Each discipline or major carries with it a unique set of speaking skills that are essential in becoming successful in their respective field. Consider some of the following and their impact on speaking and communicating ideas in criminal justice.

**Types of Speaking**

**Public Interactions**— Criminal justice is a profession that carries with it a great deal of interaction with the public. In some cases this is merely in a service role in responding to citizens in distress, directing traffic, dealing with family conflict or in dealing with crimes in progress or dealing with offenders in court or in the corrections environment. Communicating what you need an individual to do must be crystal clear so that the individual can comply with your request or orders. If a criminal fails to drop his weapon, he could be shot, so effective communication is paramount in this field. Public interactions carry with it a vast array of possibilities from being thanked profusely to being spat upon and cursed at. The criminal justice professional must do that, speak professionally in all circumstances. One should also be able to adapt to the unique needs at the time whether it be compassion or giving and direct and firm order. The public is who we serve, so using communication that is professional cannot be stressed enough, regardless of the situation.

**Testifying/Speaking** with the media— At some time in a criminal justice career you will have to testify before some type of court or panel of persons. This could be in criminal or civil court, prison parole or disciplinary hearing, probation or parole revocation hearings, or a disciplinary hearing for yourself or an employee. As with writing, your testimony must error free and you must speak clearly and professionally. Cursing or the use of criminal justice slang terms is not appropriate in this setting, or in any setting, but especially not during testimony. You must be honest and tell the truth as lying is perjury and undermines the criminal justice system. The individual must also be prepared to speak under pressure as attorneys or other personnel may question you and seek to find holes in your story. Practice speaking in front of others and this will get easier over time.

**Presentations**— Presentations are part of most careers and occasionally you may be asked...
to present materials to supervisors, co-workers, boards of supervisors, legislators, etc. Use of a presentation tool such as PowerPoint can be helpful in presenting your information in a clear and organized fashion. Practice is the key, so get others to hear your presentation and critique it. The more comfortable you are with the material and your presentation the easier it will be. Know your audience and use language that is appropriate for that level. As with all circumstances, be professional and speak professionally.

**Knowing Your Audience**

Criminal justice personnel are constantly speaking with members of the public whether it be in social interactions or in the scope of their job duties. Using professional language will often prevent miscommunication and negative feelings from the public. Please know that regardless of the level of your position within an agency or department you may be asked to or required to speak to members of the public, the media, supervisors, judges, attorneys, legislators, and governors. Speak with your audience in mind and remember that what you say is a representation of you and the agency or department that you work for. **BE PROFESSIONAL!**

**How speaking in criminal justice is different than other disciplines**

Criminal justice is a profession that faces intense scrutiny regardless of your job position. Unlike other professions, CJ personnel are in constant interactions with public and are often the attention of media. It should be noted that the public is also much more capable of taping or using cell phones to record or document incidents, so now more than ever CJ personnel must be aware of the language and tone of speech that they are using. Most people do not get pulled over by historians or writers, but almost everyone in the public has an opinion about the criminal justice system and the people that work within it. Effective oral communication can help to increase positive feelings of the public toward CJ personnel. Conversely, poor or unprofessional interactions can create negative feelings and increase tension amongst the CJ system and the public we serve.