

# Communicative strategies for the production and expression of technical discourse

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## 1. Introduction

At this stage of the course, you need to get acquainted with the main techniques of *public speaking*. Before tackling your presentation proper, you must remember that *audiences determine speech subjects and purposes*. In this case, you will be talking in front of some teachers and your fellow students in order to present them the mechanism you have synthesized. Your speech purpose will be, therefore, to *inform* and to *persuade*. As regards the first one, your main goal will be to bring about understanding, for which you will have to be clear, concise, and orderly. This means you will have to get the attention of your listeners, introduce and limit the scope of your subject adapting it to the assigned time, state your aims, and organise the body of your talk with certain patterns of arrangement (chronological, spatial, contrastive, topical, inductive & deductive, etc.), as well as to provide supporting details and offer a conclusion.

As to the second, you will have to determine the best placement of your arguments according to the audience's shared knowledge and your intentions and preferences to build up to a climax and thus increase interest. At the same time, you will have to watch for transitions from one section of the talk to another, take care of your vocal and physical deliveries plus have your presentational aids (posters, computer images, slides, overhead transparencies, etc.) at command. Never forget that *how* you deliver the information is just as important as *what* you say. The delivery of any speech is effective when the speaker knows his / her material well, maintains eye contact with the audience, uses a variety of vocal changes and appears to move naturally.

## 2. Useful tips for presentations

### 2.1. Division of the presentation into parts

Every presentation consists of three main parts: *introduction*, *body*, and *conclusion*. The *introduction* gains the audience's attention, frames the topic, and orients the listeners to the contents of the talk. The *body* contains at least 75% of the information the speaker will talk about and is usually structured into three, four or five points (at the most): a good presenter / lecturer must avoid overloading his / her public with too much information. For that purpose, he / she will start with simple concepts and gradually bring up more complex ones, stagger examples and presentational aids (*i.e.* audiovisuals), and use repetition (in the form of occasional summaries and rephrasings). Each main point should be clearly stated and supported by subordinate points. The *conclusion* reviews

the major points mentioned throughout the speech and provides closure by ending with a strong final statement.

### 2.1.1. Introduction

As before mentioned, the goal of introductions is to prepare the audience for the coming speech. In our case it may consist of these elements: 1) *attention-getters*, 2) *statements of significance and credibility*, 3) *thesis sentence*, and 4) *preview*. It is strongly recommended to write out the introduction word for word and then memorise it: that way there is more chance of visual contact with the audience.

#### 1) Attention-getters

They are the first sentences uttered by the speaker. Their aim is to engage the audience and draw them into the speech. Common attention-getters are *rhetorical questions* and *startling statements* and *statistics*, these latter intended to surprise the listeners. *Rhetorical questions* are questions which expect no answer at all but that make the audience think about the topic.

*E.g. How can this mechanism improve efficiency? (Rhetorical question)*

*This is a revolutionary mechanism with which to improve efficiency considerably. (Startling statement)*

*85% of the companies asked have improved their efficiency considerably since using this mechanism. (Startling statistics)*

#### 2) Statements of significance and credibility

They motivate the audience by giving them reasons to listen to your speech (*i.e.* saying to them why the topic to be presented is relevant) and telling why you are qualified to speak about it (because you have conducted some research on it, taken classes, worked on a project, etc.).

*E.g. This analysis may provide a possible guide for understanding...*

#### 3) Thesis sentence

It is a single declarative statement summarising the central idea or specific purpose of the speech. Sometimes it is combined with the forecasting of the main points (= preview).

*E.g. In general terms the basic idea is that...*

#### 4) Preview

It is an anticipation of the main points, a list of the items to be covered during the talk. Here the markers of listing or enumeration see under 1.5.2.2.4 prove very useful.

*E.g. In this talk I will discuss the advantages of this mechanism. I shall do so by contrasting..., then stating..., and finally...,*

### 2.1.2. Body

We have already said that the body of the presentation has between three and five major points, each of them with one or more subpoints and supporting material. You should state each point orally before discussing it; it is crucial that the audience never lose the thread of your talk. Equally important is the type of supporting material to be used. You may resort to the following:

a) *Testimony* --> Cite the authorised opinion or work of some expert (books on the topic, etc.) to back up your points.

*E.g. These processes are essentially the same as those dealt with by Smith and Brown (1999)*

b) *Analogy* --> It is a comparison between two different items which reveals their likeness: the idea is to highlight common aspects that may help understand concepts and memorise them.

