

ROLE OF LANGUAGE / VOCAL VARIETY

I know what I meant why don't you?

Ever wondered why you are not listened to sometimes? Is what you say misheard or taken the wrong way? It is actually possible for you to be saying something and in your head you think it means one thing but to the person listening to you it means something completely different.

It is all about communication. Communicating is not only about what you say but it's also about the way you say it. The manner, style and tone of what you say can be, and most often is, as important as what you actually say.

The way you say a sentence effects its meaning. For example, raising the pitch of your voice at the end of a sentence turns a statement into a question. The drama added by vocal variety can turn an ordinary speech into an exceptional one.

So how can you benefit from being careful with the way you say things?

Can you imagine actors reading a script for a part and using the wrong tone of voice? The script just wouldn't make sense. The same is true in real life. How well you deliver a speech is as important as what you say. When you deliver well, people are more able and more likely to pay attention.

Remember public speaking is communication with a purpose – to inform, persuade, inspire or entertain.

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

The components of communication are:

- Verbal - 7% of any message is communicated through words
- Vocal - 38% of a message is relayed by your voice
- Visual - 55% is conveyed by non-verbal body language (covered in another session)

With the verbal component of communication at only 7%, every word you use in a speech is important and you need to make the best use of words for the most impact.

AUDIENCE

Consider your audience when determining the 7% factor – words. The following hints need to be considered when determining the content and wording of your speech:

- Will they understand any technical terms you have included
- What is the standard of their education
- Use only words that are familiar to you and easy to use.
- Use words they will all understand – use simple words
- Don't use technical terms or jargon unless audience have same background and qualifications
- Better to paint a word picture than to use say medical terms understood only by specialists
- Remember Paul Keating's use of the word "Recalcitrant". Everyone lunged for their dictionaries.

PAINT WORD PICTURES

- Try to have the listeners use their 5 senses – hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch – to reproduce in their minds your ideas/words with something real
- Make sure people can picture the situation you are trying to convey
- For example, describe a thorn as "*needle pointed*". Gives impression of strength and sharpness
- Use **metaphor** – relates object/action to something unrelated eg '*He is a lion in battle*'
- Journalists and songwriters paint word pictures very well
- Try describing a main course, a dress, a car, a sporting event or scenery or doing up a button

EXERCISE 1: (Word Pictures)

VOCAL COMPONENT

That 7% verbal component of communication can be increased by 38% if you use your voice to add meaning and interest.

The vocal component (the 38%) is that part which uses vocal variety to add emphasis, colour and meaning to your speech.

Try listening to the commentator of a horse race or a football game. You don't have to understand the words they are saying to know that there is something exciting happening.

How many of you have read a story to a young child? Did it sound like this?

'They camped for the night in a cave in the mountainside. It was dark and cold. All of a sudden, a ghostly silver shape appeared on the other side of the cave. Fido barked loudly, waking the professor.'
(*read in a monotonous voice*)

Normally a child's story is read with a lot of excitement and feeling - to keep the child's interest, and to help them understand the story.

EXERCISE 2: (Read story extract with feeling – like reading to a child)

VOCAL VARIETY

Every sound we hear has four characteristics: Pitch, volume, quality and rate.

Vocal variety is the use of these four characteristics:

• **Pitch**

- Highness or lowness of a sound (squeaky/deep)
- More a problem for men (express less emotion – sounds flat) than women (pitch variety – get into upper pitch range for too long – shrill sound)
- Use pitch and inflection to convey emotion (high pitch for excitement, lower pitch for sombre moments, different inflections on the same words to convey several different meanings)
- Eg “Fido barked loudly”, “The cave was dark and cold”

• **Volume** or intensity

- Loudness of a sound (loud/soft). ‘Loud clap of thunder’ ‘Soft whisper’
- Emphasising a few words or sounds adds interest and emphasis to your message.
- Plan how you want to say each sentence, underlining or **highlighting words** you particularly want to **emphasise**. Practise the speech, tape it and hear if you are achieving the effect you want.
- Speak to the person furthest away in the audience
- Don't shout at audience to be heard. Increase volume only or use microphone
- Relax vocal muscles and use diaphragm
- Speaking louder or softer will add emphasis, emotion and meaning to your words
- **EXERCISE 3: Use of Emphasis**
- To communicate your thoughts accurately you must verbalise them in a way that allows the listener to understand what you are actually saying

• **Quality** or timbre

- Identifying character of a sound. Characteristic that distinguishes the sound of a violin from that of a trumpet. Ben's voice from Craig's.
- Use resonance for quality. Relax your throat and open your mouth to allow the sounds to flow.

