

Listening and Viewing: Effective Learning Tools

Whether you are planning to go on to college, a technical training school, or straight into the work force, listening may be your best tool for getting ahead.

In college and in other types of training, you will most likely listen to lectures and be involved in class discussions. If you are going into the work force, you will need to listen to your employer in order to know what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. If you are in sales or have your own business, you need to be able to listen to your customers to know exactly how you can be of service to them.

Many employers and companies require training and seminars for all their employees. If you listen and get the information right the first time, you will most likely be the employee whose name is on the top of the promotion list or the student who easily passes the test.








No matter what the learning situation entails, there are certain techniques for effective listening and clear understanding:

- Be quiet and attentive—this means looking at the speaker as he or she is speaking and not talking to others who are trying to listen.
- Take notes of important ideas, words, or phrases—you should not attempt to write the lecture or speech word for word, just those key words or phrases that will help you remember the concepts later.
- During the **oral presentation**, do not read material that is unrelated to the topic. In fact, material that is related to the topic should be quickly scanned and then saved for further review.
- Pay attention to the **body language** and facial expressions of the speaker. This can often clue you in to the speaker's feelings about the topic.
- Pay attention to any **visual aids** that the speaker uses. The visual aids may contain key words or phrases that you will want to jot down in your notebook.

- Wait until the speaker is done speaking before asking questions. (Unless you are specifically told otherwise.)
- Do not start packing up your briefcase or book bag before the presentation, lecture, or speech is finished. You may miss important information in those last few minutes and you will certainly annoy the speaker.

Techniques for Effective Listening and Clear Understanding



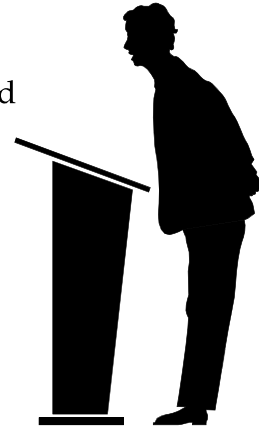
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After you have listened closely to the speech or lecture, take a few minutes to briefly review what you've heard. Read over any notes that you made, and answer the following questions:

1. What was the topic of the presentation?
2. What was the purpose of the presentation?
3. What was the speaker's attitude about the topic?
4. What sort of body language and facial expressions did the speaker use during the presentation?
5. What new information did you learn?
6. What questions do you now have about the topic?

Then, write a quick summary of the presentation in your own words. This will help to seal the information in your mind, and if you need to review the material for a test or for performance later on, you will have something to study.

Finally, if you enjoyed the presentation or if you learned something useful, it is almost always acceptable for you to express this to the speaker. You may also have one or two quick questions that could be answered personally, or the speaker may be able to direct you to finding more information on your own. If the speaker is unavailable to speak to you after the presentation, you may write him or her a note expressing your thanks and asking where you might find further information.



Discussions: Sharing Your Good Ideas with Others

Discussion involves both listening and speaking. Discussions are the basis of a Democratic society. The Town Hall meeting, talk radio, classroom discussions, church and synagogue discussion groups, team management meetings, civic discussion groups—all these activities point to the importance of discovering what people think and feel about certain topics. Discussions offer the opportunity to share ideas and debate points of concern. Discussions help a group of separate individuals come together as one to resolve problems or to develop ideas.

You've probably been involved in many discussions—both informal and formal. Informal discussions are those you have with your friends and family members. Perhaps you and your friends have discussed your plans for the weekend. As you know, everyone's input is important. If you don't speak up, you might be doing something you'd rather not do. Likewise, if your friends don't voice their opinions, then you'll never know if your plans are in agreement with theirs until it's too late.

Formal discussions are also more effective if everyone involved gets a chance to state his or her opinion or ask a question. Formal discussions are the kinds of discussions that you have had in school. In the future you will continue to be involved in formal discussions whether in college, in your work or in your role as a member of the community. In all of these situations, you will encounter lectures, speeches, or information reviews. After any type of presentation, there is often a period of time for discussion or questions.



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These guidelines will help you to be more effective in any discussion situation:

1. Be prepared. If reading material was given in advance of the discussion, be sure to read it carefully at least twice. Then summarize the reading material in your own words, and write down at least two comments or questions. If you are shy or uncomfortable in discussions, having your comments or questions already written will help you overcome this discomfort. Sometimes you can pass the written comments or questions directly to the

discussion leader. If you do not receive any reading material in advance of the discussion, be sure that you know the topic and seek out any information that you can prior to the discussion.

