

Public Speaking Lecture Notes

Week 3

Using Language to Style the Speech

CHAPTER 17

Words are the public speaker's tools of the trade, and **style** is both the specific word choices and the **rhetorical devices** (techniques of language) that speakers use to express their ideas and achieve their speech purpose.

Prepare Your Speeches for the Ear

- Whereas readers who fail to understand something can reread a passage until they are satisfied that they understand what the writer means, listeners have only once chance to get the message.
 - More so than written texts, effective speeches use familiar words, easy-to-follow sentences, and straightforward syntax (subject-verb-object agreement).
 - Speeches make much more frequent use of repetition and transitions than do most forms of written communication.
 - Because you cannot "rewind" a speaker's words, speeches must be more clearly organized than written language. A clear organization pattern provides listeners with the necessary framework to follow spoken messages (see Chapter 13).
 - Spoken communication is more interactive than written language. When you deliver a speech, you can adjust the content based on audience feedback. If listeners appear not to understand you, for example, you can supply additional examples or otherwise attempt to increase shared meaning.

❖ **Strive for Simplicity**

- To make certain that your audience understand you, strive for simplicity of expression in your speeches.
- Avoid pretentious and / or empty terms such as "*extrapolate*" for "guess" and "*utilize*" for "use".

❖ **Be Concise**

- Concise wording is another feature of effective oral style. As a rule, use fewer rather than more words to express your thoughts.
- Edit and unnecessary words or phrases
 - As a rule, easy-to-pronounce words and shorter sentences are more readily understood
- Use contractions in conjunction with pronouns.
 - "I am so happy to be here today. I will first turn . . ." vs. "I'm so happy to be here today. I'll first turn to . . ."

❖ **Experiment With Phrases and Sentence Fragments**

- At times phrases and sentence fragments can be used in place of full sentences to help communicate an oral message
 - "I'm just a simple bone-and-joint guy. I can set your bones. Take away your bunions. Even give you a new hip. But I don't mess around with the stuff between the ears . . . That's another specialty."

❖ **Make Frequent Use of Repetition**

- Good speeches often repeat key words and phrases.
- Repetition can help a speech in several ways:
 - Add emphasis to important ideas
 - Helps listeners follow your logic
 - Imbues language with rhythm and drama

❖ **Use Personal Pronouns**

- Using the personal pronouns we, us, I, and you, can help you better connect with your audience.
- Audience members want to know what the speaker thinks and feels
- Audience members want to be assured the speaker recognizes them and relates them to the message.
- **CAUTION:** Using the personal pronouns he, she, him, her etc. is not wise when telling a story. It caused the audience to have to work harder to

follow the narrative, and often the point of the story is lost on them because of the confusion these pronouns can cause.

Use Concrete Language and Vivid Imagery

- Concrete language is specific, tangible, and definite. Words: mountain, spoon, dark, and heavy describe things we can physically sense.
- Abstract language is general or nonspecific. Words: peach, freedom, love are purely conceptual.
- Imagery is concrete language that brings into play the senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing, and touch to paint mental pictures.
- Among the most overused abstract words in student speeches are the following vague and imprecise adjectives:
 - Old, bad, a lot, short, good, thing, big, long, new, and late
- Note below how concrete words add precision and color:
 - ABSTRACT – The old road was bad
 - CONCRETE – The road was pitted with muddy craters and nearly swallowed up by huge outcropping of dark gray granite.

❖ Use Descriptive Adjective and Strong Verbs

- One easy but powerful means of creating imagery is to modify nouns with descriptive adjectives.
 - Describing the blue of a sky as “faint blue” or “sea blue”.
- Another means of producing imagery is to trade weak and mundane verbs with those that are strong and colorful.
 - Rather than “walk,” you can say “saunter”, in place of “look”, use “gaze.”

❖ Use Figures of Speech

- Figures of speech make striking comparisons that help listeners visualize, identify with and understand the speaker’s ideas.
 - A Simile compares one thing to another using like or as:
 - “He works like a dog”.
 - “The old woman’s hands were as soft as a baby’s.”
 - A Metaphor describes one thing as actually being the other. They do NOT use like or as:
 - “Time is a thief”
 - “All the world’s a stage.”

- **CAUTION** in using similes and metaphors
 - When using a simile, avoid clichés or predictable and stale comparison (see examples above).
 - Beware of mixed metaphors, or those that mix unlike images or expressions
 - ◆ “Burning the midnight oil at both ends”
 - An improper joining of the expressions “burning the midnight oil” and “burning the candle at both ends”.
- An Analogy is an extended simile or metaphor that compares an unfamiliar concept or process to a more familiar one to help listeners understand the unfamiliar one.
 - “The structure of an atom is like a solar system. Nucleus is the sun and electrons are the planets revolving around their sun.”
 - ◆ The atomic structure is compared to a solar system by using “like”, and therefore, it is a simile
 - ◆ Relating the nucleus to the sun and the electrons to the planets without using words “like” or “as’ is use of metaphor
- An example taken from Amy Lowell’s poem “Night Clouds”
 - “The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens.”
 - ◆ Lowell constructs the analogy between clouds and mares. She compares the movement of the white clouds in the sky at night with that of the white mares on the ground.
- Faulty Analogy is an inaccurate or misleading comparison suggesting that because two things are similar in some way, they are necessarily similar in others.
 - EXAMPLE:
 - ◆ Medical Student: “No one objects to a physician looking up a difficult case in medical books. Why, then, shouldn’t students taking a difficult examination be permitted to use their textbooks?”

Other forms of figures of speech:

| FIGURES OF SPEECH | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Personification | Endowing abstract ideas or inanimate objects with human qualities. | "Computers have become important members of our family." |
| Understatement | Drawing attention to an idea by minimizing, or lowering, its importance | "Flunking out of college might be a problem" |
| Irony | Using humor, satire, or sarcasm to suggest a meaning other than the one that is actually being expressed. | "Our football players are great. They may not be big, but they sure are slow." |
| Allusion | Making vague or indirect reference to people, historical events, or concepts to give deeper meaning to the message. | "His meteoric rise to the top is an example for all of us" |
| Hyperbole | Using obvious exaggeration to drive home a point. | "Have you seen those students carrying backpacks the size of minivans filled with five-course dinners, cell phones, and an occasional textbook or two?" |
| Onomatopoeia | The imitation of natural sounds in word form; it adds vividness to the speech. | "The rain dripped a steady <i>plop plop plop</i> on the metal roof; the bees <i>buzzed</i> through the wood." |

Choose Language That Build Credibility

The way you handle language in your speech will have an immediate effect on how audience members perceive you. Therefore, use language that is appropriate, accurate, assertive and respectful.

❖ Use Words Appropriately

- As a rule, strive to uphold the conventional rules of grammar and usage associated with General American English.

- The more formal the occasion, the closer you will want to remain within these conventional bounds.
- There are times, however, when it may be appropriate to mix casual language, dialects, or even slang in your speech.
 - The selective use of dialect, sometimes called code-switching, can provide your speech with friendliness, humor, earthiness, honesty and nostalgia.
 - Ensure however, that your meaning is clear and your use appropriate for your audience
- Suggestive language, obscene references, or bathroom humor are never appropriate in a public speech event.

❖ Use Language Accurately

- Malapropism – the inadvertent use of a word or phrase in place of one that sounds like it:
 - “It’s a strange receptacle” vs. “It’s a strange spectacle”
- Denotative meaning – literal or dictionary, definition.
- Connotative meaning – special association that different people or context bring to bear on it.
 - The denotative or literal meaning of “home” is “a place where one lives; a residence.” The connotative meaning of “home” is a place of security, comfort, and family.
 - “There’s no place like home!”
 - “That’s sick!” or, “That excuse is pretty thin!” or “He’s a snake!”
 - Symbols are often defined connotatively.

