

Pre-assignment #2: Elements of Delivery

Purpose:

Effective training presentation means much more than just stand up delivery skills, but those skills are extremely important in conveying your training message. This pre-assignment presents a number of critical delivery skills for effective trainers including:

- Eye contact and movement
- Voice tone, pace, and expression
- Body movement and posture
- Appropriate language usage

Task:

You are asked to study the material that follows related to the elements of effective delivery and to consider your own thoughts on each topic. At the institute, you will be presented with additional material on the topics, and you will work with several other participants to present the topic to the entire learner group.

Topic 1: Eye Contact and Movement

Ever wonder what your eyes are saying when you speak to a group?

Simply put, strong, direct eye contact is an important part of straightforward, effective communication. It is one of the most important elements in building a relationship with your audience. Proper eye focus helps you to present effectively in a number of ways:

It initiates communication.

In a one-on-one meeting, imagine speaking to someone while looking away from, instead of at, the person you are addressing. How effective can you be in communicating with someone if your eyes are focused somewhere else?

Actual in-person communication does not really take place until you look someone in the eye—until your eyes establish a connection with someone. That is true whether you are speaking to one person or to a group.

It inspires trust.

When you want someone to believe you, trust you, and agree with you, eye contact is a must. You probably would not buy a car - or make any major purchase - from someone who does not look you in the eye. That simple trust applies just as much when you are trying to win over a group of people.

It helps you to stay in control.

You want to keep your listeners focused on you. Lack of proper eye contact allows your listeners to enter into their own private world. Worse, it can give them a reason to engage in their own conversations, distracting others and drawing attention away from you.

It helps control stage fright.

When you focus your eyes on one person at a time, you instantly go from addressing an audience (even if it is just an audience of two,) to having a series of one-on-one conversations.

This not only helps make your talk more personal; it can also reduce and help control your anxiety. Part of your mental preparation should be to focus on speaking with and engaging individuals who just happen to be in a group.

It puts others at ease.

People on the receiving end of good eye contact benefit as well. By focusing your eyes on people, you can draw them in and make them feel you're addressing them directly. If you are successful, a large part of your audience will leave thinking "he/she was speaking just to me."

Tips for using your eyes properly in a training setting:

1

Look at your audience - not at the walls or the floor or the ceiling, or beyond your audience at some distant place over their heads. Nobody, after all, is there. They are in the room, wanting and deserving your attention.

2

Be careful not to limit your focus to just a couple of people - or worse, to just one person, who may wonder why you are staring at him or her. Your audience may well end up wondering too. Instead of establishing rapport, it could have the opposite effect of intimidating the poor soul who has just become the sole object of your attention.

3

Focus on one person at a time. When you are speaking to a small group, finish an entire thought, come to a natural breakpoint, then move your eyes to someone else. Once you have focused on another person, then continue speaking. Move randomly around the room -- not in a row-by-row fashion.

If you are talking to a large audience, begin with one person at the back of the room, holding your focus a little longer. This will help draw them in, and it will also serve as a connection to others at the back of the room. This technique has the added advantage of leading you to reach out with your voice to your entire audience.



Remember the basics. Adopt a neutral, pleasant expression. Rehearse often leading up to your presentation. If you cannot assemble a few friends rehearse in front of an imaginary group.

Do you have any additional thoughts on this topic that you would like to share at the institute?

Topic 2: Voice Tone, Pace, and Expression

Fast speech is like fine print. It is easy to ignore. Listeners tune out if speakers do not make listening comfortable. It's the speaker's job to make it easy and comfortable for the audience to listen.

But speed is not the only issue. In fact, speed by itself is rarely the issue. The *constant* speed is what causes the trouble. People who speak at a constant pace, whether slow or fast, are likely to frustrate their listeners. They not only bore us with their own special brand of monotony (sameness of speed), they undermine the natural physical aspect of speech.

Speech is physical because it comes from the body. We need to remind ourselves of that. It is not just a mental exercise. Talking engages the muscles of the abdomen, the throat, the tongue, and the lips. Speech literally embodies ideas—it brings ideas, thoughts and logic onto the physical plane.

However, speech carries more than words and logic. Since it comes from the body, it creates physical sensations in listeners. We are all familiar with the power of sound to create mood and feeling. Think of chalk on a blackboard, a door creaking open, wind in the branches of pines at night. Many sounds, not just music, have qualities that stir us deeply. Your voice, used effectively, has that same power.

If you habitually speak at the same rate, you need a variety of ways to punctuate your speech. The most natural punctuation for speech is when you pause to take a breath. Writing without punctuation is ambiguous and cumbersome. Speech, without the punctuation of pauses, is unclear and hard to listen to. It makes listeners uncomfortable, not just because of the speed itself. The unrelenting stream of sound never gives us a chance to rest and ponder the movement of the speaker's thought.

To gain some verbal punctuation:

- ▶▶ **Look people in the eye when speaking.** That will slow you down because you get feedback from your listener. You can see whether or not your listener understands what you are saying. That sense of connection with your target will help you pace your words so they hit the mark.
- ▶▶ **Breathe more often.** You will have more energy for your voice. You will feel calmer. You will have enough air to keep the energy in your voice right through to the end of the phrase.
- ▶▶ **Pause between phrases.** The pauses will give your listeners a chance to digest what you've said. Speech that comes from a person who is breathing deeply and regularly is easier to hear and understand.

Topic 3: Body Movement and Posture

The tricky thing about body language is that you are usually unaware of the messages that you are conveying nonverbally. When presenters see themselves on videotape, they are often surprised to see that their body language conveyed an entirely different message from the one they had intended. For example, some people actually shake their heads "no" when they say "yes."

