Chapter 9:
Public Speaking

The Art of Public Speaking

Ancient Greek educators and philosophers wrote the first public speaking texts about 2,400 years ago. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* covers many of the same topics addressed in this unit of the book, including speech organization, audience analysis, and persuasive appeals. Even though these principles have been around for thousands of years and have been taught to millions of students, getting students to see the value of public speaking is still a challenge. Some students think they already know everything they need to know about speaking in public. In response, I remind them that even the best speakers still don't know everything there is to know about public speaking. Other students don't think they'll engage in public speaking very often, if at all. To them, I mention that oral communication and presentation skills are integral to professional and personal success. Last, some students are anxious or even scared by the thought of speaking in front of an audience. To them, I explain that speaking anxiety is common and can be addressed. Learning about and practicing public speaking fosters transferable skills that help you organize your thoughts, outline information, research, adapt to various audiences, and utilize and understand persuasive techniques. These skills will be useful in other college classes, career, relationships, and civic life.

Types of Speeches

Because we live in a world where we are overwhelmed with content, communicating information in a way that is accessible to others is more important today than ever before. To help us further understand why public speaking is important, we will first examine two common types of public speeches. We will then discuss how public speaking can benefit you personally.

Informative Speaking

One of the most common types of public speaking is informative speaking. The primary purpose of informative presentations is to share one's knowledge of a subject with an audience. Reasons for making an informative speech vary widely. For example, you might be asked to instruct a group of coworkers on how to use new computer software or to report to a group of

managers how your latest project is coming along. A local community group might wish to hear about your volunteer activities in New Orleans during spring break, or your classmates may want you to share your expertise in Mediterranean cooking. All these examples have the common goal of imparting information to an audience.

Informative speaking is integrated into many different occupations. Physicians often lecture about their areas of expertise to medical students, other physicians, and patients. Teachers find themselves presenting to parents as well as to their students. Firefighters give demonstrations about how to control a fire in the house effectively. Informative speaking is a standard part of numerous jobs and other everyday activities. As a result, learning how to speak effectively has become an essential skill in today's world.

Persuasive Speaking

A second common reason for speaking to an audience is to persuade others. In our everyday lives, we are often called on to convince, motivate, or otherwise persuade others to change their beliefs, take an action, or reconsider a decision. Advocating for music education in your local school district, convincing clients to purchase your company's products, or inspiring high school students to attend college all involve influencing others through public speaking.

For some people, such as elected officials, giving persuasive speeches is crucial to attaining and continuing career success. Other people make careers out of speaking to groups of people who pay to listen to them. Motivational authors and speakers, such as Les Brown, make millions of dollars each year from people who want to be motivated to do better in their lives. Brian Tracy, another professional speaker, and author, specializes in helping business leaders become more productive and effective in the workplace.

Whether public speaking is something you do every day or just a few times a year, persuading others is a challenging task. If you develop the skill to persuade effectively, it can be personally and professionally rewarding.

Personal Benefits of Public Speaking

Oral communication skills were the number one skill that college graduates found helpful in the business world, according to a 2020 study by sociologist Andrew Zekeri. That fact alone makes learning about public speaking worthwhile. However, there are many other benefits of communicating effectively for the hundreds of thousands of college students every year who take public speaking courses. Let's take a look at some of the personal benefits you'll get both from a course in public speaking and from giving public speeches.

Critical Thinking Skills

One of the first benefits you will gain from learning about public speaking is an increased ability to think critically. Problem-solving is one of many critical thinking skills you will engage in during the formation of a presentation. For example, when preparing a persuasive speech, you'll have to think through real problems affecting your campus, community, or the world and provide possible solutions to those problems. You'll also have to think about your solutions' positive and negative consequences and then communicate your ideas to others. At first, it may seem easy to come up with solutions for a campus problem such as a shortage of parking spaces: just build more spaces. But after thinking and researching further, you may find that building costs, environmental impact from the loss of green space, maintenance needs, or limited locations for additional spaces make this solution impractical. Thinking through problems and analyzing the potential costs and benefits of solutions is an essential part of critical thinking and public speaking aimed at persuading others. These skills will help you not only in public speaking contexts but throughout your life as well. As we stated earlier, college graduates in Zekeri's study rated oral communication skills as the most useful for success in the business world. The second most valuable skill they reported was problem-solving ability, so your public speaking course is doubly valuable!