2. Be brief. Nothing spoils a good discussion quicker than someone who monopolizes or dominates the discussion. Say what you have to say and stay on the topic. You may have many funny or touching stories to tell, but a discussion is usually neither the time nor the place for them.
3. Listen to others carefully. Respond to others' comments or questions politely. Sometimes we get so caught up in our own thoughts and feelings about a topic that we don't listen to others. As a result, we often wind up asking questions that have already been answered or missing useful information.
4. Stay cool and calm. Sometimes discussions can get overheated. When people start shouting, then a discussion loses its constructive potential. It's a good idea to remind yourself that everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion. Make a point of allowing others to voice their opinions and acknowledge those parts of their opinion with which you are in agreement. Then calmly make your own points. If you find yourself getting emotional, try to channel that emotion into something constructive. Use it to support your own ideas rather than to tear down or attack the ideas of others.
5. Use appropriate body language. Body language is our way of communicating nonverbally. Gazing off in the distance shows others that you are not paying attention to the discussion. Arms crossed often indicates a closed attitude. However, looking attentively at other members of the discussion shows that you are involved in the discussion. Keeping your arms uncrossed indicates that you are willing to be open-minded.
6. When leading a discussion, be sure to keep the other participants on track. If the discussion begins to get sidetracked, gently bring the group back to the topic at hand as soon as you can. Try not to interrupt, but find a natural break in the flow of conversation.

Discussion Topics:

Discussion Topics

1. Should gender still play a role in employment choices?
2. Has school adequately prepared students for the work place? What are some changes that could be made?
3. What would be the ideal job?
4. Is it better to go to college or to start working immediately?
5. Should young people be required to spend one or two years in service after high school? What kinds of service would be most useful to the world and to the individuals who were engaged in that service?
6. Is it better to work for a large corporation or a small company?
7. Is it possible to still be an entrepreneur (someone who starts his or own business)?
8. What are the qualities necessary to succeed in the work place?
9. What are some rules or boundaries young people should set for themselves when they first leave home?

Speaking: A Method for Teaching and Learning

Every single person is unique, and every single person is interesting. You may not think you have enough life experience to have much information to offer, but you probably have much more than you realize. For one thing, you've spent most of your life absorbing all kinds of information in your classes. In addition, you have beliefs—religious, political, and social. You also have those things that you enjoy doing, whether playing sports, watching movies, cooking, or playing computer games. Because we all have our own interests, hobbies, opinions, and feelings, each one of us knows things that other people don't know.

One way to share knowledge is through speaking. You do this when you tell a friend about a great new band you've heard or a funny television show that you've watched. Your teachers share their knowledge with you when they lecture. Ministers, rabbis, and other religious leaders share their lessons weekly from pulpits and on television programs. Politicians also use many different forums for expressing their views.

Throughout your life, there will be times when you will need to share information. Sometimes you will need to share it with a large number of people and for that you will need to prepare an oral presentation.

Preparing a presentation or a speech is one of the most effective ways to learn about a topic. For one thing you need to formulate your ideas and opinions clearly for others to understand them. This helps you to understand your own thoughts as well. Making an outline of your speech

will help you discover those areas of your topic that may need more research. A speech is similar to an essay in that you should make your points and then provide examples, facts, and figures to back up those points.

Once you've written down your speech and figured out all the elements of your presentation, you should practice it several times. Try it out on one or two people first to see if they understand your ideas.

Try practicing your speech using only your outline. Your sentences will be a little different each time, and this will help you to be more

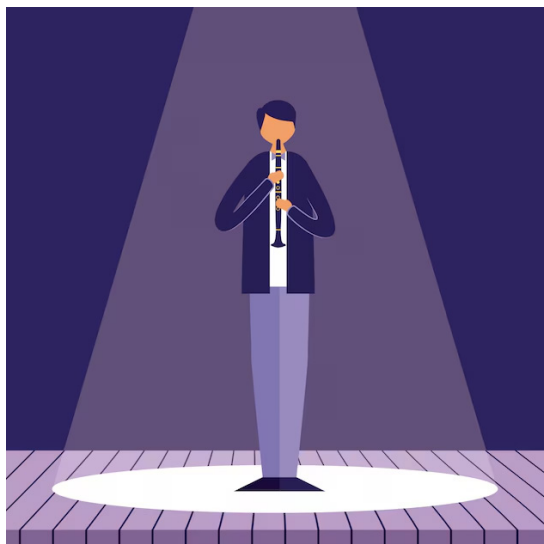


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spontaneous. You may want to put the main points of your outline on index cards and number the cards so that you only have to look down briefly to remember what it is that you want to say.