❖ Use the Active Voice

- Voice is the feature of verbs that indicates the subject’s relationship to the action.
- *Active Voice* is when the subject performs the action
- *Passive Voice* is when the subject is acted upon or is the receiver of the action.
 - “Beth mailed the letter” vs. “The letter was mailed by Beth”
- Speaking in the active rather than the passive voice will make your statements clear and assertive instead of indirect and weak.

❖ Use "I" Language

- "I" language such as I, me, my, foster a sense of inclusion and creates an impression of conviction.
- If audience members are expected to accept your ideas and arguments, then you must demonstrate in the most uncertain terms you accept them as well.
- Unless you are an unquestionable expert you will need to support your assertions with credible sources in order to substantiate your support for the idea, argument etc.

❖ Avoid Powerless Speech

- Used by both men and women, however, tends to be more prevalent with women
- Hedges are unnecessary words and phrases that qualify or introduce doubt into statements that should be straightforward.
 - "I guess my question is" or "I may be mistaken, but . . ."
- Tag questions are unnecessary questions that are appended to statements or commands.
 - "This costs too much, don't you think?"
 - "They'll be arriving soon, won't they?"
 - "They've been to Japan, haven't they?"

❖ Use Culturally Sensitive and Gender-Neutral Language

- Language defines and creates culture, since it is through language that we share meaning
- Use language that reflects respect for your listeners' cultural beliefs, norms and traditions.
- Review and eliminate from your speech any statement that reflects:
 - Unfounded assumptions
 - Negative descriptions
 - Stereotypes etc.
- Colloquial expressions can add color and richness to your speech, but only if your listeners understand them.
 - "Back the wrong horse" or "ballpark figure"
- Gender-neutral language should be used when appropriate
 - Avoid using third-person generic masculine pronouns (he, his) in favor of inclusive pronouns (his or her, he or she, we, ours, you, yours)

Choose Language that Creates a Lasting Impression

❖ Use Repetition or Rhythm and Reinforcement

- One of the most effective strategies for creating a lasting impression in a speech is repetition.
- Repeating key words, phrases, or event sentences at various intervals throughout a speech creates a distinctive rhythm and thereby implants important ideas in listeners' minds.
 - Anaphora the speaker repeats a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences.
 - *I have a dream* that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."
I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.
I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.
I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.
I have a dream today!
 - Epiphora repeat a word or phrase at the end of successive statements.
 - "I'm a Pepper, he's a Pepper, she's a Pepper, we're a Pepper. Wouldn't you like to be a Pepper, too? Dr. Pepper."
 - When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child (1 Corth. 3:11)

❖ Use Alliteration for a Poetic Quality

- Alliteration is the repetition of the same sounds, usually initial consonants, in two or more neighboring words or syllables.
 - Down with dope, up with hope
 - If it does not fit you must acquit
 - But a better butter makes a batter better

- Alliteration lends speech a poetic, musical rhythm. When used well, it drives home themes and leaves listeners with a lasting impression.

❖ Experiment with Parallelism

- Parallelism the arrangement of words, phrases, or sentences in a similar form.
- Helps the speaker emphasize important ideas in the speech
 - Can be as simple as numbering your points
- Often makes use of antithesis – setting off two ideas in balanced (parallel) opposition to each other.
 - “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”
 - “To err is human, to forgive divine”
- Triads – Grouping concepts or ideas into threes
 - “. . . of the people, by the people, for the people”

CHAPTER 3

Managing Speech Anxiety

It turns out that feeling nervous is not only normal but desirable. Channeled properly, nervousness can boost performance. The difference between seasoned public speakers and the rest of us is not that seasoned speakers don't feel nervous or anxious. It's just that they're more practiced at making nervousness work *for* rather than *against* them. They use specific techniques, to help them cope with and minimize their tension.

What Makes Us Anxious About Public Speaking?

Anxiety is simply a state of increased fear or arousal. Some of us tend to be more anxious than others.

Researchers have identified several factors that underlie the fear of public speaking:

❖ Lack of Positive Experience

- Gaining more experience is a key to overcoming speech anxiety.
 - Each time we give a speech, we learn more about meeting the various challenges speakers face.
 - Keeping track of our thoughts
 - Feeling confident
 - Facing different types of audiences & occasions

❖ **Feeling Different**

- Novice speakers often feel alone.
 - Getting up on front of an audience makes them extra-sensitive to their personal idiosyncrasies, such as less-than-perfect haircut, a slight lisp, or accent.
- We assume that being different somehow means being inferior.
 - Everyone is different from everyone else in many ways.

❖ **Being the Center of Attention**

- Audience behaviors such as lack of eye contact with the speaker, talking amongst one another, pointing, etc., can be disconcerting.
- With all our attention now focused on ourselves we become all the more sensitive to things that might be wrong with what we're doing.
 - That, in turn, makes us feel even more conspicuous, which in turn increases our anxiety!
- An audience generally notices very little about us that we don't want to reveal, especially if the speech is well developed and effectively delivered.
 - You see yourself more critically than the audience does, relax and focus on delivering your message.

Pinpoint the onset of Public Speaking Anxiety

❖ **Preparation Anxiety**

- Feeling overwhelmed at the amount of time and planning required.
 - You may hit a roadblock, putting you behind schedule, or causing you to be unable to locate adequate support.
 - These kinds of pressures produce a cycle of stress, procrastination, and outright avoidance.

- For the great majority of people, anxiety is lowest during the preparation phase.
 - If you find yourself feeling anxious during this point, take short, relaxing breaks to regain your confidence and focus.

❖ **Pre-Performance Anxiety**

- While rehearsing your speech, the reality of the situation sets in
- You may feel that your ideas don't sound as focused or as interesting as they should be.
- If *pre-performance anxiety* is strong enough you may even decide to stop rehearsing.
- To help resolve this anxiety, you might try "Anxiety stop-time".
 - Allow the anxiety to present itself for a few minutes, then declare that its time for confidence to step in so you can complete your practice.

❖ **Performance Anxiety**

- Tends to be most pronounced during the introduction of the speech
 - This tends to be the time when we are most aware of the audience's attention.
 - Audiences we perceive to be hostile or negative cause us to feel more anxious than those we sense are positive or neutral.
 - If you control nervousness during the introduction, the rest of the speech comes relatively easily.
- Trait Anxiety or sometimes called communication apprehension is a personal internal feeling that you may experience regardless of the situation. The situation doesn't create the feelings rather you bring the feeling onto the situation.
 - People who experience high trait anxiety are naturally anxious much of the time
 - People with low trait anxiety experience nervousness usually only in novel situations. This is often called situational anxiety.
- Differences between low and high trait anxiety:
 - Low trait-anxious person get nervous when starting a speech but gain confidence.
 - High trait-anxious people start out nervous and continue getting more nervous throughout the speech.

- Low trait-anxious speakers comment positively about the experience and look forward to the next opportunity.
- High trait-anxious speakers focus on what they felt went wrong and didn't enjoy making the speech.

