

Tricks & Tactics for Teaching Oral Communication

1. **Open Posture**—Use the Alignment Checklist: Where am I getting in my own way?
 - ✓ Feet—Place your feet under your hips, with your weight balanced between the balls of your feet and your heels.
 - ✓ Knees—Your knees should be unlocked. If students are habitually locking their knees, encourage them to shift their weight from 50% on balls of feet/50% on heels to 60% on balls of feet/40% on heels. This balance naturally discourages people from locking their knees.
 - ✓ Buttocks—If our knees are locked, our glutes are almost always clenched. Yes, it usually makes people giggle when it's brought up, but it's a common habit, especially when people are anxious.
 - ✓ Abdomen—To practice letting go of the muscular “corset” we create when we suck in our gut, place your hands on your belly, relax your abdominal muscles, then jiggle your belly “like a bowl full of jelly” (*The Night Before Christmas*). You can also encourage students to give a hearty “ho ho ho” as they exhale.
 - ✓ Shoulders—To relax your shoulders, do shoulder circles to work out the “snap, crackle, and pops,” then raise and drop your shoulders, allowing them to literally “fall into place.”
 - ✓ Neck—Your chin should be roughly parallel to the floor, the back of the neck should be long and relaxed. To relax the neck, gently stretch your right ear towards your right shoulder, then slowly roll your chin towards your chest. From there, continue slowly rolling your left ear towards your left shoulder. Repeat back and forth two more times while breathing slowly and deeply.
 - ✓ Jaw—Your teeth should remain unclenched, with the tongue resting in the bottom of your jaw.
2. **Gesture**—Gestures can be incredibly engaging or incredibly distracting. Having something for one's hands to do can redirect a lot of nervous energy. A ring, a pea-sized piece of Silly Putty (or anything small that doesn't make noise) can be an inconspicuous way of redirecting fidgety hands. Simply trying to repress fidgeting can lead to more stress and nervousness. If nothing else, hands loosely clasped or held lightly in front of or above the belly button can be a natural, comfortable posture for a speaker's hands. *Loosely* is the key word; demonstrate for your students the difference between hands that are clasped tightly to the belly with elbows tucked close to the body and hands that are loosely clasped in front of the belly with elbows relaxed and slightly away from the body.
3. **Volume**—Our instinct is to get louder to make something important; experiment with using a slightly softer volume at times in order to pull your audience in or to build suspense. Whenever possible,

speakers should also practice their speeches in the room in which they'll be presenting, with a partner present to give feedback on volume. If a partner is not available, students can place their phone across the room and use a recording app to test their volume. If a phone microphone can't pick up their voice, then the audience certainly won't be able to hear them.

4. **Intelligibility of Speech**—Often, when someone mumbles or isn't clear in their speech, the difficulty originates in thought and/or reasoning. If a student mumbles during a section of their presentation, it's usually a reflection that they either don't fully understand the information or haven't practiced out loud often enough (and aren't confident in how to phrase it). In these cases, students should be encouraged to write out difficult sections of their speech (especially transitions!!) and/or to record a practice video of their speech to see where they are struggling. You can also have students use pencils for articulation resistance training. Place a pencil between the teeth (behind the canines is usually the best place). Then have your students speak their speech with the pencil in place. After they've finished, students should remove the pencil, then repeat their speech normally.
5. **Vocal Fillers**—Vocal fillers are usually used when we're gathering our thoughts. This gives us two options; take a breath in the moment or write in a specific transition while preparing your speech. Breathing allows the brain time to think more clearly (avoiding panic mode), and preplanned transitions are always helpful for the speaker and audience. Speakers can also record themselves practicing their presentation; whenever they use a vocal filler, they should re-visit that part of their presentation to clarify the wording, write a clearer transition, or simply practice more thoroughly. In addition to vocal fillers, we want to avoid 4-letter words; like, just, well, okay, and rite (I know, I'm stretching, but work with me on this one). The word "just" diminishes the importance of what we're saying. "I'm just going to speak about why spaying or neutering your pet is good for their health and your wallet" is much weaker than "I'm going to speak about why spaying or neutering your pet is good for their health and your wallet." We also use "okay?" and "right?" at the ends of sentences as if we're asking our audience to confirm what we've told them: "so, logically, two plus two equals four, *right?*"
6. **Eye contact**—You can use a counting exercise to practice eye contact. One person stands in front of the group and speaks a number each time they make eye contact with someone in the audience until they've made eye contact with everyone. Ideally, the pace is "one-Mississippi, two-Mississippi" to discourage rushing. This also challenges the audience to practice engaging with the speaker.

