

Some facts on giving a talk



1 Attitude

Prepare yourself

Audiences may be made up of people with different interests, backgrounds, levels of knowledge and intelligence. Be ready to adapt your talk to your audience as you give it, according to the 'level' and 'atmosphere' of the group. Sustain the audience's interest by:

- a) Gaining their respect (be knowledgeable and enthusiastic).
- b) Making a conscious effort to lead them along the easy way to understanding. Don't drive them; suggest, don't browbeat.
- c) Introducing variety into your talk. Be courteous, thoughtful, patient and friendly.

Prepare the room

Get there early. If you are the organiser of the meeting, make sure the audience's needs are seen to as well as your own. Check on warmth, ventilation, chairs, lighting, no distracting pictures or lights etc. on the platform. See to your own equipment, table or lectern, positioning of visual aids, suitable lighting. Be punctual in starting and finishing. If there is no visible clock have a watch handy.

2 Delivery

Make a positive start. Begin with 'full bellows' and begin in a position of dignity.

Speech

Voice

Use your natural voice, forming your vowels within your normal accent. Be careful with consonants, articulate clearly. From your normal pitch vary upward and downward as far

as possible. Make full use of inflection and emphasis.

Pauses

Use frequently. These give your audience an opportunity to catch up.

Pace

Begin at an easy pace and vary faster and slower for effect; the larger the audience, the slower should be the pace.

Mannerisms

Beware of 'ers' and 'ums', 'sort of', 'you know', 'you see', 'and so on'.

Movements

Eyes

Look at your audience, maintain contact through the eyes. Give them all brief moments of personal attention. Leave your spectacles alone; put them on or leave them off.

Gestures

They should be fluid and purposeful, not tight, stiff or repetitive.

Stance

Stand in a natural, easy way, not too formal, not too casual. Don't lean on the table or the lectern. Don't move about without reason.

Notes

Have them but don't read from them, glance only when you have to. Use them unobtrusively. Hold them comfortably within range of easy reading or place them on the table or lectern. Don't wave your notes about or gesture with them.

Colour

Introduce variety and colour by the use of apt stories or a touch of humour, but be careful. Never use a humorous story without a peg to hang it on. Use it to illustrate a point, never for its own sake. If in doubt, leave it out.

Questions

With a small group, invite questions after each main section but with a large group, at the end only. Do not be in a hurry to answer. Ask yourself, 'Have I got the question clear?' 'Has the audience understood the question?' In case of doubt repeat the question before replying. Do this anyway with a barely audible or confusingly phrased question. Always be polite and painstaking with the difficult and persistent questioner.

If you do not know the answer, confess and promise to find out and reply later. You should try and anticipate the questions that may be asked and have material available with which to answer them.

Open air

Enlarge on your indoor style and delivery, i.e. more breath, larger gestures, slower speech, shorter sentences with no long statements or lists or figures. Stand high to windward of your audience and away from distractions.

Clothes

They should be quiet and restrained. Wear something suitable for the occasion which looks natural on you and in which you feel comfortable. Don't fiddle with buttons or pockets or earrings.

Actions

Move easily about your platform but not to a pattern. Don't prowl about, don't toss chalk, don't rattle the money in your pocket. Don't obviously watch the clock. Don't talk to the blackboard, or examine pins or other small objects. Don't look out of the window or off to the side of the platform.

Other points

Watch for latecomers. Don't embarrass them by drawing attention towards them. Draw them into the audience by briefly repeating what you have just said as soon as they are settled.

Always be ready to improve your own performance by an analysis and self-criticism of what you did the time before.