

Public Speaking Tips:
General Advice for Verbal and Non-Verbal Skill Development

Prepared by: Amy Slagell, Ph.D., Heidi Burns, M.A.,
and Kristen Nanaziashvili, M.A.

Maximizing Verbal/Nonverbal Delivery:

Once you have your anxiety working for you (and not against you!), you'll want to consider the delivery style that will best complement your communication goal of engaging the audience.

1. *Verbal delivery enhances understanding of your message.*

You'll want to work towards an elevated, conversational style. The audience wants you to talk *to* them not at them. Use a sincere tone that lets the audience know you're invested in the material you're presenting.

- Incorporate pauses to highlight key ideas, transition between points, and/or grab the audience's attention again.
- Think about the volume of your voice—can the person in the back hear you clearly? Keep in mind, working with a microphone may make it necessary for you to modify your volume.
- Pay special attention to the rate of speech you're using; remember the goal isn't to finish as soon as possible. You want to make sure that the audience is understanding the material and connecting with it. The rate you use should allow you to focus on explaining the material carefully.
- Having variety in your rate, volume, and inflection can help give emphasis the material and sustain audience interest. Be especially conscious of these vocal delivery features when giving examples or sharing an illustration or story.

2. *Nonverbal delivery enhances understanding of your message.*

Eye contact is crucial in keeping you and the audience connected. The audience forms understanding and makes judgments about your material based on their ability to see your eyes. You can see if you are making sense to the audience by looking at them and gauging their nonverbal feedback.

- Anxiety can cause a speaker to see an audience as a menacing big blur rather than a gathering of interested individuals.
- To help you connect on a person-to-person level, locate the “friendly” faces in the audience--the people who give positive feedback in the form of smiles, nods and attentive listening positions. Speak directly to these people, varying your eye contact between them. You'll begin to notice more and more “friendly” faces to connect with as the audience is drawn into your speech.

Gestures and stance should appear natural. They should add purpose and emphasis to the message. It is best to use gestures unconsciously so that you avoid drawing attention to them, but if nervous energy tends to make you freeze physically, then you may need to plan a few gestures until you become more comfortable.

- It's better to have minimal gestures than distracting or overdone gestures.
- Minimize distracting habits like fidgeting or swaying.
- To help channel this nervous energy, think about incorporating purposeful movement. Not only will this use some of the energy, it will also help to emphasize main points and keep the audience engaged.
- One idea is to picture a triangle on the floor and plot out the points where you may move during the speech (taking care to minimize distracting pacing). Wherever you place your points, it's important that you begin and end your speech in the same place to let the audience know that the speech is concluding.