

Tip Sheet: Public Speaking in the Classroom

Here are a few 'key principles' to keep in mind when you are preparing to speak in front of others, whether it is in the classroom, at a conference, in an interview, or as part of a seminar. The principles are deliberately broad so that they can be applied to a range of disciplines and contexts.

Key Principles of Communication:

We are all always communicating. There are three main registers of communication: *Body language, Tone, and Content*. To be as effective as possible, we must be actively aware of all 3.

Goal and Audience: What do you want your given audience to do/remember? **Be clear about your Goal. Modify your Goal to appeal to your specific Audience.** (You can change your goal, but not your audience!)

Credibility: "Why should I listen to you?" **Tell your audience how you know what you know.** Have you done research/ taken a class/ received your degree/ done this before/ had personal experience in a given area? **Do you have common ground with your audience?** This can also help establish credibility ("I am like you, I know that this information will help you as it has me...").

Tips for Non-verbal and Vocal Communication:

Physical Communication

- **Take up space.** Stand with your feet hip distance apart, fully facing your audience.
- **Make eye contact.** Spend a few seconds with each person you look at.
- **Avoid defensive postures:** arms crossed, hands in pockets, hands clasped behind or in front of body.
- **Avoid fiddling with props.** Put down the chalk/marker when you are not using it. If you know you play with jewelry, don't wear it; if you play with your hair, pull it back. Empty your pockets of change or keys if needed.
- **Smile!** Even if you don't feel like it; it'll put your audience at ease and soon you'll feel better!

Vocal Communication: Be aware of your habits in the following areas:

- **Volume** – how loud you speak in relation to size of space and audience
- **Pitch** – where in your voice you speak (high/low/monotone)
- **Rate** – Speed, how slow or fast you speak
- **Vocal Variety** – how often you change your pitch, rate, and volume

Together these aspects create *Tone*: the emotion, confidence, enthusiasm with which you speak.

- **Avoid filler words:** um/uh/sorta/like/y'know; replace them with silence. **Pauses** help you and your audience.
- **Avoid upspeak:** turning statements into questions by using upward inflection after all statements. Icture exclamation points after statements; silently say "dammit" after a declarative statement, such as your name.

Know Yourself to Help Yourself: How do your nerves manifest themselves?

Note what happens when you get up to speak. Do you sweat/ shake/ mind goes blank/ pace/ talk too fast/ and so on? Knowing what to expect will keep you from feeling thrown off in the moment. Anxiety is a form of Energy!

Anticipate and prepare:

- Write yourself notes to SLOW DOWN in the margins of you notes; take a deep breath if your mind goes blank
- Warm-up and get some exercise before hand to release nervous energy in your body
- Do not drink too much caffeine before presenting, but bring water
- Build in some meaningful movement (not pacing!) to use some of that nervous energy
- Make sure your blood sugar is not too low (don't forget to eat!)

DO NOT tell your audience you are nervous. Things are never as apparent from the outside as the inside.

Be other-centered: Remember that you are speaking in service of you audience. Everything you do is to help them learn/ remember/ take action. The less you focus on yourself, the less nervous you will be.

-- Adapted from Elise Morrison, Associate Director for Speaking Instruction, Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning