**Chapter no. 13**

 Speaking Effectively

**What is an Oral Presentation?**

Speaking formally or informally to a group of strangers, friends and acquaintances or an oral presentation is a short talk on a set topic given to a tutorial or seminar group. In an oral presentation one (or more) students give a talk to a tutorial group and present views on a topic based on their readings or research. The rest of the group then joins in a discussion of the topic.

Whatever your profession is, you may be asked on various occasions to participate in a seminar, conference, panel discussion and/or meeting and to deliver an address to the audience present there. If you are an effective speaker, you can take this opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge, enhance your prestige, influence decisions, and occupy more important positions in your organizations. So, the acquisition of oral presentation skills is essential for success in any profession.

**Purpose of Oral Presentation:**

1. To Persuade
2. To Sell
3. To Demonstrate
4. To Entertain
5. To Propose
6. To Inform

**Preparing an Oral Presentation**

An effective presentation is more than just standing up and giving information. A presenter must consider how best to communicate their information to the audience. Use these tips to create a presentation that is both informative and interesting.

**Organize your thoughts:** Start with an outline and develop good transitions between sections.

Emphasize the real-world significance of your research.

**Have a strong opening.** Why should the audience listen to you? One good way to get their attention is to start with a question, whether or not you expect an answer.

**Define terms early.** If you are using terms that may be new to the audience, introduce them early in your presentation. Once an audience gets lost in unfamiliar terminology, it is extremely difficult to get them back on track.

**Finish with a bang.** Find one or two sentences that sum up the importance of your research. How is the world better off as a result of what you have done?

**Design PowerPoint slides to introduce important information.** Consider doing a presentation without slides. Then consider which points you cannot make without them. Create only those slides that are necessary to improve your Communication with the audience.

**Time yourself.** Do not wait until the last minute to time your presentation. You only have few minutes to speak, so you want to know, as soon as possible, if you are close to that limit.

**Create effective notes for yourself.** Have notes that you can read. Do not write out your entire talk; use an outline or other brief reminders of what you want to say. Make sure the text is large enough that you can read it from a distance.

**Practice;** the more you practice your presentation, the more comfortable you will be in front of an audience. Practice in front of a friend or two and ask for their feedback. Record yourself and listen to it critically. Make it better and do it again.

**Tips for effective oral Presentation:**

When you start your presentation, the audience will be interested in what you say. Use these tips to help keep them interested throughout your presentation

**Be excited.** You are talking about something you find exciting. If you remember to be excited, your audience will feel it and automatically become more interested.

**Speak with confidence.** When you are speaking, you are the authority on your topic, but do not pretend that you know everything. If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it. Consider deferring the question to your mentor or offer to look into the matter further.

**Make eye contact with the audience.** Your purpose is to communicate with your audience, and people listen more if they feel you are talking directly to them. As you speak, let your eyes settle on one person for several seconds before moving on to somebody else. You do not have to make eye contact with everybody, but make sure you connect with all areas of the audience equally.

**Avoid reading from the screen.** First, if you are reading from the screen, you are not making eye contact with your audience. Second, if you put it on your slide, it is because you wanted them to read it, not you.

**Blank the screen when a slide is unnecessary.** A slide that is not related to what you are speaking about can distract the audience. Pressing the letter B or the period key displays a black screen, which lets the audience concentrate solely on your words. Press the same key to restore the display. Use a pointer only when necessary. If you are using a laser pointer, remember to keep it off unless you need to highlight something on the screen.

**Explain your equations and graphs.** When you display equations, explain them fully. Point out all constants and dependent and independent variables. With graphs, tell how they support your point. Explain the x- and y-axes and show how the graph progresses from left to right.

**Pause.** Pauses add audible structure to your presentation. They emphasize important information, make transitions obvious, and give the audience time to catch up between points and to read new slides. Pauses always feel much longer to speakers than to listeners. Practice counting silently to three (slowly) between points.

**Avoid filler words.** Um, like, you know, and many others. To an audience, these are indications that you do not know what to say; you sound uncomfortable, so they start to feel uncomfortable as well. Speak slowly enough that you can collect your thoughts before moving ahead. If you really do not know what to say, pause silently until you do.

