

# *Vassar and Associates: Delivery*

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When asked to name the three most important components of rhetoric, the great ancient Greek orator, Demosthenes, responded: “Delivery, delivery, delivery.” Even today, over two thousand years later, his words ring true. Too often, a speaker’s otherwise strong ideas are lost in ineffective presentational techniques that bore the audience and distract its attention from the content of the speech. A speaker’s nerves may be responsible for such delivery techniques, so it is important to examine how best to ***Manage Nervousness***, and channel nervous energy into positive non-vocal and vocal delivery, namely through your ***Stance, Gestures, Voice, and Eye Contact***.

### **Managing Nervousness:**

All speakers get nervous when giving speeches; some speakers get a little nervous, some get really nervous, but all of them get nervous. This is a perfectly natural reaction to a stressful situation, and, although it may not seem like it at times, it is actually good that you feel nervous.

Nervousness simply means that you care about doing well. Consider if you gave your speech in front of six pigs instead of an audience of six people. Would you feel nervous? You likely would not because it would not matter whether you were dynamic in your delivery or gave meaningful gestures. We only begin feeling nervous once we feel that something is at stake, once we care about success or failure. Of course, it is a good thing if you are concerned about doing well with your speech, and you should use that energy to make your content and your delivery more engaging to your audience.

Channeling nervousness into positive energy can be tremendously effective, but sometimes the anxiety gets so overwhelming that it becomes very difficult to channel all of it into positive energy. How, then, do we get rid of the excessive forms of energy? A few simple tips are to ***Familiarize, Find the Friendly Face, and Fake It***.

#### **Familiarize:**

We tend not to be afraid of things with which we are familiar; I am not afraid of walking down the street in the light of day, but, instead, am afraid of walking down a dark alley in the middle of night.

Making various components of your presentation more familiar to you can help to calm down nerves. Specifically, you should familiarize yourself with your *content*, your *audience*, and your *setting*.

*Content*

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Above all, the best defense to nervousness is careful, thorough preparation. You should practice your speech many times so that by the time you deliver it, you will be doing the same performance you practiced, and know your words and delivery techniques very well.

Furthermore, it may help before you deliver your speech to close your eyes and picture yourself performing in front of an audience; imagine your voice rising to make key points, your emphatic gestures as you speak, and picture the audience's positive reactions to each section of your speech. If you have done the speech once before (albeit in your mind), it makes it seem more familiar when you actually stand up and deliver before a "real" audience.

### *Audience*

In the context of your office, you are always in a safe space. Each week, you will be delivering your speech in front of several colleagues who are also presenting like you. You may know them quite well, and understand that they too are trying to improve their presentations and engage audience interest. Be assured, though, that no matter who your colleague is, they want you to succeed and they want your company to succeed.

Even outside of the office, though, it helps to familiarize yourself with the audience. Show up early for your speech, and begin talking to a few people in the audience. Make friends with them so that when it comes time to deliver your speech, you will have a friendly audience, one with which you are familiar.

### *Setting*

If possible, practice at least once in the room where you will be presenting your speech. If you are familiar with the nuances of the room, you will not be caught off-guard by the peculiarities of it. In making the room more familiar to you, it is less likely that something will go wrong, which makes it less likely that you will trigger your nerves.

### **Find the Friendly Face:**

Usually when you deliver a speech, there will be one or more people smiling and/or nodding along in agreement with your points. Find these friendly faces so that when you are feeling less confident, you can always turn to them and regain your confidence. Getting this positive feedback mid-speech will boost your morale and allow you to continue doing all the successful techniques that have worked so far in the speech.

Take this idea a step further, though, and recognize that everybody in the audience is a "friendly face" (symbolically, if not literally). In most cases, people are attending your speech because they are interested in being there! They want to hear your speech, and they want you to succeed because a successful speech on your part means a learning experience on their part. Recognize also that they are usually there because they are interested in learning about your subject matter, and are not interested in evaluating you personally; they are focused on your material, and you should be too (see above on how careful, thorough preparation is the best defense for nerves).

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### **Fake It**

Recognize that most signs of nervousness are not even visible to your audience; members of the audience can see neither the butterflies in your stomach nor your faster than average heart rate. The only thing they see is what you allow them to see; thus, if you are not feeling confident, simply fake it. Try not to fidget or tremble, but instead exhibit controlled and meaningful gestures. If you notice your voice quivering or creeping up to a higher octave, simply take a deep breath from your lower abdomen and lower your voice to its normal pitch. If you forget what to say next, do not panic; you actually have a longer amount of time than you think before the audience realizes that something went wrong. Just pause and stand confidently, as though your pause was deliberate and for dramatic effect, then continue with your speech.

