

# PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE TALKING

Any effective talk must do three things:

1. communicate your arguments and ideas,
2. persuade your audience that they are true, and
3. be interesting and entertaining.

In our obsession with persuasive argumentation, academics sometimes forget about the third item on this list. Some people think it follows automatically from the first two. (It doesn't.) These attitudes are seriously mistaken. *It is impossible to communicate and persuade effectively without entertaining as well.* Keeping your audience interested and involved -- entertaining them -- is essential because in order to communicate your work and its value, you need their full attention.

Listening is hard work. Especially at conferences, where audiences attend many talks over many hours, people need the speaker's help to maintain their focus. This is the true meaning of "entertainment." In an academic talk, entertainment doesn't mean making your audience laugh or distracting them from their troubles. Instead, it's about helping them stay focused on and interested in what you have to say.

No rule applies always and everywhere. But the following principles work almost all the time. Try them!

1. Talk rather than read.
2. Stand up.
3. Use visual aids.
4. Move around.
5. Speak loudly, clearly, and confidently.
6. Make eye contact with the audience.
7. Focus on main arguments.
8. Finish your talk within the time limit.
9. Summarize your talk at the beginning and again at the end.
10. Notice your audience and respond to their needs.

## **Task: Now match the principles with the following arguments.**

It's easier to keep focused on someone who's moving than on a motionless talking head. Hand gestures are also good. It's possible to overuse these devices, of course. Simply crossing from one side of the room to the other every three or four minutes is probably enough.

Not to do so is disrespectful both of any subsequent speakers and of your audience. Most people's *maximum* attention span is 40-45 minutes. If you exceed this limit, you'll probably lose them.

The only way to be certain you can keep within your limits is to rehearse your talk.

If people seem to be falling asleep, or getting restless or distracted, the problem may not be you. Is the room too hot, or too cold? Too dark? Can people see you? Is the microphone on? Is something outside the room distracting people?

This is one of the most important principles of public speaking. People are visual creatures. At the same time, it helps them understand the structure of your thinking. Talk outlines should be extremely concise.

This is better for two reasons. First, people can see you better. Second, standing puts you in a physically dominant position. The audience needs your help to maintain their attention.

An important element of vocal technique is to focus on the bottom (the deepest pitch) of your vocal range, which is its loudest and most authoritative tone. Don't be afraid to ask for feedback: "Can you hear me in the back of the room?"

If this is anxiety-inducing, at least pretend to do this by casting your gaze toward the back and sides of the room. Be careful not to ignore one side of the audience.

Especially in a conference situation, where talks are short and yours is one of many, your audience is not going to remember the details of your evidence. In such a situation, less is more. Give them short, striking "punch lines" that they'll remember.

You'll be easier to understand, and you'll be better able to make genuine contact with your audience. Furthermore, ultimately talking will help you think more clearly by forcing you to communicate your points in ordinary language.

"Tell `em what you're gonna tell `em, tell `em, and tell `em what you told `em": this ancient principle still holds. If you follow this rule, your audience is much more likely to remember your main points.

**Task: Having read the principles above choose the best answers to the questions below (more answers can be correct):**

- 1) Summarizing the main points is essential because
  - a) some people love it
  - b) it helps the speaker stay focused
  - c) you can use an extra slide on it
  - d) it helps the audience remember the message
  
- 2) Effective talks should be entertaining.
  - a) in order to communicate your work and its value, you need their full attention
  - b) because they are persuasive
  - c) in order to make your audience laugh or distract them from their troubles
  - d) effective talks do not have to be entertaining, they must be informative
  
- 3) You should not read:
  - a) because it is more difficult to understand than when you talk
  - b) because reading intensifies your contact with the audience
  - c) because when you talk your grammar is perfect and vocabulary sophisticated
  - d) all of the above
  
- 4) Standing is better than sitting.
  - a) Standing is a little easier.
  - b) Sitting is politically incorrect.
  - c) people can see you better
  - d) you better control the room
  
5. If the audience is responding poorly,
  - a) it is always your fault.
  - b) it does not have to be your fault.
  - c) somebody should open the window.
  - d) you should switch the lights off.