**Relax.** It is hard to relax when you are nervous, but your audience will be much more comfortable if you are too.

**The following three core elements of vocal production need to be understood for anyone wishing to become an effective speaker:**

* **Volume** - to be heard.
* **Clarity** - to be understood.
* **Variety** - to add interest.

### Volume

This is not a question of treating the voice like the volume control on the TV remote.  Some people have naturally soft voices and physically cannot bellow.  Additionally, if the voice is raised too much, tonal quality is lost.  Instead of raising the voice it should be 'projected out'.  Support the voice with lots of breath - the further you want to project the voice out, the more breath you need.

When talking to a group or meeting, it is important to never aim your talk to the front row or just to the people nearest you, but to consciously project what you have to say to those furthest away.  By developing a strong voice,as opposed to a loud voice, you will be seen as someone positive.

### Clarity

Some people tend to speak through clenched teeth and with little movement of their lips.  It is this inability to open mouths and failure to make speech sounds with precision that is the root cause of inaudibility.  The sound is locked into the mouth and not let out.  To have good articulation it is important to unclench the jaw, open the mouth and give full benefit to each sound you make, paying particular attention to the ends of words.  This will also help your audience as a certain amount of lip-reading will be possible.

### Variety

To make speech effective and interesting, certain techniques can be applied.  However, it is important not to sound false or as if you are giving a performance.  Whilst words convey meaning, how they are said reflects feelings and emotions.  Vocal variety can be achieved by variations in:

* **Pace:**This is the speed at which you talk.  If speech is too fast then the listeners will not have time to assimilate what is being said.  Nevertheless, it is a good idea to vary the pace - quickening up at times and then slowing down – this will help to maintain interest.
* **Volume:**By raising or lowering volume occasionally, you can create emphasis.  If you drop your voice to almost a whisper (as long as it is projected) for a sentence or two, it will make your audience suddenly alert, be careful not to overuse this technique.
* **Pitch - Inflection - Emphasis:**When speaking in public, try to convey the information with as much vocal energy and enthusiasm as possible.  This does not mean your voice has to swoop and dive all over the place in an uncontrolled manner.  Try to make the talk interesting and remember that when you are nervous or even excited, vocal chords tense and shorten causing the voice to get higher.  Emphasise certain words and phrases within the talk to convey their importance and help to add variety.
* **Pause:**Pauses are powerful.  They can be used for effect to highlight the preceding statement or to gain attention before an important message.  Pauses mean silence for a few seconds.  Listeners interpret meaning during pauses so have the courage to stay silent for up to five seconds – dramatic pauses like this convey authority and confidence.

**Managing speech anxiety**

**What is speech anxiety?**

Anxiety is a physical tension, unease and panic symptoms.

Public speaking anxiety, often referred to as speech anxiety or stage fright, involves a central fear of being scrutinized or evaluated by others. This fear is often accompanied by a variety of physical and emotional reactions that can significantly interfere with a person's ability to successfully give a speech or presentation, including intense feelings of anxiety, worry, nervousness, trembling or shaking and sweating.