Remember that your mood is both transparent and infectious. Even young children are adept at sensing how other humans feel because of nonverbal cues. If you indicate that you are nervous, people will pick up on that, and will also feel uneasy about the speech. Always project confidence, even if you do not feel confident.

Let us now examine how confidence can be projected through your *Stance, Gestures, Voice,* and *Eye contact*. You may have noticed that all of the above categories are non-verbal and that three of the four categories covered are non-vocal; this is not a coincidence as non-verbal cues tend to be more powerful than verbal cues when audience members determine the overall tone and mood of a message or a speaker (Argyle et. al., 1970; Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967; Mehrabian and Wiener, 1967).

### **Stance:**

Maintaining openness with your stance and body language indicates an openness and honesty of your character. Start with your feet shoulder-width apart, your knees slightly bent (in order to allow blood to flow through the body), and stand up straight. Place your hands either by your sides or folded near the midriff level and keep them in this resting position still unless you are gesturing.

Of course, a speaker would come off remarkably wooden and robotic if the speaker kept his or her hands still the whole speech, and thus comes the need for gestures.

### **Gestures:**

Gestures can be tremendously effective in bringing emphasis to certain words or phrases, underscoring your feelings or attitudes, and illustrating concepts or ideas. Through the simple movement of your hands, you also have another added benefit, though; you come across as more dynamic and animated.

Make sure that gestures are **big** and **meaningful**. That is, when you gesture, you should always gesture above the waist since small or low gestures run the risk of going unnoticed and, even if they are noticed, they are hardly effective since it does not appear that the speaker is using all the space afforded to him or her. Make sure your hands do only one of two things: if they are by

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your sides, they are still, and if they are above the waist, they are gesturing meaningfully. This means that gestures should be limited to when they are effective, and you should not project nervous energy (such as fidgeting or playing with change in your pocket). Be aware also that while you look more animated when you gesture, it is possible to be *too* animated and end up being distracting with far too many gestures.

The most commonly-used effective gestures in this course are the ***Descriptive***, ***Organizational***, and ***Emphatic Gestures***.

### **Descriptive Gestures:**

A descriptive gesture, quite simply, describes a certain concept in the speech. For example, I can simulate swinging a baseball bat by putting both my hands in fists, stacking them on top of each other, and then swinging them through the air. Another descriptive gesture would be when I describe how tall the fence was by holding my hand up to the appropriate height. Such gestures give the audience a visual picture of what it is that you are trying to describe, helping audience members to have a better understanding of the speech.

### **Organizational Gestures:**

Organizational gestures illustrate the underlying organization of the speech. For instance, if I moved my hands left to right in three distinct chopping motions while counting off the three main points of my speech, it helps the audience to see how the speech is about to unfold. This draws the audience's attention to the logical ordering of my speech, and helps people to organize my thoughts in their minds.

### **Emphatic Gestures:**

An emphatic gesture is used to stress certain words or ideas, punctuating the overall impact of a certain word or phrase. For instance, if I were frustrated by my neighbor's barking dog, I might clench my fists and tense up every time I said the word "dog" to indicate my frustration with the dog. Emphatic gestures not only bring power to certain words and phrases, but can also be used just to break up the monotony of standing with your hands stationary.

Gestures can be tremendously effective in punctuating the words we say, but it would not be public *speaking*, unless voice is used.

### **Voice:**

Making use of vocal variation can help to make your overall message more interesting and dynamic. While presenting, a speaker should be aware of his or her use of ***Power***, ***Pace***, ***Pitch***, and ***Pauses***.

### **Power (Volume):**

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The power or the volume of your voice should be adjusted to the size of the room, making sure that you are neither too loud nor too soft for the room size; larger rooms demand higher volumes so that the people in the back row can hear you, while smaller rooms require lower volumes. In both cases, it is important not to be so soft that nobody can hear you, nor should you be so loud that it hurts members of the audience's ears. If you are uncertain about the precise level of volume to use, err on the side of being slightly too loud since loudness projects confidence (while softness projects shyness or timidity).

