

## THE THREE CHANNELS OF ORAL COMMUNICATIONS: LOOK, TONE AND WORDS

## FIRST YEAR SEMINAR

In his book, *Silent Messages*, Dr. Albert Mehrabian identified three channels of face-to-face communication:

**Look** is the visual channel. People will judge you and your message based on what they see: the color of your skin, your height (or lack thereof!), your weight, and many other attributes that frankly, you cannot control.

That's why it's important to focus on those things you can control in the channel of look: Good grooming, appropriate dress, a smile, sustained eye contact, and descriptive gestures...to name but a few.

**Tone** is the aural channel. It's how you sound. As with *Look*, there will be many things that you cannot control in your tone. Those include cultural accents, speech impediments, and in many cases, even volume.

What attributes in the channel of tone can you control? For starters, consider pauses, silence and punching key words for emphasis. It can be inflection, tone and breath support. Remember: The most important thing is to ensure your audience can *hear* you. If you have trouble projecting to the back corners of the room, then ask for electronic amplification. But once you confirm they can *hear* you, it's necessary to employ vocal variety so your audience will *listen*.

**Words** are the third and final channel identified by Dr. Mehrabian. It is not necessary to use big, polysyllabic words to impress your audience. Effective communicators speak at a level their audiences can understand.

Oral communications differ from written communications because even if there is a question and answer period following the presentation, audiences cannot go back and "reread" parts of your presentation. That's why it's critical for speakers to:

- *Limit and narrow their topic.* Don't attempt to cram too much information into the allotted time frame.
- *Have a central theme.* The most effective presentations are those that stick to one idea, one theme. Be careful not to mix multiple analogies into the same presentation. Keep it simple and easy for your audience to understand and remember.
- *Support your message with solid evidence.* At the end of an informative presentation, have you provided enough material so the audience understands your message? In the instance of persuasive presentations, have you provided enough facts, data, and stories to reinforce or change your audiences' beliefs and attitudes?

Effective presentations are those where the speaker capitalizes on all three channels of face-to-face communications.

**TIPS ON PROJECTING CONFIDENCE VISUALLY:  
THE CHANNEL OF LOOK**

**FIRST YEAR SEMINAR**

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For the purposes of oral presentations in the First Year Studies courses, you will be held accountable for using four of the most important behaviors associated with the *Look* channel:

1. *Maintain a confident stance.* This is often called your "anchor" position. Your feet should be about shoulder width apart, your knees slightly bent and your arms hanging freely to your sides. This allows your hands to be free to add descriptive gestures. You should maintain correct posture. Speaking without use of a podium is preferred. Walking during your presentation is perfectly acceptable so long as it is purposeful and you do not end up pacing. Step up and speak with confidence. First and last impressions are very important so always begin and end on a strong note.
2. *Employ sustained eye contact.* Nothing will build your credibility more than sustained eye contact. You must look your audience members in the eye and move slowly throughout the entire audience. Eye contact is especially important during the introduction and conclusion of your speech.
3. *Smile.* It makes you appear relaxed and confident even when you're not.
4. *Add descriptive gestures.* Remember: You are your best visual aid. Once you become comfortable in your anchor position, start incorporating big, broad descriptive gestures that help the audience "see" what you are describing. The key question to ask: Is this gesture descriptive? If not, stay in your anchor position.

**TIPS ON PROJECTING CONFIDENCE VOCALLY:  
THE CHANNEL OF TONE**

**FIRST YEAR SEMINAR**

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What attributes in the channel of tone can you control? For starters, consider pauses, silence and punching key words for emphasis. It can be inflection, tone and breath support. Remember: The most important thing is to ensure your audience can *hear* you. If you have trouble projecting to the back corners of the room, then ask for electronic amplification. But once you confirm they can *hear* you, it's necessary to employ vocal variety so your audience will *listen*.

For the purposes of oral presentations in the First Year Studies courses, you will be held accountable for using three behaviors associated with the *Tone* channel:

1. *Use appropriate inflection.* Inflection is altering the pitch of your voice. You know when someone "sounds" happy or sad. And how many times did a parent or teacher exclaim, "Don't you use that tone of voice with me!" They were addressing the issue of inflection. Strive for a conversational style of delivery. Talk *with*, not *at* your audience. Engage your audience with dynamic delivery.
2. *Add pauses and silence.* Well timed pauses can add great impact to your presentation. Your audience cannot simultaneously store away information you just gave them while receiving new information. Give your audience time to process your information. More importantly, give yourself time to think of your next point!
3. *Incorporate vocal variety.* A monotone speaker is one who uses "one" tone. We typically think of that speaker with low, slow and deliberate delivery. In fact, a person who speaks rapidly with a high pitch is also a monotone speaker. Learn to use vocal variety where sometimes you speak fast, and other times you slow down; where sometimes to project to the back of the room, and other times you bring it down to a whisper. Variety is not only the spice of life. It also holds your audiences' attention.

