use 'I' and 'you'. Normal conversational abbreviations such as "he's", "it's", "isn't", "you'll", "they've", "mustn't", "shouldn't", etc, give a friendly, relaxed feel to a presentation, and can help to tone down a tendency to be too formal.
3. **Adjectives and adverbs can often be cut:** You need less descriptive words to communicate with spoken English. Great economy is possible because the voice can carry more meaning than the print. Keep the script smooth and fluent rather than verbose.
4. **Avoid multiple words ending in '-ing':** Don't say 'On entering the building'; say 'When you enter the building', or better still, 'When you go into the building.'
5. **Don't be afraid to use the same word more than once:** You can't write the same word differently each time, but you can say it differently; e.g., 'She's had a nine-pound baby and is delighted' sounds better as 'She's had a nine-pound baby and she's delighted.'

Physical Form of the Script

1. **Use large (A4) sheets of duplicating paper** (the thick sort). It makes less noise than the crisper kind. Don't type your script so that a sentence carries on from the bottom of one page to the top of the next - you're bound to rustle your script, or pause unnaturally, at a time when it does not fit the delivery.
2. **Use double spacing and a large, clear font:** Some people prefer their notes in upper case. This will reduce the amount of time you spend glancing directly at the text and increase eye contact with the audience.
3. **Number every page** in a large bold font. If the script accidentally falls all over the floor, you need to be able to re-assemble it quickly.
4. **Write in your cue material** as it may affect the way you begin your talk. Don't forget to thank you introducer. If there are special appreciations owed to colleagues and inspirers, these are often better coming towards the end of the talk rather the start.

The Delivery (Para-Language and Body Language)

Overall Strategy

Para-language and body language are together the most important components of your presentation. Without being told, the audience will know from these attributes of your presentation: how you feel today; if you don't like them; when you are insincere; when it's a sales pitch; when you have given up; and when you haven't prepared.

1. **Prepare your para-language:** Because para-language (the way that words are expressed) is usually a more powerful form of communication than the script itself, it is worthy of preparation in its own right for important presentations.
2. **Synchronise with audience reaction:** If you evoke laughter, applause or even booing from the audience, pause briefly but start talking again just after the reaction reaches its peak and begins to subside. Don't wait until the audience returns to its 'resting state.'
3. **Be sensitive to your audience:** Show that their comfort and enjoyment is of paramount importance. Notice how they are reacting and respond appropriately. For example, if they are apparently bored or uncomfortable with your presentation, best to cut it short rather than prolong the agony. Don't become so wedded to your words that you can't let go if need be.
4. **Aim for impact at the finish:** Don't rush at the end to finish. It should be delivered in a different manner from the body of the talk. There is no reason why it should not conclude on a high note of both drama and intensity.
5. **Rehearse to guarantee success:** It is difficult to get into trouble if you are well prepared and well rehearsed. The audience will forgive a great deal if they sense the effort that you have invested for them. Always rehearse standing up. Try to use the same or similar space for full rehearsals; i.e., not your bedroom. If possible, rehearse at the same time of day as the presentation for biorhythm. Visualise the audience. Use the mirror. Ask other people to sit in. For the grand presentation, tape record or video your last rehearsal.

Delivery of Sentences and Words

1. ***Be articulate and aesthetic:*** Your *diction* should be clear and without tension in the organs of speech. Your *volume* should reach the entire audience without strain, without breathy sounds and without fading at the end of sentences. Your *pace* should be not too fast and not too slow. Your *rhythm* should add variety and interest. Your *pitch* should support the content and add variety. Your *tone* should be pleasant and expressive. Your *phrasing* should support the meaning of and relationships between ideas. Talk with - don't read to your listeners.
2. ***Use inflection to signal starts and finishes.*** Start each new paragraph and each sentence at a high pitch to grab their attention. A phrase ends on high pitch if there is more information to come or on a low pitch if that is the end of the sentence and the idea. This technique is especially important with lists. Finish each item on the list on a high pitch, except the final item which finishes on a low pitch (usually combined with a slight slowing of pace) to signal the end.
3. ***Use emphasis to highlight key ideas,*** but take care against excessive use of emphasis for the sake of effect, because economy of emphasis tends to add to its value. There are many ways to provide emphasis other than an increase in volume. Emphasis may be given to a word or phrase by any of the following:

Change in volume (stress): mostly by speaking louder, but sometimes great impact can be obtained when a key point is said quietly, especially after a crescendo in volume to grab attention and to hush the audience.

Change in pace: for example, a key phrase may be spoken slowly and deliberately.

