

## **Presentation Skills: Avoiding Problems**

The main problems that most people have with practical delivery are the result of shyness, inexperience, or anxiety: for example, talking too fast, speaking too softly, or not looking at the audience. For the audience, this results in a presentation that is difficult to listen to.

### **Presentation Strategies**

There are a number of strategies that you can practice to help you avoid such problems with presenting:

#### *Go slowly*

You can vary your pace, of course, by slowing down for crucial things while speeding up for anecdotes or examples, for instance. Regardless, to present most effectively, you need to make a conscious effort to go more slowly than seems natural. Most inexperienced speakers go much too fast.

#### *Don't be afraid to pause*

Wait at the end of sentences and sections. If you lose your place, or can't think of a word, wait until you find it. If you don't look uncomfortable, no one else will feel uncomfortable. Try to stop yourself filling pauses with utterances like "um..." or "er...".

#### *Speak up*

Make sure everyone can hear you clearly. It is better to speak too loudly rather than too softly. Try to sound confident rather than hesitant or tentative. Avoid using the tone of voice at the end of sentences which seems to turn everything you say into a question.

#### *Look at your audience*

Whether you are sitting or standing, reading an essay or talking from notes, look your listeners in the eyes as much as possible. If you find this difficult, concentrate at first on one person or group, and then branch out to take everybody in. Look at everybody periodically. Eye contact is very important.

### *Talk to the audience*

Don't address your remarks just to or mainly to the professor or teaching assistant. Include everyone in the room when you are speaking.

### *Gestures and movement*

Nervousness usually makes you want to move around a lot. Keep your hands from doing too much distracting fluttering about and don't fiddle with things. If you are standing, stand up straight most of the time, with your weight on both feet. You can walk around a bit in a relaxed way, but don't shuffle about aimlessly. You might occasionally lean on a desk or a podium, for instance, but don't do it most of the time.

### *Appear interested in and concerned with what you are saying*

If what you're talking about doesn't seem to interest you, it won't interest anyone else. Emphasize what you think is important. Whatever the topic, make it your aim to keep the audience with you all the time.

### *Be responsive to your audience*

Make minor adjustments in your planned talk when necessary. For example, go over something again if people look confused or puzzled. If you are maintaining proper eye contact, you should also find yourself being stimulated by attentive looks from your listeners.

### *If you are reading an essay*

Be alert to the danger of making it sound just like a reading. Try to make it sound like a talk – slow down, look at your audience as much as possible, speak with emphasis. Compensate for the fact that written communication differs from spoken by adding impromptu comments of your own – background information, extra examples of details, restatements of the point you just made, etc. – before going on with your text.

### *If you are nervous*

The best antidote is thorough preparation and practice. Immediately before your talk try relaxation – sitting down, closing your eyes, and relaxing each part of your body in turn. If your anxiety is really incapacitating you, talking about it with a sympathetic friend may help you to decide whether you really have any good cause to feel that way.