Speaking and Writing as an International Student

If you are an individual who struggles with English or an accent, public speaking and writing may be particularly nerve-racking for you. Realize that most of your fears are universal, however. Most people acknowledge a fear of speaking because they think they might not have an important topic, bore the audience, not make a clear point, etc. Of course, you do have additional concerns if English is your second language. Keep in mind that most audiences are understanding—they want to hear what you have to say. There are a few things that you can do as a speaker and writer to make this as easier task, however. With that in mind, here are a few tips on how to speak and write as an International Student.

Know what to say (Content of the speech):
- Here is an acronym to help know what to include in your speech: KISS- Keep It Short and Simple
- Remember to stay focused on your message and avoid deviating from your planned comments.
- Speak from a planned outline or manuscript of the assignment (including an introduction, body, and conclusion)
- When speaking from an outline (rather than a manuscript), make sure that you give yourself plenty of time to practice. If speaking from a manuscript, make sure you are very familiar with the speech and can maintain eye contact with the audience and sound conversational while reading
- Check pronunciation and definition of words you are unsure of before the speech. Use online dictionaries that include audio pronunciation, check with friends, and practice in the Speaking Center
- Use visual aids to help clarify your content. For example, it might be helpful for the audience to see an outline (either in PowerPoint or a handout) of your presentation as you speak. Consider highlighting words that are particularly troubling for you so that the audience can see the word and hear your pronunciation.

Know how to say it (Delivery of a speech):
- Speak up! Volume is often a problem with speakers, but even more so if you also have an accent. The audience will have an easier time understanding you if you increase your volume.
- Speak carefully and clearly. Enunciate and slow down when you reach words that are harder to pronounce. Pronounce key words carefully, especially if it is important that the audience catch those words. Practice pronunciation before the speech, and it helps to review the speech with someone else.
- Use vocal variety. This deals with your rate of speaking and how many pauses you use as you talk. It's best to sound conversational while speaking—that is, try to sound like you are conversing with the audience, not reading to them. If your voice is monotone (sounds the same throughout the speech) your speech will be less engaging. Try to vary your rate, pitch, and volume. Pause between sections of the speech.
Know how to present yourself (Body Language for the speech):

- Use eye contact with your audience. It creates more of a connection with them and shows confidence.
- Beware of your movements. Watch your posture. Stand straight and show that you are confident through your nonverbal gestures. Use facial expressions to show your own interest in your topic. Use gestures to help communicate your meaning (hand gestures, intentional movement, etc.)
- Remember, the more you practice, the more confident you will be about speaking in public!

Know what to say and how to say it (Content of a paper):

- For an essay, just like a speech, pick an appropriate topic for your paper. At the same time, do not think just about your audience. Pick a topic that you are interested in and feel as if you can write a paper efficiently about. If you are more interested in your topic, the paper will often come out better.
- In writing an essay, keep it simple. Using “impressive words” that you are unfamiliar with may lead the reader to misunderstand your message. Keep it simple, use only the words you need to get your meaning across. Gradually, once you become more familiar with various words you can incorporate them into your paper. If you still are unsure of the meaning of a word, ask for help or look up the different ways people have used it in papers on the internet.
- Begin big, and then get small. Start in your introduction on what you want the whole paper to consist of. Provide a broad overview of what will be discussed in the paper. As you work your way into the body, begin to narrow your information down into specific points that relate to your big picture. Do not put in information that does not directly tie into your thesis in your introduction. Once you have stated all your main points in the paper, summarize it again in your conclusion. (For more help on introductions and conclusions see the “Introduction and Conclusions” handout)
- Keep language neutral. In a paper you do not want to be too direct about the information you are stating. Be sure to use non-discriminatory language. If you do not know the gender of the reader or the people in your paper do not assume they are male or female. This rule is the same for race, do not assume unless you are directly told in the source what ethnicity they are.
- Avoid plagiarism. When getting information from a source (book, article, webpage, etc.) you have to cite the source in your paper. (For help on a specific citation style (MLA, APA, Turabian, etc.), see that style’s handout) Citation is not used just for quotes, anytime you take information from the source it must be cited even if it is summarized or paraphrased. (For more help see the Plagiarism handout)

Know not, fear not (Asking for help):

- Think about ways that you can use the Speaking and Writing Center. How can we help you become a more confident speaker and writer?
- Set up regular appointments with us to work on speeches and papers. These appointments can help you with your pronunciation, writing abilities, and help build your confidence about your work.
- When you have a presentation or paper deadline approaching, make sure to set up several appointments to prepare yourself for the assignment.
- Use our equipment. Make a video of your presentation so you can watch yourself and see what you would like to improve.

Information adapted from OWL Purdue. Visit www.owl.english.purdue.edu for more information.