Change in pitch (inflection): mostly, using higher pitch, but a lower pitch may sometimes be effective.

Change in tone: for example, by giving 'feeling' to words that have an emotional overtone.

Pausation: either before the word or phrase to be emphasised, after it, or before and after.

Gesture: using a hand gesture or facial expression.

Generally give nouns and verbs emphasis. Give value to the names of people and places the first time that they are mentioned. Rarely stress the adjective more than the noun or verb unless something is implied. If a word is repeated after the initial emphasis, it is generally best not to emphasise it again.

Rarely stress a personal pronoun or any of the following words unless particular effect is required:

a, am, an, and, are, as, at, be, been, but, can, do, does, for, from, had, has, have, he, her, him, his, I, is, me, must, not, of, or, Saint, shall, should, sir, some, than, that, the, them, there, till, to, us, was, were, will, would, you.

Note that some words require a different stress within the word, according to whether it is used as a noun or a verb. Generally the first syllable is stressed for the noun and the second syllable for the verb; e.g., absent, abstract, accent, attribute, conduct, conflict, contest, contrast, convert, convict, detail, escort, record, subject, survey, export, extract, forecast, frequent, import, impress, increase, insult, object, permit, present, produce, progress, project, torment, transfer, transport.

4. ***Balance of emphasis:*** The contrasted terms of an antithesis should be emphasised and as a rule, they take opposite inflections; e.g., 'This result is exceptionally good, while the other result is decidedly poor.' Similarly, in a long sentence, the stressed word in one phrase usually balances with the stressed word in another.

5. **Equal emphasis:** When two words are integral to the one concept, they should be given equal emphasis. Also, observe dependent phrasing: never separate (with a pause) an adjective from its following noun, a preposition from its object, an adverb from its following verb, or a possessive pronoun from its object.
6. **Parenthetical phrasing** is a phrase or sentence introduced into another sentence qualifying some part of that sentence. It should be spoken at a slightly increased pace and a slightly lower pitch than the main sentence, the original pace and tone having resumed at its conclusion; e.g., 'I invite you to join me, *for a few moments*, in creating some imagery as a backdrop to this presentation.'
7. **Add colour to words and sentences:** Paralanguage can be used lightly throughout to give words or groups of words extra colour that is consistent with their meaning. Obvious examples include 'loonnngg' as distinct from 'short' (staccato); high (raised pitch) as opposed to low (deep pitch).
8. **The power of the pause** - not the pain. Careful use of the pause can add a great deal of impact to a presentation by providing emphasis to a key point or idea: leaving space for the audience to respond in their thoughts to your material; or allowing yourself time to remind yourself of the next point, get a sip of water or to replenish your energy.
9. **Add stimulation and variety:** The audience needs a 'kick in the pants' from time to time to recapture their full attention. This may be achieved by a change in pace, a big gesture, some movement or a change in spatial relationships. Add occasional variations to the way you usually express things to help maintain interest; e.g., reverse the normal inflections used in a list.
10. **Mark dynamics on the script,** at least while you are learning 'vocal printing' techniques. The voice is a musical instrument and dynamic marks used on the script are akin to those that appear on a musical score - they tell you when to speak louder, softer, slower, faster, pause, etc. Here are some of the marks you may use:

Inflection starting from a high pitch:



Inflection going to a low pitch:

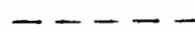


Pause: //

Stress emphasis to a word: strong



mild



Tonal emphasis to a word:



Parenthetical phrase:



Hand gesture:



Use of the pointer:



Smile:



An example of a script marked with dynamics is contained in the Appendix to these notes.

Dress

1. ***Dress up one level:*** For an important occasion, dress up one level (but only one level) from how you would normally present as a member of the audience. Appear smart and tidy.
2. ***Avoid distracting additions:*** Don't wear a 'loud' accessory, such as a very bright tie or scarf, which will distract the audience rather than enhance your content and delivery.

Preliminaries

1. ***Relax before a big event:*** The more important the presentation, the more essential it is that you should rest and relax before the big event. Sleep in that morning. Go for a long walk and come in touch with your environment; be at peace with yourself.
2. ***Greet members of the audience:*** Especially before a major presentation, shake as many hands as possible. Smile and show that you are delighted and honoured that they have chosen to attend the talk.