Another benefit to public speaking is that it will enhance your ability to conduct and analyze research. Public speakers must provide credible evidence within their speeches if they are going to persuade various

audiences. So your public speaking course will further refine your ability to find and utilize various sources.

Fine-Tune Verbal and Nonverbal Skills

A second benefit of learning about public speaking is that it will help you fine-tune your verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Whether you competed in public speaking in high school or this is your first time speaking in front of an audience, having the opportunity to actively practice communication skills and receive professional feedback will help you become a better overall communicator. Often, people don't even realize that they twirl their hair or repeatedly mispronounce words while speaking in public settings until they receive feedback from a teacher or classmates during a public speaking course.

Overcome Fear of Public Speaking

An additional benefit of taking a public speaking class is that it will help reduce your fear of public speaking. Whether they've spoken in public a lot or are just getting started, most people experience some anxiety when engaging in public speaking. Heidi Rose and Andrew Rancer evaluated students' public speaking anxiety levels during the first and last weeks of their public speaking class. They found that those levels decreased for the quarter. One explanation is that people often have little exposure to public speaking. By taking a course that includes an element of public speaking, students become better acquainted with the public speaking process, making them more confident and less apprehensive. In addition, you will learn specific strategies for overcoming the challenges of speech anxiety.

What is Audience Analysis?

One of the consequences of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which protects our right to speak freely, is that we focus so much on what we want to say that we often overlook the question of who our audience is. Does your audience care what you as a speaker think? Can they see how your speech applies to their lives and interests? The act of public speaking is a shared activity that involves interaction between the speaker and the audience. For

your speech to get a fair hearing, you must create a relationship with your listeners. Scholars Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary explain, “Speakers do not give speeches *to* audiences; they jointly create meaning *with* audiences." The success of your speech rests in large part on how your audience receives and understands it.

Think of a time when you heard a speech that sounded “canned” or fell flat because the audience didn’t “get it.” Chances are that this happened because the speaker neglected to consider public speaking an audience-centered activity. Worse, a lack of consideration for one’s audience can result in the embarrassment of alienating listeners by telling a joke they don’t appreciate or using language they find offensive. The best way to reduce the risk of such situations is to conduct an audience analysis as you prepare your speech.

Audience analysis is the process of gathering information about the people in your audience so that you can understand their needs, expectations, beliefs, values, attitudes, and likely opinions. In this section, we will examine why audience analysis is important and how you should use this information when selecting a speech topic.

Acknowledge the Audience

Picture yourself in front of the audience, about to deliver your speech. This is the moment when your relationship with your audience begins, and the quality of this relationship will influence how receptive they will be to your ideas, or at least how willing they’ll be to listen to what you have to say. One of the best ways to initiate this relationship is by finding a way to acknowledge your audience. This can be as simple as establishing eye contact and thanking them for coming to hear your presentation. If they’ve braved bad weather, are missing a world-class sports event, or are putting up with an inconvenience such as a stuffy conference room, tell them how much you appreciate their presence despite the circumstances. This can go a long way toward getting them “on board” with your message.

For a political candidate who is traveling from town to town giving what may be perceived as the same campaign speech time and time again, a statement like “It’s great to be here in Springfield, and I want to thank the West Valley League of Women Voters and our hosts, the Downtown Senior Center, for the

opportunity to be with you today" lets the audience know that the candidate has at least taken the trouble to tailor the speech to the present audience. Stephanie Coopman and James Lull tell us that Microsoft chairman Bill Gates often adapts to his audiences by thanking them for their participation in the computer industry or for their preparation to participate in an electronic world. The authors say, "Even those brief acknowledgments let audience members know that Gates had prepared his speech with them in mind."

Choose a Worthwhile Topic

Your selection of a topic should reflect your regard for the audience. There is no universal list of good or bad topics, but you have an ethical responsibility to select a topic that will be worth listening to. As a student, you are probably sensitive to how unpleasant it would be to listen to a speech on a highly complex or technical topic that you found impossible to understand. However, have you considered that audiences do not want to waste their time or attention listening to a speech that is too simple? Many students are tempted to choose an easy topic or a topic they already know a great deal about. This is an understandable temptation; if you are like most students, you have many commitments and considerable demands on your time. Many experts encourage students to begin with something they already know. However, our experience tells us that students often do this simply to reduce their workload. For example, if the purpose of your speech is to inform or persuade students in your public speaking class, a topic such as fitness, drunk driving, the Greek system (campus fraternities and sororities), or credit card responsibility may be easy for you to address. Still, it is unlikely to go very far toward informing your audience, and in all likelihood, it will not be persuading them either.