Being prepared is the first and probably the most important aspect in giving an oral presentation, but no matter how well prepared you are, you may still feel nervous (or even terrified) about getting up in front of a group of people to speak. Even the most seasoned public speakers experience butterflies before getting up in front of a group. However, there are ways to steady your nerves and make the process easier.

One of these techniques is to take a few quiet moments by yourself before your presentation. Close your eyes if that is possible. Take a deep breath, allow your mind to go blank and then exhale. Concentrate on your breathing and you will be able to forget for a moment how nervous you are feeling. In fact, you may soon find that you aren't nervous any longer.


Sometimes you may want to give yourself a little pep talk. Remind yourself that you are prepared and that you have something worth saying. Then smile and take another breath. Say to yourself, "I am ready."

Another technique is to acknowledge your audience. They are probably similar to you in many ways. Look at your audience. Even if you are reading from a paper or from index cards, be sure to look at your audience as often as possible. Some speakers find it is most comfortable to look just over the tops of their audience's heads. Others prefer to make direct eye contact. The trick is to vary the direction of your gaze. If you only look at one person, the others will think your presentation does not include them.

When reading before a group of people, use your finger or hand to keep your place so that you can comfortably look out at the audience and then find your place in the material again. Try looking down at your material, reading a sentence to yourself, and then looking up at your audience to say the sentence. You will not want to do this with every single sentence, but if you do it occasionally, it will help you maintain that all important eye contact. Audiences get restless if you don't make eye contact with them. They get bored and distracted. However, if they see you looking at them, they feel a connection to you and to what you are saying.

In addition to making eye contact, it's a good idea to smile whenever appropriate. It will help make your audience more receptive, and it will make you feel better, too.

Keep this chart handy as you prepare to do oral presentations for your class:



Prepare for Oral Presentations

Practice	Read your presentation aloud several times to yourself in the mirror and to one or two friends or family members.
Breathe	Take a deep breath before you begin your presentation. Remember to stop and breathe during your presentation, too.
Eye Contact	Look at your audience. Vary your gaze in different directions.
Smile	Smiling before your speech and after your speech will help the audience feel connected to you.

Using Your Voice: Developing the Five Elements

Good speakers use their voices to animate their presentations or bring them to life. It's not just what you say but *how* you say it. Voice has five elements: **pitch**, **volume**, **inflection**, **rate**, and **quality**.

Pitch is the highness or lowness of tone. Pitch can be used to suggest emotion. Use a low-pitched voice to express sorrow or grand ideas. Use the higher pitch for lightheartedness, fear, or anger. A well-modulated tone or pitch can be convincing without being intimidating.

Volume refers to the loudness of the voice. When performing on a stage, actors use a technique called **projection**. This technique enables audience members at the back of the auditorium to hear the words the actor is saying. Projection is not yelling, however. If you yell, the people in the front of the audience will be disturbed. Instead breathe deeply, breathing all the way down to the bottom of your lungs. Use this breath to project your voice to the back of the room.

While *volume* refers to the loudness of the voice, *inflection* is a change in pitch in individual words and has a lot to do with meaning. Inflection

means saying a word louder or softer than the rest of the sentence. Notice the difference in meanings caused by changing the inflection in the following sentences. Note that the underlined word is the one that is said louder or with more emphasis. Notice how inflection changes the meaning of a sentence.

Inflection	Meaning
1. <u>I</u> am a good worker.	Emphasis on who is a good worker. (I am.)
2. I am a <u>good</u> worker.	Emphasis on what kind of worker you are. (good)
3. I am a good <u>worker</u> .	Emphasis on what you do. (work)
4. I <u>am</u> a good worker.	This is an affirmation to yourself and others.

Rate or tempo is the speed at which words are spoken. Your rate of speech should be normal and moderate in most cases. The average rate is 160 words per minute. You can use rate to your advantage in a speech or when telling a story. One example is to speak faster to show excitement or fear. However, if you give your whole speech too quickly or too slowly, the listener may interpret this as anxiety or nervousness.