Stance, Gestures and Facial Expression

1. ***Stand up straight:*** An upright posture, with chest forward and shoulders back gives an air of confidence in yourself and your material. However, do not appear stiff and unanimated.
2. ***Avoid nervous behaviour*** such as fidgeting, repetitive mannerisms such as unwanted hand movements, swaying, pacing up and down or back and forward. Avoid fumbling over notes. Make your movements deliberate, smooth and relaxed; avoid sudden rapid movements. Keep arms resting lightly by your sides when not in use. If you are going to walk around the stage, do so in deliberate changes in position while you pause the script - move, stand and deliver; move; stand and deliver. Other things to avoid: never put hands in your pockets; never hold onto the rostrum.
3. ***Tailor gestures to the circumstances:*** Gestures should be natural and interesting. Gestures should be more generous if the occasion is a grand one, the audience is large or you are partly hidden behind a lectern. Hand gestures should be made from the shoulder, not the elbow, and should involve the whole arm. Hand gestures made from the elbow or, worst still, the wrist, tend to appear tense and uncertain. Use gestures in an open manner to include the audience. Appropriate gestures and facial expressions tend to follow naturally, without thinking, if you concentrate on the delivery of aesthetic and colourful para-language - live and believe in the words and they (and you) will come to life.
4. ***Eye contact*** with the audience is essential. Maximise eye contact during the start and finish by memorising these parts of the script. Don't stare into blank space nor flick your eyes erratically around the audience with fleeting glances. Focus on one person in the audience at a time while you 'post' an single idea (usually about 5-20 sec) from your script to them. Post these messages with eye contact in a zigzag pattern around the entire audience. Don't forget the people in the front row (especially if you are in an elevated position), in the back row and at each wing of the audience. No matter how large the audience, remember that you are always speaking to just one person. Your communication is then direct and felt by every person and you are focussed. Eye contact is vital during the emphasis of a key point. Break eye contact to think, breathe or look at your notes - it is perfectly natural.

5. **Smile:** Generally, you should smile at the end of the opening cues, and occasionally as appropriate during the presentation. Smile opening and warmly, allowing time for the audience to respond before speaking.
6. **Bow your head** gently at the end to ensure they know that you have finished and should applaud.

Answering Questions

1. **What if there are no questions:** Not all presentations are appropriately given to questions. For example, some orations are heard without questions, with the idea that the audience considers and discusses the speaker's argument during a subsequent function. At the other extreme, an audience may be reluctant to ask questions when these are an important part of the program (e.g., at the end of a lecture). Under the latter circumstance, a leading line such as 'Who wants to ask the first question?' may be helpful. Further encouragement can be given by acting out the movement you want them to make - raising your hand. Have a question prepared in advance to ask yourself, if needed: 'There is a question that I am often asked.' Alternatively, have a question ready to ask of the audience: 'I have a question for you.'
2. **Listen to the question:** Always look at the person while they ask the question, it shows you are listening. Listen to the entire question. Do not begin forming your answer in your mind while the question is being asked and never start to answer before the question is finished. Most people ask rambling questions - it's a fact of life!
3. **Respond to the question:** Pause, then think of your best answer. Be deliberate. Be brief and direct in answering the question as the persons asking is usually more interested in their question than your answer. If they want more information, they will ask for it. Do not be afraid to admit that you do not know the answer.
4. **Use audience names:** If you know the identity of the questioner, you may use their name in your response, either by given name for an informal event or title and surname at a formal event.
5. **Remain in control:** Do not allow any single questioner to dominate question time. A good technique is to acknowledge the questioner with a nod and a smile, but then direct the answer to the entire audience. Shift your eye contact from the questioner to another member of the audience during your response. Sometimes it may be appropriate to paraphrase the question or point that is being made, either to explain it to the audience to show that you have understood a negative point (rather than just ignoring it) before you move on to something else; e.g., 'I think that Mary is making the point that
6. **Handling the loaded or aggressive question:** Smile; do not be defensive; do not put down the individual; and do not put down the question. Rather, remain in control by responding with 'good question' or 'a good point' and make a very definite shift in posture and eye contact towards the other side of the audience while you provide a very brief and direct answer. Then ask for the next question. Remember, if someone is being disruptive and unreasonable, it is your responsibility to deal with the matter; e.g., 'I am afraid that we will not resolve this matter today. We need to ensure that others who wish to ask a question have the opportunity to do so.'

