Oscar Wilde supposedly said, “In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing.” Another famous quote attributed to unknown sources dating as far back as the 18th century tells us, “The key to success is sincerity, and if you can fake that you can do anything.”

In the theatre, actors must be able to create a sense of spontaneity through extensive analysis, research, and rehearsal. Stanislavski, the great turn-of-the-20th-century Russian actor, director, and teacher, called it the illusion of the first time. Yet, when we are in a theatre with an audience, we must balance the effort for organic naturalism in the voice and body with the technical requirements of clarity, diction, and projection.

It is no secret that serious performers rehearse their speeches with meticulous attention to every breath, cadence, and nuance. We actors actually use the tools taught to us in grammar school: antithesis, alliteration, metaphor, onomatopoeia, etc. in every speech we make. Endless exercises prepare us for projecting the voice to fill - but not over-fill - the space. More exercises prepare us to speak with clarity and diction even within the trickiest dialects. We use Lessac and Linklater Vocal methods at Southern Miss to get at the actor’s voice, which must be free of tension and full of resonation, clarity and expression. Lessac explores the human voice through the metaphor of a complete orchestra, encouraging the actor to explore each sound within them with precise placements. Linklater constantly refers to “freeing the natural voice.” These two methods work well in combination to balance the dual requirements for speaking on the stage.

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.