Tip Sheet: Public Speaking in the Classroom

Here are a few ‘key principles’ to keep in mind when you are preparing to speak in front of others, whether it is in the classroom, at a conference, in an interview, or as part of a seminar. The principles are deliberately broad so that they can be applied to a range of disciplines and contexts.

Key Principles of Communication:

• **We are all always communicating.** There are three main registers of communication; to be as effective as possible, we must be actively aware of them all.
  - **Body language**: non-verbal communication
  - **Tone**: vocal communication
  - **Content**: the content or message

• **Goal and Audience:** What do you want your given audience to do/remember?
  - Be clear about your Goal.
  - Modify your Goal to appeal to your specific Audience. (Remember, you can change your goal, but not your audience!)

• **WIIFM: “What’s In It For Me?”**
  - This question (asked from the perspective of your audience) must be answered as directly and practically as possible at the beginning of any lecture, interview, conference paper, seminar discussion.
  - Tell your audience what they will gain from paying attention to and remembering the material you are presenting/discussing?

• **Credibility:** “Why should I listen to you?”,
  - Tell your audience how you know what you know. Have you done research/ taken a class/ received your degree/ done this before/ had personal experience in a given area?
  - Do you have common ground with your audience? This can also help establish credibility and WIIFM (“I am like you, I know that this information will help you as it has me…”).

Tips for Non-verbal and Vocal Communication:

• **Physical Communication**
  - **Take up space**
    - Stand with your feet hip distance apart, fully facing your audience.
    - Build in meaningful movement, commanding space between lectern, computer, chalkboard etc.
  - **Make eye contact**
    - Spend a few seconds with each person you look at.
    - For bigger lecture halls, use an M or a W pattern to spread eye contact throughout the room.
  - **Avoid defensive postures:**
    - Arms crossed, hands in pockets, hands clasped behind or in front of body.
    - These postures limit your gestural ability and will make your audience close off as well.
  - **Avoid fiddling with props**
    - Put down the pen/chalk/remote when you are not using them.
    - If you know you play with jewelry, don’t wear it; if you play with your hair, pull it back;
    - Empty your pockets of change and keys that make noise and tempt fiddling.
  - **Stand your ground**
• Avoid swaying, pacing
• Avoid the hip-cock
  ○ Fake it till you make it
    ▪ Smile!! Even if you don’t feel like it; this will put your audience at ease and soon you will feel better!

• Vocal Communication:
  o Be aware of your habits in the following areas:
    ▪ Volume – how loud you speak in relation to size of space and audience
    ▪ Pitch – where in your voice you speak (high/low/monotone)
    ▪ Rate – Speed, how slow or fast you speak
    ▪ Vocal Variety – how often you change your pitch, rate, and volume
  o Together, these aspects create Tone: the emotion, confidence, enthusiasm with which you speak.
  o Avoid filler words: um, uh, sort of, like, you know

  What to do?
    ▪ Enlist a monitor or tape yourself; you need to hear it to change it.
    ▪ Replace these with silence: Pauses are good for you (sound well considered) and your audience (time to process info)!
  o Avoid upspeak: when you turn statements into questions, upward inflection after all statements.

  What to do?
    ▪ Enlist a monitor or tape yourself; you need to hear it to change it.
    ▪ Picture exclamation points after your statements; vocally send your points in a parabola that lands with your audience; silently say “dammit” after a declaritive statement, such as your name.

Know Yourself to Help Yourself: How do your nerves manifest themselves?

• Note what happens when you get up to speak
  o Do you sweat/ shake/ mind goes blank/ pace/ talk too fast/ and so on?
  o Knowing what to expect will keep you from feeling thrown off in the moment.
  o Mind shift: this is normal and even necessary! It is your body’s way of getting ready to perform. Anxiety = Energy!

• Anticipate and prepare:
  o Wear dark colors if you know sweat; write yourself notes to SLOW DOWN in the margins of your notes; take a deep breath when your mind goes blank
  o Warm-up and get some exercise before hand to release nervous energy in your body
  o Do not drink too much caffeine before presenting
  o Build in some meaningful movement (not pacing!) to use some of that nervous energy
  o Bring water
  o Make sure your blood sugar is not too low (don’t forget to eat!)

• DO NOT tell your audience you are nervous. Things are never as apparent from the outside as the inside.
• Be other-centered: Remember that you are speaking in service of you audience. Everything you do is to help them learn/ remember/ take action. The less you focus on yourself, the less nervous you will be.

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