

SPEAKING & WRITING with Effectiveness

As experienced by D.A. Sharpe

These are some principles, useful in the art of public speaking and writing. They are composed for anyone who addresses a public audience. Perhaps these ideas will enhance your ability to communicate.

1. Prepare yourself mentally for each presentation. You are the one who has offered or has been invited to leadership. Be comfortable. Rest in confident self-esteem. If you make a mistake, laugh and say you made a mistake. Then do the correct thing. Be able to laugh at yourself, but not at your competition. Thank whoever introduces you. Smile before your first word.
2. State a specific purpose for the talk, and how you plan to pursue it. Be familiar with your material, so you will not be glued to the research or a speech you have prepared in writing. Outlines help one to stay on target, as do full manuscripts. However, the latter can be extremely boring and non-effective, since eye contact with the audience can be at a minimum. Eye contact is extremely important. Notes in a professional-looking leather folder or on 3" X 5" cards give the appearance of an organized speaker. Folded up sheets of paper extracted from your pocket appear haphazard.
3. If at all possible, make your address without reference to hand-held notes. The demonstration of passion, where appropriate, is effective. Brief notes placed on a podium where you may see them without handling them is good. The notes you make for this purpose should be in LARGE TYPE, and short lines for legibility.

4. Do not rush to open your mouth the moment you reach the podium. Pause, look over the audience, and then begin. A good rule of thumb is to scan the outer edges of the audience. If you know an appropriate suitable story, use it. Be wise and circumspect with humor. You probably are not a polished stand-up comedian. Limit use of humor to occasions showing the way to some point you intend to make.
5. Review your speech and enunciate clearly. Shadow practice alone in advance or with a trusted advisor evaluating. It is important not to run words together. A rushed speech makes for an exhausted audience. Take advantage of a well-placed pause
6. Practice enunciation of your words, particularly consonants. A good practice in preparation is singing the song from *Fiddler on the Roof*, "Matchmaker." Syllables should stand out clearly, and word endings like "er" or "ing" need to be stated distinctly. This skill is called "[Elocution](#)."
7. When addressing an audience, speak more slowly and distinctly than you do in casual conversation at the office.
8. Limit your points to about three that are well supported with stories, examples and/or illustrations, but not excessively. Too much detail may create boredom. In most settings, speaking engagements are opportunities to exhort and to inspire. They are not policy debates amidst a legislative deliberative body. Know which it is in which you are participating.

.....**This section 9 is about practicing good grammar!**

Why is good grammar so important, especially if you feel that most of your audience does not practice good grammar, nor does that seem to concern them? It matters, because you do not want to limit your message to those who don't mind incorrect grammar! Those people fare just as well when good grammar is used in their presence. The key element to know is, as soon as you use bad or secondary quality grammar, you lose the attention of and the credibility from the more refined or more educated people in the audience. The moment you begin speaking, people begin judging you, estimating your background, your probable education, and perhaps your acquaintance with what people consider culture. This applies to writing as well.

9. For example: (a) use personal pronouns correctly, (b) avoid splitting infinitives and (c) watch how you use prepositions. Keep in mind that being well prepared ahead of time helps cement correct grammar. Asking someone knowledgeable of good grammar to critique your practice presentation ahead of time can be helpful.

(a) Personal pronouns need to be used correctly: “The meeting was planned by Sally and me.” is correct. It is not correct to say, “The meeting was planned by Sally and I.” It would be correct to say, “Sally and I planned the meeting.” If you're uncertain how to use the "I," try saying the sentence without including Sally.

(b) Avoid splitting infinitives. Say, “My plan is not to allow contracts without open bidding.” Do not say, “My plan is to not allow contracts without open bidding.” Though some modern English language people say that splitting infinitives is acceptable or adds emphasis, it flies in the face of anyone more formally educated, especially, if they are acquainted with Latin.

A speaker or writer should try to use "we" and "our" instead of "I" and "my" whenever feasible. Most people would be surprised to notice how much the personal pronoun "I" is used in their initial written narratives. Such usage can detract from the message, if the audience starts to think you are too self-centered.

(c) “Never use a preposition to end a sentence with!” As you can see, this is a humorous way of saying the rule, while demonstrating how not to say it. Watch how you use the word, “at.” Say, “I am presently at the campaign headquarters...” Don’t say, “I’ll bet you don’t know where I’m at.” i.e. You could say, “I’ll bet you don’t know where I am.”

Avoid the habit of "Ums", "er" and buzz phrases like "don't ya know," "You know what I'm saying?" and "OK." Don't say, "Here's what I'm driving at." The correct way is "Here's where I'm driving." Or, "Here's the point being made."

10. A very important statement, which may be controversial, first should be written carefully, so that wording can be chosen wisely. You may be quoted elsewhere, and it should be accurate to what you intend to say. You should practice articulating that statement, so you will not be distracted, trying to recall the words. Keep in mind that it is good to cultivate the art of looking directly at individuals, when possible. It is sometimes good to move around, to lean into the audience to focus on a particular person. Spread your focus to different individuals, to be more inclusive. Good eye contact is one of the most valuable assets you can maintain.
11. If you are provided a microphone, keep it close to your mouth. If it is stationary, you are limited in your effective movements. Try to discover in advance whether they will provide you something that gives freedom. A wireless lapel mike is the best to use.