### **Reporting words**

**While presenting, you will have to have a group of synonyms or words of similar meanings at hand. Complete these sentences. Choose the correct verb.**

1. I'd like to \_\_\_\_\_ you of the latest news.
  - a) speak
  - b) inform
  - c) describe
2. Could you \_\_\_\_\_ up, please? We can't hear you.
  - a) talk
  - b) say
  - c) speak
3. I'll have to \_\_\_\_\_ the place as I don't have any photos with me.
  - a) explain
  - b) describe
  - c) present
4. I'm going to \_\_\_\_\_ the results of our research.
  - a) report
  - b) inform
  - c) present
5. Let me \_\_\_\_\_ why we used this strategy.
  - a) explain
  - b) describe
  - c) talk
6. We'll have time to \_\_\_\_\_ about it this afternoon.
  - a) discuss
  - b) say
  - c) talk
7. I couldn't \_\_\_\_\_ how long it will take.
  - a) talk
  - b) speak
  - c) say
8. We will \_\_\_\_\_ you when the project comes to an end.
  - a) say
  - b) describe
  - c) tell

## Transitions

Transitions are an integral part of a smooth flowing presentation, yet many speakers forget to plan their transitions. The primary purpose of a transition is to lead your listener from one idea to another. The following are some examples of transitions that work well:

The subject of this talk is... Today I want to consider... In my talk I'd like to discuss... I'm going to talk about...  
There are three points... the first one is... the second one is...  
As we will see in the third part... As I am going to show you later...to get back to the example...  
Let's turn our attention to... To move on... Now I will deal with the problem of...The next point is...  
Furthermore,... however,... in addition,... Similarly,...Consequently,...  
As you can see on the next slide... As the table shows... To illustrate this point...  
I want to stress... I would like to emphasise... It's important to remember that... The essential point is that...  
In other words... This is to say... The point I am making is... That means...  
As we know... it is clear that... we all understand...It goes without saying...  
O.K., ... so,... well... and now...

**Look at the main body of the presentation and write down the transitions used by the speaker.**  
**SUDDEN DEATH DURING EXERCISE**

\_\_\_\_\_ that the most common causes of sudden death during exercise are abnormalities of the heart and blood vessels. \_\_\_\_\_, coronary heart disease is the major cause of exercise-related complications in Westernised communities. \_\_\_\_\_, the issue that attracts our attention is whether these deaths are causally related to exercise and thus whether exercise can be a dangerous and potentially lethal activity for predisposed athletes.

\_\_\_\_\_, there are many people with latent heart disease who are able to exercise quite safely without the risk of sudden death. \_\_\_\_\_, clinicians still have not established how to distinguish these people from those who are at risk. Because athletes who die suddenly have advanced cardiac disease, they are at high risk of dying suddenly, whether or not they exercise. A number of studies have attempted to determine whether exercise increases the risk that people with advanced heart disease will die suddenly during exercise rather than at rest. Some have found that moderate exercise does not increase the risk of sudden death, whereas others have found that more vigorous forms of exercise are associated with a five- to seven- fold greater risk of sudden death.

\_\_\_\_\_, I would like to mention that in the USA the sports most commonly associated with sudden death are football and basketball. \_\_\_\_\_, in the rest of the world, soccer accounts for two-thirds of the total number. \_\_\_\_\_ that on the one hand, the performance of exercise increases the risk of sudden cardiac death, but on the other hand if one exercises regularly, that risk is less. \_\_\_\_\_, one of the most critical things to do to improve your cardiac health and well-being is to exercise on a regular basis.

\_\_\_\_\_ of prevention \_\_\_\_\_. Although sudden death in athletes is devastating, it is very rare and there are many things we can do to prevent it. \_\_\_\_\_, it is recommended to exercise in the morning or evening during warm months, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages. Any chest or abdominal pain, fainting, dizziness, fatigue, unusually rapid heartbeat or shortness of breath should be reported to a physician.

\_\_\_\_\_, athletes should have a physical examination before participating in organized sports. Athletes with a family history of sudden death, heart disease at a young age, a loud heart murmur or previous heart surgery require further evaluation. \_\_\_\_\_, all persons over 50 should undergo cardiovascular screening before starting any type of exercise programme.

\_\_\_\_\_ sudden death at an advanced age: it is usually difficult to motivate elderly people to exercise, although the person who begins an exercise programme is at lower risk of sudden death than a sedentary peer. It has also been claimed that the relative risks of physical activity decrease with age because of a less ambitious attitude towards exercise. \_\_\_\_\_, if an exercise does provoke sudden death in let's say an 80-year-old some believe that this is a more pleasant end than many alternative ways of dying.

**Write an introduction and a conclusion to the main body of the presentation.**