While giving your speech, you should adjust your volume to the tone of your subject matter. When you want to convey excitement, for example, you may speak a bit louder; by contrast, when you want to convey somberness, you may speak a bit softer. Adjusting your volume makes it easier for the audience to perceive and feel the tone you are trying to convey, and there is power in making your volume louder or softer depending on what is called for by your current sentiment.

### **Pace:**

Similar to volume, you neither want to be too fast nor too slow. Speaking too quickly makes it difficult for the audience to keep up with you, while speaking too slowly makes it sound as though you are struggling to come up with the next word. Instead, strive to be somewhere in the middle, and have a good, methodical pacing throughout.

Also like volume, you should adjust your pace to the tone of your subject matter. Going faster can convey fast-paced action or excitement. Slowing down indicates that you want the audience to hear every...single...word. It is appropriate to speak slower when you want to indicate sadness or somberness.

### **Pitch:**

Again, you neither want your pitch to be too high, nor too low. A high-pitched voice is associated with nervousness or a lack of confidence (Apple et. al., 1979); if you have a naturally high-pitched voice or if you notice the pitch of your voice creeping upward due to nervousness, make a conscious effort to lower your voice before you begin speaking or once you notice the pitch of your voice going up. On the other hand, very low-pitched voices are difficult to understand because the human ear is only capable of easily hearing a limited range of pitches. If you are uncertain of the precise pitch to use, err on the side of being slightly too low-pitched since low-pitched voices in both males and females are associated with authority and confidence (Bolinger, 1974).

Most important with pitch, though, is to ensure that you are being dynamic; monotone speakers usually bore the audience, so make sure that the pitch of your voice varies as you speak. Also make sure that you do not speak every sentence with the exact same pitch patterns. One particularly problematic pattern comes from the person who starts all his or her sentences on a low pitch, and ends all of them on a high pitch; the problem is that this is precisely how we speak a question (our voices go up at the end of a sentence to indicate we are asking a question), and if there is a symbolic question mark after every sentence a speaker says, it ends up sapping his or her credibility.

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### **Pauses:**

Oftentimes what is not spoken is as effective as what is spoken. Making deliberate and dramatic use of pauses before or after major points can help the point sink in. Pauses can also be used to allow the audience to deliberate on certain thoughts or questions presented by the speaker. A pause need only last a second or two, but its effect can be profound.

Pauses should always be non-verbal, as opposed to verbal. Too many speakers insert verbal pauses such as “uh,” “um,” “like,” “I mean,” or “you know.” Very often when a speaker is asked why he or she uses verbal pauses, the speaker responds that a moment was needed to regain his or her thoughts. The problem is that using a filler word buys the speaker only about half a second, and everybody in the audience notices; by contrast, if the speaker replaced the verbal pause with a non-verbal one, he or she buys three or four seconds before the audience notices something has gone awry. Would you prefer to have a half-second where everybody notices your lost train of thought, or three or four seconds where nobody notices?

Having an effective voice makes a connection with the audience; making strong use of eye contact also helps in forming such a connection.

### **Eye Contact:**

Eye contact is one of the most important components of professional public speaking; speakers who make eye contact are better liked (Argyle, Lefebvre, and Cook, 1974; Exline, 1971), viewed as more competent (Sodikoff, Firestone, and Kaplan, 1974; LeCompte and Rosenfeld, 1971; Beebe, 1974), and are perceived as more credible (Hemsley and Doob, 1978). In the context of public speaking, all of those attributes can only help you, and you get them all just by making eye contact.

As a general rule, eye contact should always be with the audience (not on the floor, the ceiling, or your shoes), and eye contact should be made with each audience member for three to five seconds. This allows you to make a meaningful connection with an audience member without making the person feel like your eyes are lingering on him or her for too long.

Eye contact should be made with individual members of the audience in a random fashion; similar to how you are dynamic with your voice, you should also be dynamic with your eye contact. This means that you should not look at the exact same people in the exact same order every single time, as such a methodical form of eye contact seems robotic and unnatural. Instead, use your meaningful eye contact to form spontaneous connections with each member of the audience.

### **Conclusion:**

“Delivery, delivery, delivery.” It is as important now as it was over two thousand years ago, and with the techniques above, you should be able to channel your nervousness into positive energy,

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and utilize strong non-verbal elements of *Stance, Gestures, Voice, and Eye Contact*. In future sessions, we will cover verbal elements of speechmaking and how to bolster the content in your speeches, but for now, focus on making effective use of your delivery, which will ensure that you will keep the audience's interest with the content you develop later on.

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