

Voice

Your greatest tool as a speaker is your voice. Every time you address an audience, your mind, body, and voice act as partners in your effort to communicate with your listeners. When you speak, your voice is the primary link between you and your listeners. It is the medium of your message.

Yet most likely the voice you are now using is not your best voice. You may have buried your best speaking voice under layers of bad speech habits. However, you need to find that “best voice” and put it to work if you want to become a good speaker.

An effective voice isn't necessary just for public speaking. A good, controlled voice is an asset in every contact with others. Your voice mirrors your personality with a language all its own. A natural voice which projects cordiality, cultivation, and authority is a significant tool for personal success. It can help in gaining promotions, making sales, winning the respect of others, and improving your social opportunities, as well as in speaking effectively to audiences.

When you speak, your voice reflects your psychological and emotional state of mind. You cannot hope to persuade or influence others – or even get them to listen in a positive way – if your tones are harsh and unfriendly. Such a voice can repel even when the speaker wishes to attract. The quality of friendliness is a requirement for a good speaking voice. It is largely a matter of habit, as is the unfriendly tone.

If you scold, snarl, and speak in an unpleasant tone and you want to produce the friendly, cheerful, and gracious tones that characterize a good speaking voice, you may need to do more than simply develop your voice. You may have to reassess how you look at yourself, other people, and events in general.

But most likely you can develop the sort of voice that wins favorable attention and reflects the qualities you wish to project. You simply have to strip away any bad speech habits and replace them with positive ones that will enhance your speaking voice.

One of your goals as a speaker should be to develop a voice that is:

- pleasant, conveying a sense of warmth
- natural, reflecting on your true personality and sincerity
- dynamic, giving the impression of force and strength - even when it isn't especially loud
- expressive, portraying various shades of meaning, and never sounding monotonous or without emotion
- easily heard, thanks to proper volume and clear articulation

Whisper or Boom?

Some people speak too loudly. At the other extreme are those who can barely be heard. Volume should be appropriate in strength and intensity, and should be varied in order to add emphasis and dramatic impact to your speeches. Inaudibility is different from speaking softly with vocal support. A whisper is air without sound; air must vibrate against your vocal cords to produce audible sound. A fading voice is first cousin to a whisper; a sentence or phrase may begin well enough, then collapse into unintelligibility. If you want to communicate with your audience, you must project your voice.

Monotonous or Melodious?

When you speak about something, does your voice convey life, color, and melody? Or do your sentences come out flat, wooden, and without variety? Do people find your vocal range pleasant? Good speakers vary their speech to express emotion and conviction. If your voice is squeaky, guttural, shrill, or flat, then you should work on your pitch (remember, that's the highness or lowness in the sound of your voice). The desired speaking pitch sounds low, clear, full, and varied.

Do You Have Mumble-itis?

Indistinctness is an especially annoying speech habit. Have you ever been trying to listen to someone, or watching a movie, and you just can't make out what was said? It's frustrating. When you speak, you must be understood. If you mumble your words or swallow, suppress, or mumble them, people will soon tire of trying to follow your thoughts. Talking through a half-opened mouth is the same as speaking with a book in front of your mouth.

Trudging Turtle or Racing Rabbit?

The rate at which you speak is closely associated with your personality. Consequently, rate is difficult to change because it relates to how you think and behave. Yet you should avoid speaking either too slow or too fast because either can distort your articulation, limit changes of pitch, and alter your voice quality.

A slow speaker may not realize how listeners must struggle to pay attention. People think at a much faster rate than the flow of speech, and overly slow speech encourages listeners to daydream. In addition, it often results in sound distortion and lack of variety, which can make what you say hard to follow.

Talking too fast creates similar problems. When information is spewed forth at a rapid rate, listeners become frustrated and stop paying attention. A fast speaker also may shorten sounds and fail to vary intensity, volume, and pitch. By varying your speaking rate during a talk, you can reflect changes in emotions and mood, as well as emphasize critical points.

Name: _____

Score: ____/16

7-Word Summaries

Directions: For each of the sections you read on the handout, write a seven word summary. You can use less than seven words, but no more!

Whisper or Boom?

Monotonous or Melodious?

Do you have Mumble-itis?

Trudging Turtle or Racing Rabbit?
