



Graduate Online Writing Studio

Oral Communication Tips

Written and oral communication are similar in some ways. They both require clarity, organization, and consideration of the audience. Even with these similarities, there are some specific things to consider when communicating orally. These tips will help you to develop stronger oral communication skills:

- **Understand your audience.**

As with any form of communication, considering the audience is vital when communicating orally. Think about who you are speaking to and what they know about your topic. For instance, if you are speaking to a class of your peers, you can assume that they have a similar base knowledge as you when it comes to topics covered in class, but if you are speaking to a general audience, you do not want to assume that they know what you know. If a term or topic you are discussing might be unfamiliar, be sure to define it or explain it to your audience. You should also think about why your audience is there listening to what you have to say. What do they want to know? What do they need to know to understand what you are talking about? How can what you are saying benefit or inform them? Tailor your message and your language to best fit your audience.

- **Be concise.**

Oral communication requires the audience to listen and retain the information being communicated, so speakers should use concise, easy-to-follow language. Even more than in written communication, wordiness or tangents can derail oral communication by causing the reader to lose track of what is being said. Try to say things in the simplest way possible to avoid confusing the audience.

- **Be mindful of your tone.**

Although tone is also important in written communication, it can be even more impactful for verbal or oral communication. For example, if you are speaking in a monotone when giving a presentation, your audience will lose interest and get distracted more easily; however, if you vary your tone and emphasize important words vocally, you can better keep your audience's attention. Think about the pitch of your voice because if you are speaking in too high a pitch, your audience might assume that you are nervous. Volume is also an important consideration for oral communication because if your audience cannot hear you, they cannot receive the information or message you are communicating. Speak loudly enough for the audience to hear but not so loud that you are yelling at the audience. Also be mindful of your speed as you speak to ensure that the audience can hear and understand everything you are saying. Tone also lets your reader know who you are and makes them more likely to engage with you, so maintaining a kind and friendly tone can help your audience warm to you as a speaker and to your message.

- **Be aware of body language.**

Body language says a lot about a person. If someone crosses their arms or stands stiffly, they may come off as cold or defensive, if a person uses body movements that are self-assured or relaxed, they may appear more knowledgeable or confident. The amount you move and how you move your body and hands can either support or detract from your message. Use movement purposefully to accentuate what you are saying and keep the audience's attention. Make eye contact with different members of the audience as you speak rather than focusing on just one person or not making eye contact. Maintain good posture as slouching or leaning over a podium can be read as your being disinterested or insecure. Be conscious of these nonverbal cues so that you can match your body language to the message you are conveying and the way you want to be perceived as a speaker.

- **Practice.**

Practicing what you are going to say for a speech or presentation or even an important conversation can help you to get your ideas down and organized before speaking to your audience. Try writing out an outline of what you want to say or even a script and practicing it in front of a mirror to see what you look and sound like and to gauge how much time it will take you to deliver your information. You do not need to memorize every single word of your speech or presentation, but you should have an idea of what you are going to say and feel confident presenting the information without reading it from a script or your notes.

- **Use minimal notes.**

Relying too heavily on notes can be distracting and can make your audience lose confidence in you as a speaker. You should be very familiar with the topic you are speaking on, so being overly reliant on notes can imply to the audience that you do not know what you are talking about. Reading from your notes or a script can also cause you to become boring or monotonous without noticing it, causing your audience to lose interest in what you have to say. Use notes as a tool to keep yourself on track by including only an outline of what you are going to say and any important facts or numbers you do not want to forget.

- **Breathe.**

Many people feel nervous when it comes to public speaking, a common form of oral communication. One way to combat this anxious feeling is to remember to breathe. Focus on your breathing to keep yourself calm and steady as you begin your speech or presentation and remember to breathe and pause as you move through the ideas so that you do not move too fast for your audience to follow.

- **Remember the audience is on your side.**

In most cases, your audience wants to hear what you have to say, and they want you to be successful at delivering it. Sure, there is always a chance that you may have a person in the audience who is combative or distracting, but overall, most audiences are just there to learn, so they are rooting for you and are engaged in what you have to offer them as a speaker. When you are speaking in front of your class, for example, everyone in class is likely going to have to speak at some point, and they want you to be a good audience for them when it is their turn, so they have no reason not to be a good audience for you. If you feel nervous before getting up to speak, just remember that the audience is on your side.