

SEMINAR 2 EFFECTIVE TALKING

1. 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.

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.

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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.

2. 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

3. 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...
Futhermore,... 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...

Adapted from http://www.english.ucsb.edu/grad/2nd-exam-resources/academic_talk.asp

http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/talking_main.html

4. KEY VERBS

1. Read the tasks students have been given. Identify the key verbs commonly used in academic English.

A) Discuss some of the problems involved in investigating attitudes to diet and health. Write a critical review of an investigation you have read about, or describe an investigation you yourself could conduct. Consider the advantages or disadvantages of different methods.

B) Starting from rest, an aircraft accelerates to its take-off speed of 60m/s in a distance of 900m. Illustrate this with a velocity-time graph. Assuming constant acceleration, find how long the take-off run lasts.

C) The fact that nations agree to follow international law demonstrates that we can identify ideals that are trans-national and trans-cultural. How far is this statement true? Critically analyse any recent event which supports or challenges the statement.

D) Examine how industrial growth has affected any two developing countries. Provide statistical evidence where necessary and include a discussion of likely future trends.

2. Now match each verb from the tasks above on the left with its synonym on the right.

affect

attempt

calculate

demonstrate

include

challenge

investigate

provide

compute

give

influence

involve

question

show

study

try

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3. In academic style, noun phrases can often be used instead of some of the key verbs. Complete each phrase with the appropriate noun. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1. investigate = conduct, carry out an _____ into/of
2. illustrate = provide an _____ of
3. analyse = provide, carry out an _____ of
4. affect = have an _____ on
5. attempt = make an _____ to/at
6. classify = make, provide a _____ of