To avoid this trap, it behooves you to seek a topic that will be novel and interesting both for you and for your audience. It will also be important to do credible research to ensure that even the most informed audience members will learn something from you. Many topics could provide a refreshing departure from your usual academic studies. Topics such as the Bermuda Triangle, biopiracy, the environmental niche of sharks, the green lifestyle, and the historic Oneida Community all provide exciting views of human and natural phenomena not usually provided in public education. Such topics

might be more likely to hold the interest of your classroom audience than topics they've heard about repeatedly.

You should be aware that your audience will not have the same set of knowledge that you do. For instance, if you speak about biopiracy, you should define it and give a clear example. If your speech is on the green lifestyle, it would be important to frame it as a realistic choice, not a goal so remote as to be hopeless. In each case, you should use audience analysis to consider how your audience will respond to you, your topic, and your message.

Adapt Your Speech to Audience Needs

When preparing a speech for a classroom audience consisting of other students and your professor, you may feel that you know their interests and expectations reasonably well. However, we learn public speaking to be able to address other audiences where we can do some good. In some cases, your audience might consist of young children who are not ready to accept that a whale is not a fish or that the moon is always round even though it sometimes appears to be a crescent or a half circle. In other cases, your audience might include retirees living on fixed incomes who, therefore, might not agree that raising local taxes is a vital "investment in the future."

Even in an audience that appears to be *homogeneous*—composed of people who are very similar to one another—different listeners will understand the same ideas differently. Every member of every audience has his or her own frame of reference—the unique set of perspectives, experience, knowledge, and values belonging to every individual. An audience member who has been in a car accident caused by a drunk driver might not appreciate a lighthearted joke about barhopping. Similarly, stressing the importance of graduate school might discourage audience members who don't know whether they can afford to stay in college to complete an undergraduate degree.

These examples illustrate why audience analysis—the process of learning all you reasonably can about your audience—is so centrally important. Audience analysis includes consideration of demographic information such as the gender, age range, marital status, race, and ethnicity of the people in

your audience. Another, perhaps less obvious, demographic factor is socioeconomic status, which refers to a combination of characteristics including income, wealth, level of education, and occupational prestige. Each of these dimensions gives you some information about which kinds of topics, and which aspects of various topics, will be well received.

Suppose you are preparing to give an informative speech about early childhood health care. If your audience is a group of couples who have each recently had a new baby and who live in an affluent suburb, you can expect that they will be young adults with high socioeconomic status; they will likely be eager to know about the very best available health care for their children, whether they are healthy or have various medical problems. In contrast, if your audience is a group of nurses, they may differ in age but will be similar in education and occupational prestige. They will already know quite a lot about the topic, so you will want to find an aspect that may be new for them, such as community healthcare resources for families with limited financial resources or referring children with special needs. As another example, if you are addressing a city council committee considering whether to fund a children's health care initiative, your audience will likely have very mixed demographics.

Audience analysis also considers what market researchers call *psychographic information*, which is more personal and more difficult to predict than demographics. Psychographic information involves the beliefs, attitudes, and values that your audience members embrace. Respecting your audience means avoiding offending, excluding, or trivializing the beliefs and values they hold. Returning to early childhood health care, you can expect new parents to be passionate about wanting the best for their child. The psychographics of a group of nurses would revolve around their professional competence and the need to provide a "standard of care" for their patients. In a city council committee meeting, early childhood health care may be a highly personal and emotional issue for some of your listeners. In contrast, for others, it may be strictly a matter of dollars and cents.

Common Constraints of Public Speaking

When we use the word "constraint" regarding public speaking, we refer to any limitation or restriction you may have as a speaker. Whether in a

classroom situation or the boardroom, speakers are typically given specific instructions that they must follow. These instructions constrain the speaker and limit what the speaker can say. For example, in the professional world of public speaking, speakers are often hired to speak about a specific topic (e.g., time management, customer satisfaction, entrepreneurship). In the workplace, a supervisor may assign a subordinate to present specific information in a meeting. In these situations, when a speaker is hired or assigned to talk about a specific topic, he or she cannot decide to talk about something else.

Furthermore, the speaker may have been asked to speak for an hour, only to show up and find out that the event is running behind schedule, so the speech must now be made in only thirty minutes. Having prepared sixty minutes of material, the speaker now has to determine what stays in the speech and what must go. In both of these instances, the speaker is constrained as to what he or she can say during a speech. We refer to four primary constraints: purpose, audience, context, and time frame.

