Effective Vocal Delivery

Brief: Vocal changes can help emphasize the parts of a speech that the speaker wants the audience to know are most important.

Learning Objective: Understand the importance of effective vocal delivery.

Key Terms:
- Monotony: Speaking with one pitch tone or little variety in pitch.
- Paralanguage: The nonverbal elements of speech—such as pitch, rate, and volume—used to modify meaning and convey emotion.
- Pitch: The auditory attribute of sound ordered on a scale from low to high.
- Rate: How fast or slow a person speaks.

Paralanguage

Paralanguage is the term used to describe the nonverbal elements of speech—such as pitch, rate, and volume—used to modify meaning and convey emotion.

Paralanguage is "how" you say it, rather than "what" you say. For example, a shift in your nonverbal delivery can allow you to compare and contrast. To achieve this, you might say one phrase at a faster rate, followed by another phrase at a slower rate. Alternatively, you might speak louder at the end of your speech that you did in the preceding part of your speech. These types of vocal changes can help you emphasize the parts of your speech that want your audience to know are most important.

Pitch

Pitch is the auditory attribute of sound ordered on a scale from low to high. You can think about the notes on a musical score with pitch getting higher as you move up the scale.

As a public speaker, you generally want to use a pitch that matches your natural conversational pitch.

In musical notation, the different vertical positions of notes indicate different pitches.

Using Pitch in Public Speaking

In public speaking you can apply changes in pitch to a single word, such as an exclamation, as well as to any group of syllables, words, and even sentences to convey different meanings.

Try to avoid monotony, speaking with one pitch tone or little variety in pitch. Much in the same way that natural conversation pitch changes make some words stand out more than others, you can use pitch changes during your speech for emphasis, drawing the audience's attention to words or phrases that are more important than others.

Practice saying sentences with different pitch patterns to change the meaning. For example, you can turn a statement into a question by raising the intonation at the end. Try for example, saying "See what I mean," versus "See what I mean?"

Rate

Rate is how fast or slow a person speaks. The average person speaks about 125 words per minute. But we all change our rate of speech depending on circumstance. For example, it's not uncommon for public speakers to talk much slower, at about 100 wpm, when delivering a slide presentation.

Using Rate in Public Speaking

When you're delivering a public speech, you can vary your rate of speech to emphasize emotions or the type of message you're communicating. For example, if you are experiencing joy or excitement, you will tend to speak at a faster than normal rate.

In general, a slower rate conveys thoughtfulness to the audience. If you want your audience to understand the significance of a certain point, you might choose to slow down as you share that point.

It's important to self-monitor your rate of speech during your delivery. Most of us increase our rate of speech when we're nervous. If you notice this happening to you, pause, take a deep breath, and slow down.

From Concept to Action

Are you aware of your everyday pitch and rate of speech? In stressful situations, does your pitch rise and rate of speech increase? Or, when you're nervous, does your vocal quality tend to become monotone and your rate of speech decrease? If you're not sure what your pitch and rate of speech habits are, ask friends for their observations. Or, better yet, ask a friend to make a video or audio recording of you practicing your speech. Once you're aware of your pitch and

rate habits, you'll be better able to consciously choose more effective paralanguage to complement your speech.

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