7. **Vocal Variation**—Vocal variation is a catch-all category for the things we do conversationally every day to make our voices more interesting and engaging. This includes variations in pitch, speed/rhythm, volume, etc. The phrase “I never said she stole my money” is a great way to practice important words and vocal variation. The meaning changes based on which words are emphasized and how they are emphasized. Speakers should practice speaking the sentence while emphasizing a different word each time. An even quicker exercise is a very sassy, gossipy, scandalized “You wouldn’t! You couldn’t! You shouldn’t!” The quickest, easiest way to practice vocal variation is the phrase “I’m fine.” These phrases also help students recognize what words should be emphasized and how they can effectively emphasize them. Vocal variation also includes the use of dramatic pauses. Pauses help the audience “catch up” with what we’re saying and can be used for dramatic effect.
8. **Beginning and Ending Without Rushing**—In order to begin and end speeches without rushing, we rely on our breath. Remind students to breathe slowly and deeply while setting up their notes on the podium or setting up their visual aids. When they are ready to begin speaking, encourage them to take a deep breath as they look at the audience before they begin their speech. As we near the end of a speech, we often feel an urge to hurry up and get out of there. This leads us to speak the last few words of our speech as we’re gathering up notes and moving away from the podium. Again, planting our feet and breathing deeply can help reduce anxiety and reduce the urge to walk away prematurely. An appropriate ending to most speeches is to finish your final sentence, take a deep breath, then thank your audience for listening.

Example Rubric for Presentations

Name: _____

Topic: _____

Delivery: (**These are simply the basics, more advanced skills can be added, see below*)

Open Posture..... ____ / 5 points

Appropriate Volume..... ____ / 5 points

Intelligibility of Speech..... ____ / 5 points

Avoiding Vocal Fillers..... ____ / 5 points

Connection with Audience/Eye Contact..... ____ / 5 points

Vocal Variation (pitch, rate, volume, etc.)... ____ / 5 points

Effective Gestures..... ____ / 5 points

Introduction:

Introduced Topic/Main Points..... ____ / 5 points

Gained Audience's Interest/Attention..... ____ / 5 points

Organization:

Purpose Clear ____ / 5 points

Main Points Clearly Stated..... ____ / 5 points

Main Points Supported with Evidence..... ____ / 5 points

Well Prepared/Researched..... ____ / 5 points

Related Topic to Audience..... ____ / 5 points

Conclusion:

Signaled Conclusion, Restated Main Points ____ / 5 points

General Notes:-

Final Grade: _____

***This rubric can be adapted in a number of ways, most immediately in the number of points available for each section. For our purposes, I have included an even number of points across the board, but one could easily add more points to a particular section to give it more weight.*

**More advanced presentation skills can be added later on. For example, in later presentations, I often include "Effective Use of Important Words/Phrases," "Began & Ended Without Rushing," "Rapport with Audience," etc.*

TDF 203.003 Special Occasion Speech

Name:

Topic:

Introduction:

Gained Attention and Interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Introduced Topic.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Organization:

Purpose Clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Language Appropriate.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Transitions/Connectives.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Well Prepared.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Conclusion:

Prepared audience for ending.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Vivid Ending.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Delivery:

Began speech without rushing.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Maintained strong eye contact.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Used appropriate gestures.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Intelligibility of speech.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Used pauses effectively.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Used vocal variety to add impact....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Prepared visual aids well.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Presented visual aids well.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Communicated enthusiasm for topic..	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Departed without rushing.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Overall Evaluation:

Met Assignment Guidelines.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Time Limit.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Held attention of audience.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Final Grade:_____

Additional Resources

Below is an additional sample rubrics that you can use or adapt for your class.

“Oral Presentation Rubric.” Read Write Think, NCTE/IRA, 2004,
www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson416/OralRubric.pdf.

Below are a couple of open educational resources you can use for supplementary readings regarding presentation skills.

“Chapter 14: Delivering the Speech.” Stand up, Speak out: The Practice and Ethics of Public Speaking, by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, pp. 435–472,
<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/stand-up-speak-out-the-practice-and-ethics-of-public-speaking>.

Tucker, Barbara. “Chapter 11: Delivery.” Exploring Public Speaking: 2nd Revision, edited by Kristin Barton,
<https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/communication-textbooks/1/>.

Tongue Twisters

These twisters are for specificity. Don't let the sounds get muddled together, and keep the consonants sharp. For a more intense articulatory workout, bite down on a pencil while you speak the twisters, then remove the pencil and speak them again.