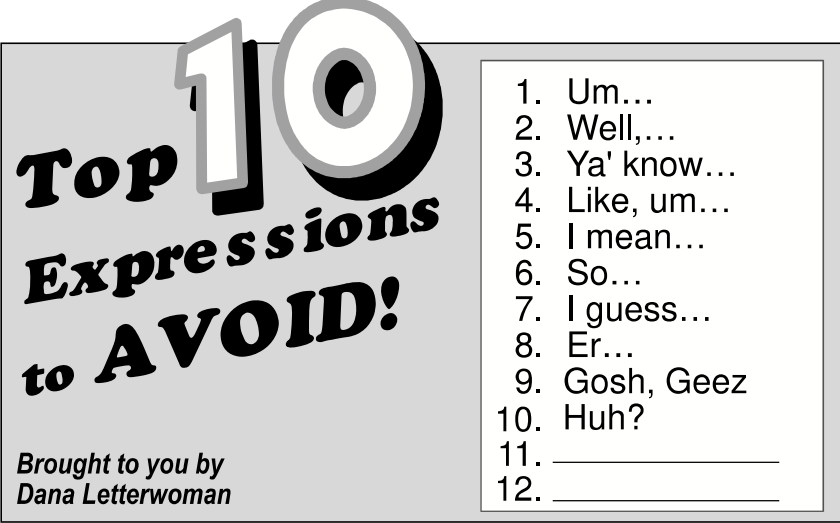
Quality is the characteristic of a voice that makes it different from another voice. A speaker often changes his voice quality to imitate the different characters in a story.

Enunciation, or speaking each word distinctly, is very important in being clearly understood by your audience. Remember to fully pronounce each word, especially the ends of words. Additionally, correct **pronunciation** of each word is essential. The best guide for pronunciation is the dictionary.

Use these guidelines to analyze your own voice production.

- **Enunciate and pronounce words clearly and distinctly.**
- **Speak at a suitable volume—neither too loudly nor too softly.**
- **Speak at a suitable tempo—neither too slowly nor too quickly.**
- **Make the pitch of your voice appropriate to what you are expressing—neither too high nor too low.**

Good speakers also make their speech flow evenly. In casual conversation people commonly say words and sounds that should be avoided in formal oral presentations. Study the following list and ask a friend to help you identify which expressions you use frequently. Add your own expressions to the list if it does not cover them.



Top 10 Expressions to AVOID!

*Brought to you by
Dana Letterwoman*

1. Um...
2. Well,...
3. Ya' know...
4. Like, um...
5. I mean...
6. So...
7. I guess...
8. Er...
9. Gosh, Geez
10. Huh?
11. _____
12. _____

Using Your Body: Communicating Nonverbally


Body language, or nonverbal communication, has a message all its own, and you need to learn to use it effectively when making a presentation. Nonverbal communication includes facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and gestures.

One well-known body language expert says that attributes such as full control of the space, relaxed body language, a posture that is open, and a strong, authentic presence are the keys to being a great speaker. A good technique is to imagine you are a lion in the jungle. This will help you to move with confidence and grace. Notice how far apart your feet are as you stand. Move your feet one inch further apart to create a lion-like stance and presence. Let your weight shift back so you are aware of your heels, and feel your feet connect to the floor.

Keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet. Take long purposeful strides and allow your arms to freely swing. If you can move around while giving a presentation, do so. Speak on your first point, and pause. Move, and then address your second point.

Good posture will have two beneficial effects. First, it will convey confidence to the audience. Secondly, it will help you feel more relaxed. When we are fearful, our shoulders tend to draw up towards our ears and our back arches slightly. Square your shoulders and let them relax. Squared shoulders communicate power and stability. Try standing with your head and shoulders against a wall to make sure your body is straight and tall. Carry that posture with you as you give your presentation.

The most difficult aspect of public speaking is often figuring out what to do with your hands. Here are some answers to that question:



What to Do with Your Hands

- Keep your hands in view, rather than behind your back or in your pockets.
- Let your gestures flow naturally. Use purposeful, smooth movements during your talk to help emphasize major points.
- Practice being more animated, more expansive, more powerful.
- When making points, use your fingers to count, hold your spread-out hand high so the audience will know that you are counting for them.
- Be aware of distracting hand motions—playing with jewelry or pens, twisting fingers, pushing back hair. These gestures will indicate nervousness and lack of confidence to your audience.
- Use your arms and hands. They express emotion more powerfully than any other part of the body.
- Use different gestures. Try not to use the same gesture over and over.
- Watch yourself on videotape. Notice what your hands are doing and what they are saying about you.

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By learning some body language guidelines, you can improve your nonverbal communication as well as your ability to make good oral presentations.

Understanding what is meant by a “good speech” and knowing the characteristics of a “good speech” are your best tools for delivering a speech that your particular audience will enjoy.

The characteristics listed on the following chart will help you to deliver a good speech. This, in turn, will help you to gain confidence when you speak to an audience. Use this checklist to practice presenting your speech.

