

HANDOUT 1

WHY DO WE COMMUNICATE BY SPEECH?

Apart from the obvious need for efficiency and speed in routine communication (you don't write a formal report about a box of paper clips arriving), there are many other less obvious qualities evident when you talk rather than write.

Speech is perhaps the best way of determining how confident a person is about the information that they are conveying. Listeners do not have "confidence meters", but we are quickly aware of someone who knows their stuff. We can pick up every nuance of a person's speech by observing and listening. We recognise a person who is confident about what they are saying.

Confident speakers typically speak up because they are not ashamed of themselves. They use a clear speaking voice and they look directly at the audience. They do not avert their eyes because they are confident that they know what they know. They do not shuffle papers while talking. They do not put their hands in their pockets. They are not nervous because **really knowing what you want to say annihilates nervousness.**

By the same token, people communicate orally to determine if the other person can be trusted on important matters. For example, assume you are a contractor and you offer services for a fee. You write up a quote and send it in, then speak to the client on the phone. The client asks you why in the quote there is an item "extra work at \$50/hour". Does this mean that the quote is not complete and the work is under-designed?

You say, "Well, if there are some things that do not work then I might have to fiddle around until it does" and you add a little laugh after this, possibly involuntarily, to make it sound unimportant. But the client notices, and having heard that nervous laugh before in another context, decides that you, the contractor, are not confident enough about your design. They choose someone else for the job.

There was nothing concrete about this. There was no wrong answer written down. There was just an impression, given orally, by you to the client.

FOUR MAIN FORMS OF ORAL COMMUNICATION

Oral communication can vary from a simple request ("Got the time, mate?") to a nationwide address given by a high-ranking dignitary. There is a huge gulf between these extremes.

The four main types of oral communication that you need to recognise as young professionals are:

- The quick head-around-the-door exchange in the boss' office.
- The five- to ten-minute formal presentation
- The major address
- The spontaneous grab-the-podium speech, which frequently occurs in a meeting.

In the boss' office

The head-around-the-door is both the easiest and the hardest form of oral communication. If your relationship with your boss is good, then it's a breeze. If you and your boss loathe each other, then perhaps it is time to look for another position because you cannot even say what is on your mind, let alone do it with confidence.

- The trick when confronting the boss is:
- If you have a problem, either personal or professional, then **go to the boss with a set of solutions** as well. Bosses do not want to think of everything on the spur of the moment. This is what their staff is for.

If you are asking for information from the boss, then make sure that you are well briefed in the background before you use the boss' time. Every question to the boss is likely to elicit a question back. This is to see how well prepared you are to do something with the answer. Before asking the boss a question, do some homework.

The formal presentation

This is a favourite mode for technical meetings, where there are a lot of speakers, all of whom feel important and all of whom want to get to the podium for their share of the spotlight, however brief it may be. This talk needs to be well rehearsed before being delivered. There should be several types of visual aids. Use 35 mm transparencies, overheads, live models – anything, so long as it can be easily transported and demonstrated in the short time available.