Visual and Audio Aids

1. **No loss of audience contact:** Visual aids should be fully integrated into the story of your script. Don't show the slides separate from the script.
2. **There is only one 'performer' at a time:** Either the audience attention should be directed towards you or towards the slide on the screen. Visual aids should not compete with the presenter for 'communication space'. Don't place them up on the screen until needed; remove them after they are no longer needed. In between visuals, either turn the projector/overhead off or keep a set of blank slides that you place in your carousel to black out the screen while not in use.
3. **T-T-T Technique:** This stands for touch - turn - talk. When you refer the audience to a visual, first *touch*, point or gesture towards the relevant area of the slide; then *turn* from the slide to the audience to re-establish eye contact; then *talk* about the point you wish to make. Avoid looking at the visual while you talk. When a visual has a list of points, 'post' each point to a different member of the audience, using a combination of the T-T-T technique and the zigzag 'posting' eye contact technique (see above); i.e., touch the first point, turn to the audience and post it to someone with your eyes while you talk; return to the slide and touch the second point, turn to the audience and post it, etc.
4. **Using the pen as a pointer:** Use of a pen placed on the screen is a good technique to take the audience through a complex overhead. Your voice is then the other powerful controller of their thoughts and understanding,
5. **Avoid microphone tapping** through physical touching or saying explosive consonants ('p' and 'b') with your mouth too close. Also, check that the microphone is at the right height.

The Venue

1. **Time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted:** Know your venue in advance. Visit it while empty and, if possible, practice all or sections of an important presentation. At the very least, ensure that you are familiar with the technology of the venue, including the public address system, control of lighting, control of visual aids and the whereabouts of pointers. Speak to the venue technician and insist on the most optimal conditions possible for your presentation.
2. **Good lighting is essential** to direct people's attention to the speaker and to keep them alert. During slide shows, if the lights must be dimmed a little, try to arrange for a spot light to remain directed to the lectern.
3. **Adequate height and angle of the lectern** is important to minimise the change in elevation of the line of sight from your notes to the audience. It takes less time to glance and alters your posture less if your notes are facing you at an angle and at a reasonable height.
4. **Minimise disruption from latecomers** by arranging for doors near the stage to be closed and latecomers redirected to enter from the rear of the venue. If there is a major disruption, for any reason (e.g., the plates are being removed at a presentation over dinner), tell the audience in a respectful manner that you are going to wait to allow the matter to be dealt with.

5. *What if things go wrong?*: If something goes wrong with the venue (e.g., the air conditioning has failed; the projector is jammed), you should openly acknowledge the existence of the problem as early as possible. Show that you are sensitive to their comfort. If it is controllable, be seen to take control and don't be afraid to request people to assist you in rectifying the situation.

Some Common Mistakes

The following are the most common mistakes made by presenters. Now you know them you won't make them.

- Poor first impression.
- Little eye contact.
- No humour or light hearted moments.
- Limited preparations.
- Poor visual aids.
- Little facial expression.
- Dull, dry and boring.
- Vague objectives.
- Frozen on the spot.
- No audience involvement.
- Weak closure.

Acknowledgment

The information in these notes is based on the exceptional work and expert knowledge of the late Mrs Adele Cohen.

APPENDIX: Example of Dynamic Marks on a Script

low/feeling

IN TAKING WITH US THE NEW KNOWLEDGE AND THE REAFFIRMATION OF OUR VALUES THAT THIS CONFERENCE HAS PROVIDED, IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED THAT WE ARE NOT MERELY A PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION. WE ARE ALSO A PUBLIC HEALTH MOVEMENT: A LIVING, BREATHING, ADAPTING AND DYNAMIC COLLECTIVE OF COMMITTED INDIVIDUALS, EACH OF WHOM IS CAPABLE OF RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE, AND SEIZING THE NEW OPPORTUNITIES THAT SURFACE FROM EVERY THREAT.

UNLIKE HAMLET, WE MUSTN'T BECOME SO MELANCHOLY, PUZZLED, UNDECIDED AND SCEPTICAL THAT WE DALLY IN OUR PURPOSE AND BECOME TOTALLY INEFFECTIVE. THE QUINTESSENTIAL QUESTION IS 'TO BE OR NOT TO BE'; AND IF WE'RE NOT TO SUFFER THE SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE, WE MUST TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST THIS SEA OF TROUBLES THAT ARE THE THREATS TO PUBLIC HEALTH. AS WE LEAVE THIS CONFERENCE AND LOOK TOWARDS MELBOURNE 1997, I ASK YOU TO REMEMBER THAT EACH ONE OF US IS A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT FOR CHANGE.

AND ARMED WITH OUR NEW KNOWLEDGE AND COMMITMENT, IT'S UP TO EACH OF US TO FIND THE QUALITY OF MIND AND THE POWER THAT ACCOMPLISHES PURPOSE. EACH OF US IS THE NEXUS BETWEEN THOUGHT AND ACTION.

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