

DELIVERY

Your delivery can matter just as much as the actual content of your speech, and for some judges, might matter even more. Public speaking is a multitude of different aspects, and your vocal and physical presentation is a huge part.

Using Vocal Delivery Skills

Volume

Volume refers to how loud or soft your voice is as you deliver a speech. Some speakers are not loud enough, while others are aggressively loud. A guiding rule should be for everyone in the room to be able to hear you, while not being too loud for the person nearest to you.

Most speakers biggest challenge is speaking too quietly. Without the correct volume, your audience may have trouble hearing you, and you may seem timid and uncertain - which will earn you lower rank in every round.

Before competing, have someone listen to you speak in a quiet room. They should be able to give you feedback on your volume while in similar conditions to an actual round.

Tone

The tone of your speaking voice relates to pitch - the highs and lows of your natural voice. If you can mix high and low tones to achieve some tonal variety, you'll add color to your vocal delivery. By contrast, if your tone never varies (or being monotone) listeners will perceive your presentation as bland, boring, or even annoying.

As you practice your speech, try dropping your pitch in some areas and rising it in others. If you're having an especially hard time, ask someone to listen and give you feedback - then mark the areas on your speech to focus on.

Consider using inflection - the raising or lowering of your pitch - to emphasize certain words or expressions. For example, try a lower pitch to convey the seriousness of an idea or end on a higher pitch if you are posing a question. Like italics on a page, inflection draws attention to the words or expressions you want your audience to remember.

Rate of Delivery

Your rate of delivery refers to how quickly or slowly you speak. As with any vocal delivery skills, going to one extreme or another can hurt your presentation.

The guiding rule for achieving an appropriate rate of delivery is this: speak fast enough to keep it lively and interesting, but not so fast you become articulate. Most beginner speakers have this issue. As nerves creep in, they begin to rush through their speech. If you catch yourself gaining speed, take a deep breath and prepare for an even speed before starting again. A 2-3 second pause is better than 7 minutes of a rushed speech.

Projection

Have you listened to someone singing without a microphone and wondered how their voice managed to reach people in the front of the room as well as all the way in the back? It's because they used projection - "booming" their voices across the whole room.

Projection is all about the mechanics of breathing. To project, first maintain good posture: stand up straight with your shoulders back and your head at a neutral position. Exhale from your diaphragm- just below your rib cage - to push your breath to carry your voice.

Articulation

Articulation refers to the crispness or clarity of your spoken words. When you articulate, your vowels and consonants sound clear and distinct, and your listeners can distinguish your separate words as well as the syllables.

Articulation problems are the most common when nervousness increases a speakers rate of delivery or when being inattentive. Often, your audience has trouble understanding you and it comes across as mumbling. Practicing speaking drills or paying extra attention while speaking is the best way to overcome this issue.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation refers to correctness in the way you say words. Pronounce terms incorrectly, and your listeners may have difficulty understanding you. Equally troublesome, they may question your credibility and knowledge on your topic. When speaking on a cultural topic, mispronunciation can even be offensive.

The simple way to avoid this issue is to look up any word you aren't completely sure on. Online dictionaries or youtube videos will have the pronunciation on just about any word that you can think of.

Pausing

Used skillfully, pausing can have significant advantages. It can reinforce the seriousness of your subject, and show when certain parts of your speech have the greatest impact. Or, if you just forgot the next few words of your speech, pausing can be the easiest way to play it off.

Verbal Fillers

Verbal fillers, or crutch words, are often one of the greatest mistakes of a beginning speaker. These are words that are used when you lose your train of thought or get too nervous. A few examples are "Um", "Uh" and "Like". All speakers use these when they first start out, and it takes a lot of practice to stop. Here are a few ways to avoid crutch words.

- Take a brief pause. A second of silence is better to help yourself collect your thoughts than having your audience listen to you stumble over words.
- Become more aware of when you're using them. Have someone listen to your speech, and ask them to keep track of every time you use a filler word. You may be surprised at how often you actually use them.
- Practice, practice, practice. After enough practice, you'll be able to greatly minimize the amount of crutch words you use.

Using Physical Delivery Skills

Maintain eye contact

This is a huge one for judges. Try sweeping the room to make eye contact with everyone, while still returning to eye contact with your judge.

Be aware of your space

When you're presenting, most of the time you'll be in the front of a classroom with limited space. This is good, because it discourages you from pacing or moving around a lot, which is the last thing you'll want to do. You should try to imagine your feet following a triangle. For each of your main points, you move to the next point in the triangle. This is also a visual cue for your judges to know when you're transitioning between points.

Facial Expressions

Your facial expressions can help set the tone of your speech, and can help you seem more animated and passionate about your topic. Make sure to move and change your face, keeping a smile or a blank stare your whole speech is a sure fire way to make your judges uncomfortable.

Gestures

Make sure you're not fidgeting with your hair, twisting your hands, or sticking them in your pockets. These can distract your judges and make you look nervous. Instead, try to keep your hands steady at your sides and use hand gestures sparingly and when appropriate.