Vocal Delivery

You can identify and correct some common mistakes in vocal delivery.

- **Start by talking for a minute about any topic** – what you did last weekend, your favorite food, anything.
- **Everyone else should listen and then share what they found most distracting.**
- **Check the list for an exercise, run through it, talk about it, and try your original topic again.**

**These tasks are intentionally unrealistic**: they exaggerate in the opposite direction. For example, if you speak too quickly, pause for 2 seconds between each word. You would never do this in a real talk; the idea is to over-stretch yourself like a rubber band so that you’re looser afterwards.

**Stand still**
A little movement is fine, a lot can be distracting.
Talk with a heavy object balanced on each shoe.

**Make eye contact**
One of the most powerful ways to hold an audience’s attention is to look them in the eyes. This will also give you feedback: are they nodding? Falling asleep? Looking confused? You can learn to adapt your talk in real time, but you must develop the habit of looking at people.

Throw a tennis ball back and forth with difference audience members. Each time, make eye contact before throwing them the ball, make sure they’re ready to catch it. Maintain eye contact until they throw the ball back to you. Then choose a new audience member and repeat.

**Speak slowly**
Count to two in your mind between every word. It’s. Painful. We. Know. But your audience will wait for you if you give them something worth waiting for.

**Speak loudly**
You have to be louder than you think. Read a dramatic passage, increasing in volume as you go along. Start from a quiet volume, and aim to end up booming by the end.

**Avoid filler words**
Being silent on stage feels awkward. It’s a common impulse to fill in the gaps with “ums” while we think of our next sentence. Don’t. It’s far better to let the silence hang – it’s not as long as you think, the audience needs time to digest new content, and silence usually comes off as thoughtful.

As you’re talking, have the audience clap whenever they hear you use a filler word like “um” or “like.” Continue until the audience claps only rarely.

**Project confidence; avoid up-tone**
A rising tone at the end of a sentence signals a question in North American dialect. This can create the appearance that you are unsure and not trustworthy. Tone is not fully conscious, so changing it is difficult, but worth it.

As you’re talking, use hand movements to visualize your tone: when your tone goes up, your hand should go up. Notice when your hand stays up at the end of the sentence. Practice diving your hand down, and having your voice follow your hand. Have the audience double check you, and give feedback by moving their hands to mimic your pitch.

**Vary vocal tone; avoid monotone**
Choose a poem. Have one person in the audience underline one word per line in a poem. Then read that poem emphasizing the underlined words via volume, tone, or slowing down for it. Have the rest of the audience guess which word you tried to emphasize. Continue until they can guess most of them.

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Passage for volume
Look, I'm gonna do everything in my power to help you. But you know how it is...these things, when they happen, it can go either way. Just go about your business, pretend nothing happened and I'll find out more details in the upcoming weeks.
Don't make that face Maggie, it takes time, if you want this done right, it takes time. Okay? I want this bastard too. But we need to do this the right way. We only have one shot at this!

Short poems by A. R. Ammons

TRYST
I'm to go see you tonight:
birds that know where to fly
are loose under my ribs:
your eyes fly here to my mind's eye: I dwell in them:
what if I'm frozen
when I see you: what if I burn completely up: the birds may break out and go
too soon; or, too bad if my self flies to you early, and I can't follow.

CATCH
Near dusk: approaching my house,
I see over the roof
the quartermoon
and, aiming, walk it down my chimney flue.

COWARD
Bravery runs in my family

Directed emphasis
Can you get the audience to guess the emphasized word?

I'm to go see you tonight:
birds that know where to fly
are loose under my ribs:

your eyes fly here to my mind's eye
your eyes fly here to my mind's eye
your eyes fly here to my mind's eye

I dwell in them: what if I'm frozen
when I see you: what if I burn completely up: the birds may break out and go too soon; or, too bad if my self flies to you early, and I can't follow.