

## EFFECTIVE VOCAL DELIVERY

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### SEVEN FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE VOCAL DELIVERY

#### ***Pronunciation***

Pronunciation concerns how closely sounds conform to those assigned to words in a particular language variety. An audience-centered approach to speaking **compels the speaker to pronounce words in a way that the audience will understand**. A reciprocal approach **compels the audience to learn new ways of hearing words pronounced**. In any context, speakers and audiences can benefit from expanding their facility with language varieties different from their own.

#### ***Articulation***

Articulation is the clarity or distinction with which sounds are made. A speaker can articulate clearly while pronouncing poorly (or vice versa). A lack of articulation is often referred to as mumbling, which can be frustrating for listeners and cause them to underestimate a speaker's credibility. **Strong articulation can be achieved by giving sufficient support and space to consonants and vowels as you say them.**

#### ***Volume***

The volume of your speaking voice depends on the amount of air you project through your larynx (voice box). **Effective speakers speak loudly enough for everyone in the room to hear them.** Some contexts may compel a speaker to lower her volume (to create intrigue or mark a transition to a more serious topic). Effective speakers are attuned to their audiences: Are people leaning forward with one ear tilted toward you? Are they wincing?

#### ***Pitch***

The pitch of your voice is determined by how fast the folds in your vocal chords vibrate. You may tend to speak with high, medium, or low pitch, but each voice has a range. In some communities, a high-pitched voice may be interpreted as tentative or weak and a deep voice strong or authoritative. Although these correlations are mistaken, speakers should be aware of these assumptions. **Ask others how you sound and practice modifying your pitch.**

#### ***Rate***

Rate refers to how quickly or slowly you speak. There is no perfect speaking rate. If, however, you deliver your entire speech at a rate of fewer than 120 words per minute (too slow) or more than 180 wpm (too fast), your audience will usually lose interest. Nerves cause most people to talk too fast. Speakers who **aim to speak more slowly than feels natural** tend to settle into a pace that is actually ideal for the audience.

#### ***Pauses***

**Effective speakers use intentional pauses** to signal transitions and important ideas and to give the audience time to think. A planned pause is an excellent alternative to "um" or "you know." Many speakers write the reminder "PAUSE!" in their speaking outlines. A well-timed pause can be more effective than the choicest word.

#### ***Variation***

**By varying your volume, pitch, rate, and pauses during your speech, you can underscore the meaning of your words and maintain the interest of your audience.** Speakers who tend towards a

monotonous delivery style often benefit greatly by practicing the speech with exaggerated variation. When you are actually delivering it, your enthusiasm will remain while your variations settle into a more natural range.

### VOCAL DELIVERY EXERCISES

#### **Yawn Trick – for increasing volume and lowering pitch**

Stand and say “I believe I can be a powerful speaker.” Then yawn. (You don’t have to wait for this to spontaneously occur. Open wide and think about yawning and the yawns will come.) After yawning, repeat the sentence. Note how your throat opens up and your breath begins to come from a deeper place. Speak from this opened up space in your throat.

#### **Consonant Drill – for clearer articulation**

Repeat these sentences, sounding all the consonants in each word: “Badminton racquets are lighter than cricket bats.” / “Isn’t it time you tried the high jump?” / “Hitting tennis balls while sitting down is terribly difficult.”

#### **Vowel Work-out – for greater volume and articulation**

Repeat these sentences, opening your mouth as wide as possible for all of the vowel sounds: “My smile is wide as I cross the winning line.” / “Throw it slowly into the yellow box.” / “Stay there, Mae, and pick up the weight.” / “Stay calm, don’t argue, I’ll spar with you.”

#### **Diaphragm Breathing – for increasing volume**

Stand and put your hand on the hollow in the center of your rib cage. Say “ho-ho-ho.” Feel the muscles contracting and the air being forced out of your lungs. Now take a deep breath in while expanding your abdomen, and then speak a sentence on the exhale, while contracting your abdomen muscles. You are using your diaphragm to support and move your breath.

#### **Imitate your Idol – for practicing pauses, pitch, volume, and variation**

Write a sentence stating something you feel strongly about. Think of a speaker (professor, politician, journalist, television personality) whose style you admire. Listen in your mind (or to a film clip) of that speaker, noting how she pauses, projects, and varies her pitch. Imagine her saying your sentence. Stand up and say the sentence, imitating her style. Repeat until you feel that you have it down. Add a second sentence, and continue until your imitation flows. Allowing yourself to experiment with someone else’s style will free you up to develop your own.

#### **Pace Yourself – for achieving a comfortable speaking rate**

If you are a habitually fast talker, read a paragraph from a book or article (with feeling!) for 30 seconds. Use your cell phone to time yourself. Mark the point where you stopped. Now read the same text but try to make it last for 60 seconds. Allow yourself to work back to a rate that is comfortable for you and easy for a listener to understand. If you are a very slow talker, do the same exercise working from slow to fast.

#### **Perfect Pitch – for introducing intonation variety**

Stand prepared to read or recite a speech, poem, or any other familiar text. Have a friend or SAW peer mentor stand a few feet in front of you and raise and lower their hand as you are speaking. When your friend/mentor raises their hand, raise your pitch. Likewise, when the hand is lowered, lower your pitch. Do it again. Then say the same words and note the variation in your speaking voice.

Sources consulted: Beebe, Steven A. and Susan J. *Public Speaking: An Audience-Centered Approach*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2009 and O’Hair, Dan, Rob Stewart, and Hannah Rubenstein. *A Speaker’s Guidebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: Bedford/St Martin’s, 2004.