12. Vary your pitch (highness and lowness of voice), pace (speak slower sometimes, and then a bit more quickly on "common phrases"), loudness (increasing volume is sometimes less effective than decreasing it: to say a word softly and suddenly will often cause everyone to notice), vary your body - stance, gesturing, facial direction (if you've been still, move; if you've been moving, pause quietly in a posture; if you've been maintaining a nice, sweeping eye contact look up or to the side - as if in introspection, for an arresting affect on audience)
13. Dress appropriately for the occasion. Plan to be there. Ask the event planners or another speaker what is considered appropriate attire. Most of the time, for casual settings, men may wear an understated sport shirt, with slacks and sometimes a sport coat. If there are some men in the audience who will be wearing a suit and tie, you might choose the same, which will be appropriate. Women may wear a tailored dress or basic suit or pantsuit to most occasions, avoiding the pant and tee shirt-look. Sleeveless attire often is not as appropriate for a public address. Keep in mind that good grooming requires polished and well maintained shoes, clean, well-cut and combed hair, and that facial hair for men should be trimmed well. Freely growing beards might connote the idea of freely flowing disorganized habits. If your size and shape is little broader than you might like, have someone coach you on clothing that does not accentuate your broadness. Horizontal strips are not good for broad people. If you are too skinny, horizontal strips do help.
14. Visualize yourself with a natural smile, a straight back, head held high and a stomach pulled in, walking to the platform, speaking and leaving the platform. The first thing that anyone will notice is the confidence in the way you present yourself. Practicing your speech before a mirror will help you decide how to use your hands and arms to complement what you are saying. The audience will be relaxed and enjoy the event more if you, the speaker, give a relaxed and happy appearance.

15. In most cases, avoid having a stern appearance on the countenance of your face. You should practice having a natural smile in response to all that is around you. Look like you are having fun, and that you are glad to be there. Don't make it look like a pain to do. Looking stern is not necessary for be a speaker who seriously wants to change things.
16. Be prepared to follow-up important matters. Commit to the audience that you will check into something that has been raised, and that you could not answer immediately. To do that more effectively, arrange to have a trusted associate or sitting nearby to whom you can refer the instruction about what to do. The audience can see a note is being made, and their confidence is strengthened that you will do it.
17. Remember what your mother probably said, "If you can't say anything good about a person, don't say anything at all." That is excellent advice. Also, a closed mouth catches few flies. If someone in the audience raises a negative element about someone with whom you are competing, avoid jumping on the bandwagon. There is a lot of truth in the old saying, "You don't raise yourself by lowering someone else." He who slings mud loses ground! Be as kind as you can, without appearing to agree with an opponent. You might say something like, "My worthy opponent should be invited to address that criticism."

In a political environment, if you are one of several candidates in a party primary election race, remember that **only one of you** will emerge to be on the November general election ballot. It is expected and hoped that you will support for the general election whomever is the party candidate elected in the primary. You should not say things to or about your primary election competitor that would make it difficult or impractical to support him or her in the general election.

If you are the primary winner, remember that you want the support in the general election of those fellow party members who ran against you in the primary. Don't make it hard for them to support you, because of what you may have said to or about them. Focus on perceived differences of position or policy, and not on bad characteristics of the other candidate.

18. Audience engagement is often helpful. Consider involving someone by asking a pertinent question, "What do you think about the benefits of the tax proposal?" Or speak directly to someone, "John, do you think the benefits are greater than the cost?" Be sure you thank the person who responds. Try to be careful not to draw out someone in the audience you believe may be against you.
19. Never speak too softly. Sufficient loudness to reach the back of the audience is what you need, especially when no sound system available.
20. Pauses really add to audience attention.
21. Being on time is extremely important. Knowing what time allotment has been given for your presentation is absolutely necessary. Look around the room to see whether a clock is visible, so you can monitor the time. You might remove your watch and place it on the lectern, so you can monitor time. You may even have a "friend" sitting on the front row that gives you a subtle signal when three minutes are left. Avoid glancing at your wristwatch to tell the time.
22. In concluding remarks, restate the specific purpose of that occasion in the same phrasing or in reasonably close phrasing to what you announced at the start. Thank the audience for coming, and ask for their support.
23. It is good, if you can, to visit the site of the address earlier, perhaps the day before, or at least earlier than the audience begins to arrive. It helps you to have a sense of the setting.

24. An expressed thank you is important. Expressing thanks to the audience for being present and attentive, and for giving their support, often gains good favor. A personally written thank you note after the event to the person who invited you is a small token of appreciation for his or her support, and bears you in good stead with your host.

SUMMARY:

These are principles that I strive to follow. There still is work to be done in me with them. They include suggestions from friends who shared their ideas about this document. They are cited on the last page below.

The public speaker who masters most of these principles is a step-ahead of the competition. It's a good way to have the last word, simply by being pleasant to have been at an event. It's another way of creating impressions beyond mere words.



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This document originally was composed by me about 2004. In my role, then as Chairman of the Wise County Republican Party, it was used to coach candidates in preparing themselves for public campaigns. Below is a list of some 13 citizens and political leaders who gave input for this document to give it credibility. Adjustments have been made up to 2017 to indicate those positions now that are former.

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