Delivery

Delivery is about non-verbal communication, or how a person uses his or her body and voice to express the ideas. This includes: speaking intelligibly, pronunciation and articulation, personal appearance, movement and delivery style.

Speaking intelligibly: If a speaker gives a speech and no one can understand it, is it effective? There are three parts to speaking intelligibly: volume, pitch and voice inflection, and rate.

Volume: This should be adjusted based on the acoustics of the room, which means you should practice in the room beforehand, with someone in the very back. If they can’t hear you, your volume must go up. Remember that you sound louder to yourself than you do to the audience, and watch for their non-verbal communication to determine whether or not you are at a proper volume.

Pitch and voice inflections: Pitch is the highness or lowness of the speaker’s voice. Inflections are the changes, and bring a presentation from monotone to energetic. If you sound bored with your speech, chances are others will be bored as well. Look at the speech and determine where various inflections should be placed for effect. Record yourself and listen, or have someone in the room with you when you practice to ensure proper pitch and inflection.

Rate: Rate is the pace at which we speak. Just like pitch can be varied for different effects, so can rate. No matter how slowly you think you’re speaking, you are likely actually speaking more quickly. Nerves tend to make us speak faster and higher. Speak slowly to explain something complex (like a definition) and faster when it is already known to the audience. A good way to judge rate is to perform the presentation out loud and time it. Make notes on your outline to indicate when to speed up and slow down, as well as places for various pitches and vocal inflections. The same can be said for pauses, which are used to add emphasis, to signal the end of a thought, or to allow information to sink in. Avoid vocal fillers – uh, like, er, um. If you’ve lost your train of thought, take a deep breath and continue.

Articulation and pronunciation: Poor articulation is common and comes most frequently from habit. Be sure to avoid these common mistakes.

Ought to – otta didn’t – dint for – fur don’t know – dunno
Have to – hafta them – em want to – wanna will you – wilya

Again, the best way to judge is to have someone else listen to you or to record yourself speaking. Be sure to go over your speech – is there a name or word in another language? Determine how to pronounce it beforehand. One part of articulation is the rate at which you go – the faster you speak, the harder you are to understand.
**Personal appearance:** Confidence is key. The audience tends to see you before they have a chance to hear what you say, and they will form their impressions quickly. Dress one step above the audience to garner respect and a good first impression. This doesn’t have to mean a suit, but put some effort into your appearance.

**Movement:** Movement covers everything from posture to eye contact. Moving purposefully is different than bobbing or swaying. We move to demonstrate going from point to point. We sway because we’re nervous. To prevent swaying and other nervous behavior, keep your feet evenly distributed. Movement starts in the beginning confidently, with good posture. To end effectively, pause after your last line to let your words sink in, then collect your notes and walk off confidently, no matter how poorly you felt you did.

**Gestures:** Movements while speaking can be almost as important as your speech’s content! Your body will probably instinctively want to move around when speaking. Allow this to happen, as it makes your speech feel more natural and relaxed. Pay attention to your hands and be sure that they aren’t immobile at your sides, stuffed into your pockets, or repeating the same motion again and again. You should also try to match the size of your gestures to the size of your audience. For a small panel of three professors, more subtle movements of the hands are more than enough to be perceived by the audience. For an auditorium full of fellow students, however, bringing your whole arms and shoulders into sweeping gestures becomes more appropriate. Practice gestures along with your speech, and even consider recording yourself to see what looks best!

**Eye contact** is an easy way to gain a rapport with the audience and gauge their reactions to what you have to say. Make eye contact with the entire audience – in a small group, look briefly from one person to the other; in a larger group, scan rather than trying to make contact with everyone. Keep yourself from falling into a dead, blank stare – make eye contact that is confident, warm, and friendly.

**Breathe!** You’ve probably noticed some shortness of breath when you become nervous. Improper breathing can compound nervousness and lead to a lessened flow of oxygen to the brain, making any confusion or loss for words during a speech even worse. If you ever find yourself becoming frazzled during a speech, don’t reach for filler words or shuffle note cards; take a deep breath!

**Delivery style:** Preparing for the right delivery style is important. There are two types: extemporaneous and manuscript.

**Extemporaneous delivery:** Extemporaneous delivery refers to speaking from a thorough outline. This style is the most engaging and flexible style of delivery. You should create a keyword outline, practice many times with that outline, and then (preferably) transfer that outline to note cards for the presentation.

**Manuscript delivery:** There are times when you will need to speak from a manuscript. If this is the case, make sure that you create a speech manuscript that is double spaced with at least 14 point font. Practice reading the manuscript several times and then maintain eye contact and make it seem conversational when you deliver the speech. Use underlining, highlighting, and cues (“eye contact,” “slow down,” “pause”) to guide your reading. Place one hand on the manuscript while you are reading and follow along in order to keep your place when you look up. Practice turning the pages of the manuscript so that you can do so discretely. Manuscript delivery is difficult; don’t wait until the last minute to prepare this kind of speech.