Audience

A major constraint that you need to consider as a speaker is the type of audience you will have. As discussed in the chapter on audience analysis, different audiences have different political, religious, and ideological leanings. As such, choosing a speech topic for an audience with a specific mindset can be very tricky. Unfortunately, choosing what topics may or may not be appropriate for a given audience is based on generalizations about specific audiences. For example, maybe you're going to give a speech at a local meeting of Democratic leaders. You may think that all Democrats are liberal or progressive, but there are many conservative Democrats as well. If you assume that all Democrats are liberal or progressive, you may offend your audience by making such a generalization without knowing better.

Context

Another major constraint relates to the context. For speaking purposes, the context of a speech is the set of circumstances surrounding a particular speech. There are countless contexts in which we can speak: a classroom in college, a religious congregation, a corporate boardroom, a retirement

village, or a political convention. In each of these different contexts, a speaker's expectations will be unique and different. The topics that may be appropriate in front of a religious group may not be appropriate in the corporate boardroom. Topics appropriate for the corporate boardroom may not be appropriate at a political convention.

Time Frame

The last—but by no means least important—major constraint you will face is the time frame of your speech. In speeches under ten minutes, you must narrowly focus a topic to one major idea. For example, in a ten-minute speech, you could not realistically hope to discuss the entire topic of the US Social Security program. There are countless books, research articles, websites, and other forms of media on the topic of Social Security, so trying to crystallize all that information into ten minutes is just not realistic.

Instead, narrow your topic to something more realistically manageable within your allotted time. You might choose to inform your audience about Social Security disability benefits, using one individual disabled person as an example. Or perhaps you could speak about the career of Robert J. Myers, one of the original architects of Social Security. By focusing on information that can be covered within your time frame, you are more likely to accomplish your goal at the end of the speech.

Delivering the Speech

The easiest approach to speech delivery is not always the best. Substantial work goes into the careful preparation of an interesting and ethical message, so, understandably, students may have the impulse to avoid “messing it up” by simply reading it word for word. But students who do this miss out on one of the major reasons for studying public speaking: to learn ways to “connect” with one’s audience and to increase one’s confidence in doing so. You already know how to read, and you already know how to talk. *But public speaking is neither reading nor talking*.

Speaking in public has more formality than talking. During a speech, you should present yourself professionally. This doesn’t mean you must wear a suit or “dress up," but it does mean making yourself presentable by being

well-groomed and wearing clean, appropriate clothes. It also means being prepared to use language correctly and appropriately for the audience and the topic, making eye contact with your audience, and looking like you know your topic very well.

While speaking has more formality than talking, it has less formality than reading. Speaking allows for meaningful pauses, eye contact, small changes in word order, and vocal emphasis. Reading is a more or less exact replication of words on paper without the use of any nonverbal interpretation. Speaking, as you will realize if you think about excellent speakers you have seen and heard, provides a more animated message.

Verbal Communication in Public Speaking

Use Appropriate Language

As with anything in life, there are positive and negative ways of using language. One of the first concepts a speaker needs to think about when looking at language use is appropriateness. By appropriate, we mean whether the language is suitable or fitting for ourselves, as the speaker; our audience; the speaking context; and the speech itself.

Appropriate for the Speaker

One of the first questions to ask yourself is whether the language you plan on using in a speech fits your own speaking pattern. Not all language choices are appropriate for all speakers. The language you select should be suitable for you, not someone else. If you're a first-year college student, there's no need to force yourself to sound like an astrophysicist even if you are giving a speech on new planets. One of the biggest mistakes novice speakers make is thinking that they have to use million-dollar words because it makes them sound smarter. Actually, million-dollar words don't tend to function well in oral communication to begin with, so using them will probably make you uncomfortable as a speaker. Also, it may be difficult for you or the audience to understand the nuances of meaning when you use such words, so using them can increase the risk of denotative or connotative misunderstandings.

Appropriate for the Audience

The second aspect of appropriateness asks whether your chosen language is appropriate for your specific audience. Let's say that you're an engineering student. If you're giving a presentation in an engineering class, you can use language other engineering students will know. On the other hand, if you use that engineering vocabulary in a general communication class, many audience members will not understand you. As another example, if you are speaking about the Great Depression to an audience of young adults, you can't assume they will know the meaning of terms like "New Deal" and "WPA," which would be familiar to an audience of senior citizens.

