Speaking for Clinical Laboratory Scientists (CLS)

Most CLS work in a clinical laboratory. These laboratories are found in hospitals, medical centers, clinic, and reference laboratories. CLS are educated with the assumption that they will eventually assume management positions. Management positions in the clinical lab may include section chief, shift supervisor, lab manager. Some clinical laboratory scientists may be promoted out of the laboratory to positions in infection control or upper management.

Another assumption in the education of CLS is the likelihood that there will be an education component during some phase of their professional careers. One slogan common in the profession in regard to the introduction of new methods or techniques into the laboratory setting is, “See one, do one, teach one.”

One aspect for accreditation of a CLS program is the requirement for coursework to prepare students for their probable roles in management and educations. The need to include a speaking component has not been addressed by the accreditation agency. There is less discussion concerning speaking skills as compared with writing skills at national CLS educators’ meetings.

Types of speaking in the profession

The most common speaking task for CLS is conveying laboratory results to other health care professionals. This is usually done over the telephone. It is important that the CLS gives accurate information in a clear and precise manner. It is also necessary to record the date and time contact was made as well as the name and position of the contact person. Problems arise in this type of speaking with CLS who are not native speakers (of English) or who speak in an accent not local to the region.

Although the work of a CLS impacts on patient treatment and diagnosis, most CLS positions do not entail much patient contact, so this type of spoken interaction will not be address in this paper.

Clinical Laboratory Scientists who have advanced into managerial positions will need to speak at various meetings with peers and supervisors. It is essential that the CLS be comfortable speaking in these types of group settings. A speaker with nervous tics or in a quavering voice will not be able to represent the lab in a confident manner.

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.
Occasionally a CLS may be asked to conduct in-service learning experiences for other professionals. For these occasions, it will be helpful to have the following skills:

- depth of knowledge to prepare talk
- depth of knowledge to address questions
- ability to organize material
- ability to speak at the level of the audience
- stage presence to deliver the talk

Less often, a CLS may volunteer to give a presentation at a CLS meeting. The same set of criteria listed above apply.

**How speaking for CLS is different from other disciplines.**

Since I have only worked in the discipline of CLS and in academia, I can only make assumptions concerning differences. Most formal speaking is done only by individuals who have been promoted beyond the level of staff CLS. Often these individuals will have attained an advanced degree and hopefully, will have developed some experience with the preparation and delivery of a presentation. The graduate students in our program have the requirement to give one formal, professional presentation during their course of study.

Unlike many workers in the hospitality industry, for example, CLS have little contact with customers. Unlike most health-care professionals, CLS have little contact with patients. Unlike educators, most CLS educate on a one to one basis, not in a formal classroom setting. These characteristics have made the emphasis on speaking in the curriculum less than the emphasis on writing.