**Techniques to manage speech anxiety:**

* **Movement helps breathing!** Plan and practice your movement. The most logical times to move would be during the transitions of your speech.
* **Wait:** Don’t begin until you are ready. Take a few minutes to look over your notes, say your first sentence to yourself, take a deep breath, and then begin!
* **Practice concepts, not words.** Never write out a talk word for word unless absolute accuracy must be maintained (legal situations). Otherwise, just make brief notes. A little spontaneity adds a tremendous amount of character to your talk. Written speeches are almost always boring, and when you read text, it is much more difficult to make a connection with your audience.
* **Memorizing a talk** word for word can actually lead to more anxiety. If something out of the ordinary happens or if you ever lose your place, your will put an extreme amount of pressure on yourself to get back. A better way to memorize a talk is to narrow your talk down to just a few main ideas and commit those main ideas to memory. If during your presentation you have additional time, you can add more details to the main ideas, and if time runs short, you can rest assured that your main points were delivered.
* **Exercise**: Try walking before your speech. More strenuous exercise should take place much earlier in the day, not just before your speech. Stretch your muscles throughout your body. Try isometric exercise (Tense the muscle group, hold, release). Make a “Lion Face” and a “Mouse Face” to loosen up your facial muscles. Make fists, hold, release. Try shoulder rolls/lifts.
* **Do deep breathing exercises.** This is the old standby for any tense situation and professional speakers swear by its effectiveness. Take a deep breath, hold it for three or four seconds and exhale. Repeat four or five times. You’ll feel remarkably more at ease.
* **Drop your hands**: Your hands and your gestures can add great impact to your delivery. When you are not using your hands, just drop them to your side. It will feel awkward at first, but dropping your hands to your side is the most natural gesture you can use. For instance, when you walk down the hallway at your office, do you cup your hands in front as you walk? Is it more natural to lock your hands behind you when you walk? In most situations, it is natural to just let your hands drop to your side. When you do this it will allow you to make more purposeful gestures when you need to.
* **Realize anxiety exists.** What are your fears? Make a list of your fears. Now look to see what is realistic and what is not? Would the entire audience really begin pointing, laughing, and mocking you? Probably not. Could you drop your cards; yes. What would you do? How about pick them up? See<you can plan how to respond to realistic fears.
* **Have a “GIMMICK**” for each part of your speech<role-plays, skits, poems, music, etc. This helps you to look forward to different areas of your speech.
* **Mingle with the audience before the speech** – If it’s possible, try to meet people in the audience before you speak. A simple chat with a few people in the audience will increase your familiarity with them and improve your comfort level.
* **If you are standing in behind a podium**, gently push your fingernails into your palm, squeeze a paper clip, or press your foot onto one of the shelves in the podium to trick your brain. You should inflict minimal pain, enough that your brain focuses less on the nervousness and more on the pain felt. If maintaining eye contact with your audience’s eyes makes you nervous, look at your audience member’s ears instead. No one will know the difference.

**Fielding Questions**

Question time at the end of a talk is something inexperienced speakers are sometimes afraid of. This is often because they are worried that they won’t be able to answer the questions. Look upon this time as an opportunity to interact with your audience. The fact that people ask questions can be an indication of their interest in your talk. It can also be the time when the best communication can take place. You may also get a number of new ideas or new ways of looking at your topic.

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| Here are a number of useful strategies (and phrases) for managing question time well. **Fielding questions** | * If there is nobody chairing the session, you need to take control of which questions to answer first.
* Try to appear genuinely interested in receiving questions – don’t look as if you can’t wait to run back to your seat.

You might need to repeat the question to make sure that everybody in the audience heard it and can be included in the discussion. (This is particularly important during video conferences). * Be aware of how much time is left. Indicate to the audience when you’ll finish (e.g. I’ll take one last question).
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| **Checking you’ve understood the question**  | * Make an educated guess about what somebody means
* Rephrase the question *E.g. As I understand it, you’re saying XXX. It seems that…, it looks as if…, it seems to me that you’re suggesting XXX.*
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| **Dealing with difficult questions**  | Don’t panic and don’t rush your answer. Some useful phrases are: * *You’re quite right. I hadn’t thought about that aspect.*
* *That’s a good question. I don’t know the answer. Would anybody else like to comment on this?*
* *That’s a very interesting question; however it’s not something I’ve looked into.*
* *While XXX is important, it’s too complex to deal with here.*
* *Would you mind if I dealt with that question later?*
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| **Dealing with ‘difficult’ people**  | * *Can we come back to that later? I’d like to talk about XXX now*
* *I think we should focus on X not Y.*
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**Effectiveness at Q&A**

Effectively fielding questions about your project can be important, so you should demonstrate your ability to field them, allowing time for judges and other audience members to ask questions. This criterion assesses your fluency with the material (the project content itself) and your performance (verbal and nonverbal communication, extemporaneous organization);thus, it incorporates both criteria above. Can you answer questions about your project? Can you do so in an effective manner?