*E.g. Designing a mechanism is very much like doing...*

c) *Examples* --> Like analogy, they help to understand and retain ideas.

*E.g. A case in point is..., Let us consider, for example, the case of...*

d) *Statistics* --> With numerical evidence you can clarify as well as illustrate and give credibility to your point.

*E.g. Around 50% of the this mechanism failure is due to...*

Do not forget that transitions should be made. They are most often placed between the introduction and the first main point, then again between the other main points, and finally between the last main point and the conclusion. They may be of the *internal* or the *external* type. *Internal transitions* are used between words and / or sentences and tell the audience how two ideas may be related. *External transitions* indicate that one main idea is ending and another is beginning. Also, changes in discursive rhythm may contribute to maintaining the audience's interest. For example, we tend to speak more slowly when referring to vital points.

If the body of your talk is essentially persuasive or contains a persuasive part, there are three ways according to which your arguments may be distributed. The *proposition-to-proof pattern* is one that reveals the main idea from the very beginning and develops and heightens the proofs with supporting arguments in the body, by building up subpoints. The speech concludes with an appeal for acceptance of the proposition. A second way is the *problem-to-solution pattern*. It first draws the attention of the audience towards a problem that needs to be solved. Next it recommends a course of action and shows how it will solve the problem. The solution is not given at least until

the problem has been presented, and how long it is withheld depends on the situation and on the speaker's intention (build up suspense, etc.).

The third way, the *reflective pattern*, also withholds the presentation of the solution until later in the speech. Like the former way, it describes a problem situation, but suggests several possibilities for solution and evaluates each of them. Finally it proposes one as the best. The reflective pattern looks like a thoroughly objective approach to the subject. However, its purpose is more argumentative than analytical, since the speaker knows in advance the course of action he / she will advocate, and everything which is said is intended to move the audience towards accepting it. This pattern is especially useful in situations where the audience knows little of the subject.

### 2.1.3. Conclusion

When closing your speech, it is convenient to review and reinforce your main points and provide a final impact: your last statement should be powerful and direct. It is best to condense the talk in one or two brief sentences, emphasizing the key points, and highlighting words like "and" or "finally" before coming to the very end. The conclusion for persuasive speech acts also includes a call to action.

*E.g. let me conclude by saying..., In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate that..., Let me end by reminding you of / that...*

--> **TO BEAR IN MIND:** Good speakers always signal the structure of their presentation:

- \_Say what you are going to say (introduction)
- \_Say it (body)
- \_Say that you have said it (conclusion)

## 2.2. Modes of delivery

### 2.2.1. Delivery according to preparation

There are three main kinds of delivery modes according to preparation: a) *Memorised*, b) *Impromptu*, c) *Manuscript*, and d) *Extemporaneous*.

a) *Memorised* talks are not recommended for inexperienced speakers because it is very difficult to build audience dynamics while concentrating on the memorised words rather than on their meaning.

b) *Impromptu* talks are prepared in little time, usually less than five minutes (which will not be your case). It is a dynamic and spontaneous method, but its disadvantage is that it can contain a maximum of three quick points framed between a first and a last line.

c) *Manuscript* talks are read word for word. They are less dynamic and spontaneous than impromptu ones and run the risk of not focusing at all on the audience (the speaker's eyes are on the paper), but on the other hand they are more precise and accurate.

d) *Extemporaneous* talks require a brief outline and cards with key-terms and quotes. This is the ideal method in our case because it adapts to the audience and allows the speaker to maintain eye contact and use a conversational style.

### 2.2.2. *Vocal delivery skills*

A dynamic talk requires *variety in volume, speed, pitch and rhythm*. You can make important concepts stand out by means of *pauses* and *emphasis on key words*. Remember that pauses must vary in length and frequency and provide impact with their controlled placement, and that the optimal speed range in a talk is of 150 to 185 words per minute.

### 2.2.3. *Physical delivery*

Facial expressions and hand gestures happen naturally for most speakers. It is important to use hand movements similar to those we use in conversation, but they should coincide with the meaning of the verbal message. Remember that formal talks usually demand less movement and interaction with the audience than informal ones.

For informal speeches and classroom presentations it is helpful to use the *speaker's triangle* as a pattern for moving and maintaining eye contact during the speech. You should walk slowly and pause at each angle, always facing the audience and maintaining eye contact with them.

As regards *presentational aids* (charts, posters, blackboards, slides, overhead transparencies or computer generated images), they should be tested before the talk and covered or turned off when not being used during delivery. You must make sure you know how to turn all equipment on and off and to practice speaking aloud handling it before the presentation.