- **Rate** of talking or duration or pace (fast/slow/use of pause)
 - Rate of speech varied to enhance your meaning and give different effect:
 - Fast rate can mean excitement
 - Slow rate gives feeling of sincerity
 - Watch your rate of speech. Biggest culprit of effective speaking is speaking too fast particularly if you are inexperienced or under prepared. Slowing down can improve a speech
 - A good pace is 125-160 words per minute. Try to deliberately slow down, unless you naturally speak at a slow pace.
 - A constantly slow pace will allow the audience to drift off into a daydream
 - Speaking too fast will cause listeners to become frustrated and “tune out”
 - Pauses go a long way:
 - Use them instead of "and..... er," and "um."
 - Use pauses immediately after you've made a point, shared a story, made a joke, or forgotten what you were going to say next!
 - Allows audience to mentally digest what you have said and catch up with you
- **Repetition** – very effective for message retention

In summary, vocal variety (pitch, volume, quality, rate) can convey:

- Enthusiasm/boredom
- Pleasure/pain
- Sincerity/sarcasm
- Happiness/sadness

If you think you don't have vocal variety, listen to yourself when you talk about your pet peeve, favourite activity or passion. Chances are you are quite operatic! “Can **you** believe they have increased bus fares **again**”

The voice is a reflection of what is going on inside of us. Why not use the voice to enhance what is going on in your next speech!

You may want to practice your speech in front of a friend or speak into a tape recorder to see if you should make any changes. The voice you hear in your head can be very different from the one others will hear.

ARTICULATION

Articulation is the ability to say words correctly. Use a tape recorder to listen to your pronunciation. Articulation is the muscular process of modifying our voice using your tongue, teeth, lips and other speech organs to produce speech sounds and your diaphragm for breathing. The less muscular effort the better. Good articulation helps you to speak more distinctly. Takes practice and exercises eg practice by saying tongue twisters.

EXERCISE 4: (Tongue Twisters)

4P's - PLAN, PREPARE, PRACTICE AND PRESENT

Once you have written your speech rehearse it, find somewhere private and let yourself go - turn your voice loose without any inhibitions or interruptions. Record your voice and play it back.

Speak with enthusiasm and let the motivation for the voice changes come from the context of your speech. By your voice and your words, you can influence others.

“I know what I meant I hope you do to”

EXERCISE 1 – WORD PICTURES

The trombones played their metallic notes like a burst of machine gunfire

His heart raced in tempo with the horse's hooves as they pounded the ground.

Gareth stood as still as a mighty oak in a light summer breeze.

As soon as she shut the door, the cab hurriedly pulled away, leaving her hopelessly alone in front of the large, split-level dwelling that was only visible by the generosity of the full moon.

The moon was full, lavish and silvery, and the sky was inky black, with a million stars overhead.

EXERCISE 2 – READ WITH FEELING

'They camped for the night in a cave in the mountainside. It was dark and cold. All of a sudden, a ghostly silver shape appeared on the other side of the cave. Fido barked loudly, waking the professor.'

EXERCISE 3: USE OF EMPHASIS

I'll see **you** tomorrow!

I'll see you **tomorrow!**

I'll see you tomorrow!

Why didn't you fix the fence?

Why **didn't** you fix the fence?

Why didn't **you** fix the fence?

Why didn't you **fix** the fence?

Why didn't you fix the **fence?**

I'm not angry.

I'm **not** angry.

I was born in Australia

You didn't tell me that was what you wanted

EXERCISE 4: TONGUE TWISTERS

She sells seashells beside the seashore.

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers?

Betty Botter had some butter, "But," she said "this butter's bitter."

The sixth sheikh's sixth sheep's sick.

He saw six slim, sleek, slender saplings.

Moses supposes his toes are roses.

We're your well-wishers.

Are our oars here?

His story is now history.