**TIPS ON PROJECTING CONFIDENCE THROUGH CONTENT:  
THE CHANNEL OF WORDS**

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**Words** are one of the three communication channels identified by Dr. Mehrabian. It is not necessary to use big, polysyllabic words to impress your audience. Effective communicators speak at a level their audiences can understand.

Oral communications differ from written communications because even if there is a question and answer period following the presentation, audiences cannot go back a “reread” parts of your presentation. That’s why it’s critical for speakers to:

- *Limit and narrow their topic.* Don’t attempt to cram too much information into the allotted time frame.
- *Have a central theme.* The most effective presentations are those that stick to one idea, one theme. Be careful not to mix multiple analogies into the same presentation. Keep it simple and easy for your audience to understand and remember.
- *Support your message with solid evidence.* At the end of an informative presentation, have you provided enough material so the audience understands your message? In the instance of persuasive presentations, have you provided enough facts, data, and stories to reinforce or change your audiences’ beliefs and attitudes?

For the purposes of oral presentations in the First Year Studies courses, you will be held accountable in four areas associated with the *Words* channel:

1. *Have a clear message.* Sometimes this is known as the theme or the objective of the presentation. The best messages are those that can be stated in twelve words or less. Think of your message as the headline on a newspaper. Is it compelling enough to make the audience want to listen or read in the article in the newspaper analogy?
2. *Use a logical organization format.* There are many ways that one can organize a presentation. Basic outlines are provided for an informative and a persuasive presentation. While you are welcome to use other organizational patterns, the bottom line is this: Was your presentation easy to understand?
3. *Support your message with concise points.* Your supporting information should be well-chosen. Each point should be stated as complete sentences or at least attention grabbing headlines. The best points are eight words or less.
4. *End strong.* Know what you want your audience to do as a result of your presentation. For most informative presentations, you’ll want to reinforce your key points and direct them to sources for more information. A specific call to action or a statement of your own intent is usually a strong way to end a persuasive presentation.

**BASIC OUTLINE**  
**INFORMATIVE /PERSUASIVE PRESENTATIONS**

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**Title:**

**Introduction:**

- I. Attention-Getter:
  - II. Clearly State Your Message:
  - III. Build Your Credibility as the Speaker/Identify the Sources of Your Evidence:
  - IV. Preview Your Main Points
- (transition)

**Body:**

- I. Concise Point #1 (stated as a complete sentence or attention grabbing headline)
  - A. Supporting Material/ Evidence (example, story, expert testimony, statistic etc.)
  - B. Supporting Material/Evidence

(transition)
- II. Concise Point #2 (stated as a complete sentence or attention grabbing headline)
  - A. Supporting Material/Evidence
  - B. Supporting Material/Evidence

(transition)
- III. Concise Point #3 (stated as a complete sentence or attention grabbing headline)
  - A. Supporting Material/Evidence
  - B. Supporting Material/Evidence

(transition)

**Conclusion:**

- I. Restate Main Points
- II. Offer Sources for Additional Information (informative presentations) or Issue a Call to Action (persuasive presentations)
- III. End with a Clear Sense of Finality by Stating your Own Intentions or Visualizing the Future Results

**Tips for the Body of the Speech**

1. Limit your concise points to three or fewer.
2. Use an organizational pattern (chronological, spatial, topical, cause/effect, problem/solution etc.)
3. Make your points clear and easy to remember.
4. Engage your audience by relating your material to them.
5. Incorporate strong supporting material/evidence to build your credibility.

**CHECKLIST FOR CREATING  
AND USING VISUAL AIDS**

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The goal of a visual aid is to provide quick comprehension of important data that enables timely decisions.

Presentation visuals are most effective when they quickly grab attention and are easily comprehended, like a billboard on a busy highway. Less is more. Use limited text and a simple graphic design that supports your message. Remember, *people buy from people*. Use the visuals only in the body, never in the opening or the close. *You* need to be front and center. Visuals are presented with an introduction, off to the side, the audience absorbs the information, then the focus returns to you!

In preparing for a communication, review your presentation visuals. How many checks (√) can you make next to the design elements of effective (+) visuals?

**Use a Horizontal Format**

(+) Format of slide is “landscape”

(-) Format of slide is “portrait”

**Label the Point, Not the Topic**

(+) Words used to explain or advance your case, not just label, e.g., “Sales Dive in 2003”

(-) Words only restate what is already displayed in graphic or data, e.g., “Sales for 2000”

**Use an Icon**

(+) A picture is used that enables quick recognition and improved retention

(-) No use of a picture

**Use Color Graphics**

(+) Color is used in visuals to add interest and grab attention

(-) Black and white only

**Document Your Source**

(+) Your source for data or quotes is cited to add credibility

(-) No source for data given