Characteristics of Good Oral Presentations		
Elements	Characteristics	Definitions
Preparation	1. Subject Knowledge	- the presentation subject is thoroughly researched and the speaker is prepared for any questions that may be asked
	2. Organization	- the presentation material is arranged or put together in an orderly way—using index cards, outlines, or visual materials to keep presentation well paced and on track
	3. Audience Awareness	- the presentation is prepared for the type of audience receiving the information—speaking or writing is appropriate for and understood by the target audience
Speaking	4. Enunciation	- words are spoken clearly, without mumbling, making each sound distinct
	5. Pronunciation	- words are spoken according to a dictionary's pronunciation guide
	6. Volume	- the sound produced by the voice is not too loud or too soft; the sound changes during the presentation to match what is being described
	7. Tempo	- the speed at which words are spoken is not too fast or too slow; the speed may change to match what is being described
	8. Pitch	- the highness or lowness of the sound of the voice matches what is being described
	9. Expressiveness	- the presentation (or words) are communicated in a vivid and persuasive manner
	10. Complete Sentences	- the presentation uses a group or groups of words that present a complete thought
Body Language	11. Eye Contact	- the speaker looks directly into the eyes of one or more persons—communicates the speaker's confidence, alertness, and empathy with the audience
	12. Natural Gestures	- the speaker uses normal movement of the hands, head, or other body parts to express the speaker's thoughts or feelings—gestures should emphasize presentation points, not distract from them
	13. Good Posture	- the speaker carries or holds his body straight while sitting, standing, or walking—conveys confidence and readiness; slouching conveys the opposite—unreadiness, indifference

Practice

Use the following famous quotations to practice the **five elements of voice**.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them?

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness;
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

As for me, I see no such great cause why I should either be fond
to live or fear to die. I have had good experience of this world,
and I know what it is to be a subject and what to be a
sovereign. Good neighbours I have had, and I have met with
bad; and in trust I have found treason.

Queen Elizabeth, "Speech to Parliament," 1586

The Interview: One-on-One Oral Presentations

When you are being interviewed for a job or for admittance into a college or training program, your interviewer will want to get to know you better. A common occurrence is that the interviewer will ask the applicant to speak about himself or herself. Sometimes you will be asked to make a personal presentation for several people who are in charge of hiring or admittance.

This is a moment for which you should be prepared. Think of it as an opportunity to tell your story. But don't be fooled into thinking that the interviewer wants to know everything that has happened to you since birth. Your listener will want you to focus on those aspects of yourself that apply to the given situation.

Think of this personal presentation the same way that you would think of a written essay. You will need a thesis, or a statement that focuses the rest of the speech, and you will need examples, facts and details that support your thesis. At the end, you will also want some way to sum up your personal presentation so that you don't ramble on without a clear ending.



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Here are some techniques for developing your personal presentation:

1. Decide what you want to tell about yourself. This should be something that shows the qualities that will make you best suited for the particular job, college, or training program. Are you good at making decisions? Then pick a time when you made an important decision. Are you curious and studious by nature? Then pick a time when you learned something interesting all on your own.
2. Use story-telling techniques to make your personal presentation more vivid and interesting. The more you can tell about what happened and how you reacted to it, the more involved your listeners will become.
3. Capture the attention of your listener. You might start off with an anecdote, a statement, or an insight that will make your listener eager to hear more.

4. Keep your personal presentation to a reasonable length. If you need to speak to a group of people, 20 to 30 minutes should be more than enough time. If you will only be speaking to one or two people, then keep your presentation down to five or 10 minutes unless told otherwise.

Example:

When I was 10 years old, I cut off all my sister's hair and tried to color it with purple marker. My mother had a fit and took her straight down to the hair stylist to try to fix the damage. My first experience with hair design was obviously a disaster, but I learned a few valuable lessons.

The first lesson I learned was not to experiment on my sister. And the second lesson I learned was that good hairstyling requires training. The third lesson was that no matter how much trouble I had caused, I had found something that I loved to do. Finally, I learned that a good hair stylist can solve most problems.

Since that time I have been much more careful, and I have spent many hours reading magazines about hairstyling and coloring. I have seen how styles have changed over the years from perms to long shags. With my own hair, I have even created some of my own styles.

Many things have changed since I was 10 years old. I am much more mature, and I know that purple markers are not the proper tools for hair coloring. But the one thing that hasn't changed is my desire to be a cosmetologist. I'm looking forward to joining your cosmetology school and learning everything I can about this exciting career.