- ✓ When does the wrist watch strap shop shut?
- ✓ The sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick.
- ✓ The Leith Police dismisseth us.
- ✓ With stiffest wrists and sternest boasts,
He thrusts his fists against the post,
And still insists he sees the ghosts.
- ✓ Ripe white wheat reapers reap ripe white wheat right.
- ✓ Moses supposes his toeses are roses,
But Moses supposes erroneously,
For nobody's toeses are posies of roses
As Moses supposes his toeses to be.
- ✓ Imagine an imaginary menagerie manager
imagining managing an imaginary menagerie.
- ✓ A skunk sat on a stump and thunk the stump stunk,
but the stump thunk the skunk stunk.

Oral Presentation Skills Proficiency Rubric

	Limited Proficiency	Acceptable Proficiency	Moderate Proficiency	Excellent Proficiency
Open Posture	Speaker looks uncomfortable. Posture may be slumped or excessively tense. Hands may be in pockets, locked behind his/her back, or excessively fidgeting with notecards/podium/etc. Hand gestures, pacing, or weight-shifting may be actively distracting for the listener.	Speaker looks somewhat comfortable. Posture may be tense; shoulders may be hunched forward or too stiffly held back. Knees may be locked. Hands may fidget excessively, or speaker may seem to not know where to hold his/her hands. Speaker may pace purposelessly or sway hips or shoulders side-to-side.	Speaker looks generally comfortable. Posture is mostly relaxed; may exhibit some excess tension in neck and shoulders, or knees may be locked. Hand gestures may be used, but not to full effect. Speaker may fidget with hands or shift weight purposelessly, but not to a very distracting extent.	Speaker looks comfortable. Posture is relaxed; specifically, knees are unlocked, shoulders and neck are relaxed, back is straight, but not rigid. Gestures are lively and effective. Speaker may walk around with energy and purpose.
Appropriate Volume	Speaker cannot be heard by the majority of the audience.	Speaker may be heard by the first few rows, but cannot be easily understood by those in the back rows.	Speaker can be heard, but the ends of sentences may trail away at a soft volume. Conversely, speaker could be unnecessarily loud.	Speaker can be easily heard by everyone in the room. His/her volume is appropriate to the occasion and acoustical needs of the room.
Intelligibility of Speech	Speaker generally cannot be understood by most of the audience.	Speaker can be understood, but not easily. He/she may mumble, speak too quickly, etc.	Speaker is fairly easily understood. He/she may speak too quickly at times, or mumble some phrases, but not enough to significantly affect audience understanding.	Speaker is easily understood. Even if a minimal amount of individual words are lost, the overall clarity of speech is high.
Avoided Vocal Fillers	Speaker starts and stops frequently, pauses in ineffective places and/or for long periods of time. Distracting and frequent use of "um/uh," "like," "you know," or non-verbal fillers like tongue clicks or "tsk" noises.	Speaker frequently uses vocal fillers, but they may be short or softly spoken. Use of fillers is noticeably, but not overly distracting.	Speaker uses vocal fillers primarily during transitions, or if he/she loses his/her place. Use of vocal fillers is noticeable but infrequent.	Speaker uses very few vocal fillers, perhaps only if he/she loses his/her place. Use of vocal fillers is almost unnoticeable. Unless a speech is meant to be fully memorized, avoiding all vocal fillers is extremely difficult, even for experienced speakers.

Oral Presentation Skills Proficiency Rubric

Eye Contact	Speaker never or rarely looks up at audience.	Speaker may look at audience for quick glances, but does not make extended eye contact. Speaker may look over the audience's heads.	Speaker looks up often. He/she looks up for some extended periods of eye contact, but these may be inconsistent. He/she may look consistently at only one or two people. Speaker may look up for effect at critical points in the speech, but not consistently.	Speaker looks up often and for extended periods. Speaker is able to make eye contact with multiple individuals. Speaker can look up for effect, to connect with audience at critical points in the speech.
Vocal Variation	Speaker's voice seems to "fall flat." His/her voice will have little to no variation in pitch, speed, volume, etc.	Speaker's voice is occasionally lively, but his/her pitch, volume, speed changes are minimal or infrequent.	Speaker's voice is generally lively and energetic. Certain words/phrases will jump out at the audience through changes in pitch, speed, volume, etc. May use some pauses for effect.	Speaker's voice is consistently energetic and lively. Pitch, speed, and volume change often to keep his/her speech interesting and engaging. Pauses may be used to emphasize points or for dramatic effect.