Appropriate for the Context

The next question about appropriateness is whether the language you will use is suitable or fitting for the context itself. The language you may employ when addressing a student assembly in a high school auditorium will differ from the language you would use at a business meeting in a hotel ballroom. If you're giving a speech at an outdoor rally, you cannot use the same language you would use in a classroom. Recall that the speaking context includes the occasion, the time of day, the mood of the audience, and other factors in addition to the physical location. Consider the entire speaking context when you make the language choices for your speech.

Nonverbal Communication in Public Speaking

The common saying, "It's not what you say, but how you say it," also applies to the public speaking realm. Since an audience doesn't usually read the text of a speech but listens to it, consideration of various nonverbal communication behaviors is essential. The following is a review of some of these behaviors.

Rate

Your rate of speaking refers to how fast or slow you speak. If you speak too fast, your audience will not be able to absorb the information you present. If you speak too slowly, the audience may lose interest. The key is to vary your

speaking rate in a middle range, staying away from either extreme, to keep your audience engaged. Generally, a higher rate of speaking signals that a speaker is enthusiastic about his or her topic. Speaking slowly may lead the audience to infer that the speaker is uninterested, uninformed, or unprepared to present their own topic. These negative assumptions, whether true or not, are likely to hurt the speaker's credibility. Having evaluated thousands of speeches, I can say that, in terms of rate, the issue speakers face is speaking too fast. The goal is to speak at a rate that will interest the audience and will effectively convey your information. Speaking at a slow rate throughout a speech would likely bore an audience, but that is not a common occurrence.

Some people naturally speak faster than others, which is fine, but we can all alter our speaking rate with practice. If you find that you are a naturally fast speaker, ensure you do not “speed talk” through your speech when practicing it. Even if you try to hold back when delivering your speech, you may fall back into your practice routine and speak too fast. You can also include reminders to “slow down” on your speaking outline.

Volume

Volume refers to how loud or soft your voice is. As with speaking rate, you want to avoid the extremes of being too loud or too soft, but still vary your volume within an acceptable middle range. When speaking in a typically sized classroom or office setting that seats about twenty-five people, using a volume a few steps above a typical conversational volume is usually sufficient. When speaking in larger rooms, you will need to project your voice. You may want to look for nonverbal cues from people in the back rows or corners, like leaning forward or straining to hear, to see if you need to adjust your volume more. Obviously, in some settings, a microphone will be necessary to be heard by the entire audience. Like rate, audiences use volume to make a variety of judgments about a speaker. Softer speakers are sometimes judged as meek, which may lead to lowered expectations for the speech or less perceived credibility. Loud speakers may be seen as overbearing or annoying, which can lead audience members to disengage from the speaker and message. Be aware of the volume of your voice and, when in doubt, increase your volume a notch, since beginning speakers are more likely to have an issue of speaking too softly rather than too loudly.

Pitch

Pitch refers to how high or low a speaker's voice is. As with other vocal qualities, there are natural variations among people's vocal pitch. Unlike rate and volume, there are more physiological limitations on the control we have over pitch. For example, males generally have lower-pitched voices than females. Despite these limitations, each person can still intentionally change their pitch across a range large enough to engage an audience. Changing pitch is a good way to communicate enthusiasm and indicate emphasis or closure. In general, our pitch goes up when we are discussing something exciting. Our pitch goes down slightly when we emphasize a serious or important point. Lowering pitch is also an effective way to signal transitions between sections of your speech or the end of your speech, which cues your audience to applaud and avoids an awkward ending.

Of the vocal components of delivery discussed so far, pitch seems to give beginning speakers the most difficulty. There is a stark difference between how I hear students speak before and after class and how they speak when they get in front of the class. It's like giving a speech temporarily numbs their ability to vary their pitch. Record yourself practicing your speech to help determine if the amount of pitch variety and enthusiasm you think you convey while speaking actually comes through. Speakers often assume that their pitch is more varied and their delivery more enthusiastic than the audience actually perceives it to be.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions can help bring a speech to life when used by a speaker to communicate emotions and demonstrate enthusiasm for the speech. As with vocal variety, we tend to use facial expressions naturally and without conscious effort when engaging in day-to-day conversations. Yet I see many speakers' expressive faces turn "deadpan" when they stand in front of an audience. Some people naturally have more expressive faces than others—consider the actor Jim Carey's ability to contort his face as an example. But we can also consciously control and improve our facial expressions to be more effective speakers. As with other components of speech delivery, becoming a higher self-monitor and increasing your awareness of your typical delivery habits can help you understand, control, and improve your

delivery. Although you shouldn't only practice your speech in front of a mirror, doing so can help you understand how expressive or unexpressive your face is while delivering your speech.

Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech, and it is important that your facial expressions stay consistent with your message. To set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile. A smile is a simple but powerful facial expression that can communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Facial expressions communicate a range of emotions and are also associated with various moods or personality traits. For example, combinations of facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored, among other things. Even if you aren't bored, for example, a slack face with little animation may lead an audience to think that you are bored with your own speech, which isn't likely to motivate them to be interested. So make sure your facial expressions are communicating an emotion, mood, or personality trait that you think your audience will view favorably. Also make sure your facial expressions match with the content of your speech. When delivering something lighthearted or humorous, a smile, bright eyes, and slightly raised eyebrows will nonverbally enhance your verbal message. When delivering something serious or somber, a furrowed brow, a tighter mouth, and even a slight head nod can enhance that message. If your facial expressions and speech content are not consistent, your audience could become confused by the conflicting messages, which could lead them to question your honesty and credibility.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is an important element of nonverbal communication in all communication settings. As a speaker, eye contact can establish credibility and hold your audience's attention. We often interpret a lack of eye contact to mean that someone is not credible or not competent, and as a public speaker, you don't want your audience thinking either of those things. Eye contact holds attention because an audience member who knows the speaker is making regular eye contact will want to reciprocate that eye contact to show that they are paying attention. This will also help your audience remember the content of your speech better because acting like we're paying attention leads us to pay attention and better retain information.

Eye contact is an aspect of delivery that beginning speakers can attend to and make noticeable progress on early in their speech training. By the final speech in my classes, I suggest that my students make eye contact with their audience for at least 75 percent of their speech. Most speakers cannot do this when they first begin practicing with extemporaneous delivery, but continued practice and effort make this an achievable goal for most.

Posture

Posture is the position we assume with our bodies, intentionally or out of habit. In a formal speaking situation, it's important to have an erect posture that communicates professionalism and credibility. However, a military posture of standing at attention may feel and look unnatural in a typical school or business speech. In informal settings, it may be appropriate to lean on a table or lectern, or even sit among your audience members. Head position is also part of posture. In most speaking situations, it is best to keep your head up, facing your audience. A droopy head doesn't communicate confidence. Consider the occasion important, as an inappropriate posture can hurt your credibility.

Gestures

Gestures include arm and hand movements. We all go through a process of internalizing our native culture from childhood. An obvious part of this process is becoming fluent in a language. Perhaps less obvious is the fact that we also become fluent in nonverbal communication, gestures in particular. We all use hand gestures while we speak, but we didn't ever take a class in matching verbal communication with the appropriate gestures; we just internalized these norms over time based on observation and put them into practice. By this point in your life, you have a whole vocabulary of hand movements and gestures that spontaneously come out while you're speaking. Some of these gestures are emphatic, and some are descriptive.

Emphatic gestures are the most common hand gestures we use, and they function to emphasize our verbal communication and often relate to the emotions we verbally communicate. Pointing with one finger or all the fingers straight out is an emphatic gesture. We can even bounce that gesture up and down to provide more emphasis. Moving the hand in a circular

motion in front of our chest with the fingers spread apart is a common emphatic gesture that shows excitement and often accompanies an increased rate of verbal speaking. We make this gesture more emphatic by using both hands. Descriptive gestures function to illustrate or refer to objects rather than emotions. We use descriptive gestures to indicate the number of something by counting with our fingers or the size, shape, or speed of something. Our hands and arms are often the most reliable and easy-to-use visual aids a speaker can have.

While it can be beneficial to plan a key gesture or two in advance, it is generally best to gesture spontaneously in a speech, just as you would during a regular conversation. Don't try to overdo your gestures though. You don't want to look like one of those crazy-arm inflatable dancing men that companies set up on the side of the road to attract customers. But more important, don't try to hold back. Even holding back a little usually ends up nearly eliminating gestures. While the best beginning strategy is to gesture naturally, you also want to remain a high self-monitor and take note of your typical patterns of gesturing. If you notice that you naturally gravitate toward one particular gesture, try to vary your gestures more. You also want your gestures to be purposeful, not limp or lifeless.