Effective speaking skills are essential for students and professionals in Coaching and Sports Management. Aside from daily communication with their colleagues, clients, athletes, and coworkers, professionals in these two fields are often called upon to speak to the media, address community organizations, and present at coaching clinics and sports marketing seminars, just to name a few.

Coaches and athletes already must deal with the public assumption that they are dense, uneducated, and not well-spoken (the “dumb jock” syndrome). In fact, most people are amazed when they see and hear a well-spoken coach or athlete on television. These “speeches” are often replayed time and time again while ESPN commentators point out the “articulate nature” of the coach or athlete. In fact, ironically, those athletes and coaches who are well-spoken are typically viewed as better educated and more successful than their counterparts. Likewise, those who can not hold a decent conversation, answer media questions without bumbling, or make great speeches are viewed to be less successful. Consequently, those who are articulate and have a natural and fluid speaking pattern are generally more successful in obtaining personal commercial endorsement contracts.

On the other hand, many sport management professionals are assumed, by virtue of their educational curriculum, to be well educated and articulate. Sport management professionals are often called upon to make marketing sales pitches, to present at national and international sports marketing/management seminars, and to often address the media. Again, these situations require a person to be a “quick study”, speak with confidence and conviction, and to use proper grammar and vocabulary.

The basics of speaking are, for the most part, consistent across disciplines. Knowing the expectations of a discipline is an important part of adapting to your audience, however. The papers in the “Speaking, in my opinion...” series do not represent an official statement from the department. They do, however, give you an introduction to different faculty opinions on effective speaking.
The two greatest hurdles I see for my students are confidence and proper grammar and vocabulary. What’s more, I often find that students speak very casually even in mock-professional presentations. To help my students get accustomed to speaking in front of large gatherings, speaking to the media, or just effectively communicating with colleagues and coworkers, each semester I require several brief informal speaking assignments and at least one formal presentation assignment that includes the use of PowerPoint. These speaking assignments are combined with writing and research assignments. For example, I ask students to research a recent article relevant to the current course topic. After carefully reading the article, the students are instructed to write a brief summary of the article and an opinion statement about the issue(s) contained therein. The students are then asked to present their articles to the class and conduct a brief classroom discussion. Typically, I assign three to four of these per student per semester. Often students are anxious at first, but tend to improve all of their skills by the second or third assignment.