Effective body language supports the message and projects a strong image of the presenter. Audiences respond best to presenters whose bodies are alive and energetic. Audiences appreciate movement when it is meaningful and supportive of the message. The most effective movements are ones that reflect the presenter's personal investment in the message.

Anyone can utter a series of words; it is the presenter's personal connection to those words that can bring them to life for the audience. Presenters who care deeply about their material tend to use their entire bodies to support the message. Their gestures are large enough to embrace the room full of people. They stand tall and lean into the audience right from their feet, as if trying to shorten the distance between their message and the ears of the audience. Their faces express their passion while their eyes connect with the audience, focusing on one person at a time.

Some keys to effective body language are your gestures, stance, and expression:

Gestures

Do use your hands. They don't belong on your hips or in your pockets or folded across your chest either or held behind your back. Use them-to help emphasize a point, to express emotion, to release tension, and to engage your audience.

Anyone can think of a gesture that supports words such as "short" or "tall;" however, the gestures of everyday conversation tend to be too small and often too low to use in front of a large audience.

Presenters need to scale their gestures to the size of the room. The most effective gestures arise from the shoulder, not the wrist or elbow. Shoulder gestures project better across the distance and release more of the presenter's energy, helping combat any tension that can build in the upper body (particularly under pressure).

Stance

Your stance can tell the audience that you're happy, afraid, confident, or uncomfortable. A balanced stance with weight even but slightly forward tends to say that the speaker is engaged with the audience. A slumped stance leaning to one side says the speaker doesn't care.

When not gesturing, hands should remain quietly at the sides of the presenter. Letting the hands fall to the sides between gestures projects ease. These moments of stillness between gestures also have the effect of amplifying the gestures. Yes, you can move around, but remember to punctuate that movement with stillness. Constant motion, such as swaying, is a distraction that can annoy your listeners.

Facial Expression

The movements of your eyes, mouth, and facial muscles can build a connection with your audience. Unfortunately, under the pressure of delivering a group presentation, many people lose their facial expression. Their faces solidify into a grim, stone statue, a thin straight line where the lips meet.

Try to unfreeze your face right from the start. For example, when you greet the audience, smile! You won't want to smile throughout the entire presentation, but at least at the appropriate moments. It's only on rare occasions that you may need to be somber and serious throughout.

With so much depending on communication and communication depending on body language, it is worth getting it right. Work on the use of gestures, stance, and facial expression to make the most of every speaking opportunity.

Topic 4: Appropriate Language Usage

You cannot reach your listeners if you do not know much about them. Knowing your listeners helps you to shape your message in a way that's most likely to gain their understanding and acceptance. That's all the more important when your goal is to persuade, and not simply to inform, your audience.

Persuasive speaking aims to convince people to take some form of action. To achieve that goal, you must get your listeners to change their attitudes and beliefs. Or you must reinforce the attitudes and beliefs they already hold. That means you must have a thorough knowledge of your audience before you prepare your presentation.

What should you know?

Any number of factors can affect how your listeners will react. These can include their experience, education, job or professional background, age, gender, ethnic background, cultural differences, and more.

Do your listeners share common interests? What is their relationship to one another? What recent experiences, if any, have they had that could affect their readiness to accept your argument?

What will your listeners expect from you? Do they have high expectations you may not be able to fulfill? Are their expectations realistic? Are you prepared in any case to address those expectations?

These are just some of the questions you should be thinking of as you prepare. Ask as many questions as you think are relevant.

What do they already know?

You will need to address your listeners at the level of their existing knowledge. So it is important to have a clear picture of what they already know. From that, you can build your presentation, adding information your listeners don't already have.

If, for example, your audience already has expertise in a given area, do not waste their time with unnecessary background. Start instead from what they already know. What additional information will they need to better understand and accept your message?

By the same token, if your listeners know little about your topic, you will need to take that into account too, and fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

Think in terms of how much information your audience needs, not how much information you can provide. In some cases, you may want to provide additional information in a handout after your presentation.

Do they care?

Consider how much interest your listeners have in your topic. Is your message a high or a low priority for them? How much do they care?

If they have a high level of interest, you may be able to go directly to your key messages. If their level is low, you may have to build interest before getting to your main messages. You may, for example, need to open with an especially interesting story or important piece of information that will serve as a hook that will get everyone's attention from the start.

What attitudes, biases, interests, or concerns might they have that could affect how they receive your message? Do they have strong opinions or feelings about your topic, or about you? Do they have deeply held beliefs you will need to address? To what extent are their egos and values likely to be a factor?

Is your audience likely to be friendly or hostile toward your point of view?

If they hold positive views about your topic and your messages, you will be focusing chiefly on reinforcing those views and reciting the benefits your listeners will receive.

If they hold negative views, you will need a different strategy. You will have to anticipate their objections and prepare your responses. You may have to limit what you ask of your audience. You might start with points to get agreement from your audience, before moving to the more controversial parts of your presentation. You may even want to begin by listing opposing arguments, and then explain your own position.

Determining what can trigger strong emotions in your listeners-whether positive or negative-is an essential step. You may decide in the end that you can't completely satisfy everyone's concerns. But at least you can present your position strategically, while taking those concerns into account and through that, showing your own awareness and sensitivity.

Do not be shy about asking.

It is a sign that you care about your listeners and about addressing their interests and concerns. Presenters are often surprised, once they start asking, to discover how much they can learn about an audience ahead of time.

Information can come from any number of sources-including those conducting or sponsoring the meeting, others who have spoken to the same audience, and especially, from questioning some of those who will be attending your meeting. Of course, if your listeners are people you interact with regularly, this part of your job will be a lot easier.

As you prepare for your next presentation, make sure you base your plans on a detailed understanding of your audience. Focus on what matters most to them and what will help you lead them to your goal.