Use Proven Strategies to Build Your Confidence

- ❖ **Prepare and Practice** the best way to work out your fear of speaking is *overwork it*.
- ❖ **Modify Thoughts and Attitudes.** Negative thoughts increase speech anxiety. A positive attitude, by contrast, results in lowered heart rate and reduced anxiety, regard your speech as valuable, worthwhile, challenging. Thinking of it as a kind of ordinary conversation.
- ❖ **ESL Speaker's Notes**
 - Take your time and speak slowly.
 - Practice saying any English words that may be troublesome.
 - Avoid using jargon.
 - Offer words from your native language as a way of drawing attention to a point you're making.
- ❖ **Visualize Success**
 - Visualization is a highly successful way to reduce nervousness and help you prepare effectively for your speech.
 - Visualization (also called Positive imagery) creates a detailed, positive, and vivid mental image of yourself confidently preparing for and giving a successful presentation.
 - The technique is used to summon feelings, sights and actions consistent with effective performance.
 - Instead of imagining failure – as most speakers with trait anxiety do – imagine success.
 - We act as the person we “see” ourselves to be.
 - Example of proper visualization
 - Write down the specific characteristics you want to develop.
 - Close your eyes and mentally picture this “ideal you” on the day of your speech, feeling confident and giving a great presentation.
 - Make this mental picture as detailed and vivid as possible.

- See yourself walking confidently up to the front
- See how professionally you are dressed
- See yourself giving a clear, well-organized, and entertaining talk
- Feel yourself enjoying the talk
- Feel relaxed and warm
- Notice (see) the direct eye contact you use
- Experience the way you retain your composure when a latecomer slaps the door
- Hear yourself giving a great finish to the presentation
- Hear the audience applauding as you walk proudly back to your seat
- Say to yourself "I am a good speaker."
- Picture yourself being successful
- Feel successful
- Words + vivid mental pictures + feelings = confidence.
 - Say it, see it, feel it if you want to change a negative mental picture into a positive one.

❖ **Activate the Relaxation Response**

- Fight or flight response – the body's automatic response to a threatening or fear-inducing event.
 - Confront a threat head-on ("fight")
 - Make a hasty escape from the threat ("flight")
- You can reduce these sensations and improve how you respond to stress by activating the relaxation response
 - Slowing your heart rate
 - Lowering your blood pressure
 - Slowing your breathing rate
 - Increasing blood flow to major muscles
 - Reducing muscle tension
 - All of which help you feel better about public speaking
- Steps to engage the relaxation response
 - Briefly Meditate
 - Sit comfortably in a quiet place.
 - Relax your muscles, moving from neck to shoulders to arms to back to legs.

- Choose a word, phrase, or prayer that is associated with your belief system.
- Breathe slowly and say it until you become calm.
- Use stress control breathing
 - Stage One: Inhale air and let your abdomen go out. Exhale air and let your abdomen go in.
 - Do this for a while until you get into the rhythm of it.
 - Stage Two: As you inhale and exhale use a soothing word such as *calm* or *relax*, or personal mantra.
 - “Inhale *calm*, exhale *clam*.”
 - Each inhalation and exhalation of stress-control breathing takes about three to five seconds.
 - Begin practicing stress-control breathing several days before you’re scheduled to speak.
 - Begin stress-control breathing while awaiting your turn at the podium.

❖ Use Movements to Minimize Anxiety

While delivering your speech you can use controlled movements with your hands and body to release tension.

- Practice Natural Gestures
 - Practice some controlled, natural gestures that might be useful in enhancing your speech.
 - Think about what you want to say, instead of thinking about how you look or feel.
- Move as you speak
 - Walk around as you make some of your points
 - Movement relieves tension and helps to hold the audience’s attention
 - Exercise can sharpen your mental focus and leave you more limber and better able to manage your movements.

❖ Learn From Feedback

- Speech evaluations help to identify ways to improve what you do
- Evaluation allows you to compare what you were assigned to do and what you planned to do with what you actually do
- It is a necessary part of speech class. Your classmates and instructor will provide practical feedback to help you do better in your next speech

- Using their evaluations is part of learning to be an effective speaker.

❖ **Enjoy the Occasion**

- Most people ultimately find that giving speeches can indeed be fun
- It's satisfying and empowering to influence people, and a good speech is a sure way to accomplish that goal

Preparing to speak with Confidence

1. Prepare and practice.
2. Modify thoughts and attitudes.
3. Visualize success.
4. Utilize relaxation techniques.
5. Learn from the task and enjoy it.