

- [http://pie.che.ufl.edu/guides/presentations/answer\\_tips.html](http://pie.che.ufl.edu/guides/presentations/answer_tips.html)

- **Simple and to the Point**

The presentation should be simple and to the point if the speaker is to keep the interest and comprehension of the audience high. A special effort should be made to hold the audience's attention during the talk, for once people lose the speaker's train of thought, they "tune out" and stop listening. To avoid this, the talk must be on a level where everyone in the audience can understand it. Speaking is probably the oldest form of human communication. It is certainly the most natural to modern man but, unless other minds can process and use what is said, speaking is just a useless shifting of wind.

**USE PLAIN TALK** Engineeringese, legalese, and buzz words are seldom understood by anyone even engineers, lawyers and reporters!

Words worry people. They say "I have plenty of ideas but I haven't the vocabulary to express them". This assertion is based on a fallacy. Words (or some other set of symbols such as mathematical formulae) are essential to clear thought. If you are fumbling for words, you have not clarified the thought.

Technical language and jargon incur much scorn and contempt; but they have their uses as a shorthand for the initiated. On the other hand, to use such esoteric stuff to show how clever you are or because you lack consideration for your hearers is unpardonable. Use your audience's language or explain your own. Otherwise you will waste your breath and, what is worse, waste their time.

- **Speaker Presence and Attitude**

From the moment your audience lays eyes on you until you are gone, you are "The Speaker." Take charge and command audience attention as long as you are "on stage", but do so with a "cooperative" and not a "competitive" attitude. You have something **important** for them to hear, and you **want** them to understand your message.

- **Stage Fright**

Every one of us suffers from stage fright in one way or another. Even the most experienced speakers have butterflies before important speeches. It is sometimes said, in fact, that some degree of anxiety is helpful when giving a speech, just as it is in athletic competition. Furthermore, anxiety and nervousness can be overcome to a large extent by preparing the presentation very carefully.

- **Eye Contact**

You probably do not believe a person who does not look you in the eye! Make contact with people . Look at individuals and be direct.

- **Bodily Movement**

Assume a balanced position and only move your body or gesture if it serves a purpose! Unnecessary

body movement will distract an audience from your message.

## ● **Vocal Variety**

Your voice is a tool that can go fast or slow, loud or soft. The voice can pause for effect and it can emphasize a work. **SPEAK CLEARLY, SPEAK LOUDLY ENOUGH TO BE HEARD IN THE BACK ROW, AND GENERALLY SLOW DOWN.**

Remember, the object is not how much you say but how much they hear!

Human voices possess an immense range of volume, tone, pace, attack. Why be monotonous? Why be dull? Why mutter or why bawl like a bull? Why not work out beforehand how you can give variety and the appropriate vocal values to each part of your talk? Think in terms of main headlines and paragraphs and make sure that each new idea comes to the audience with a change in vocal approach. Particularly when introducing a fresh point, give your voice a lift. Watch sentence-length; see to it that a few crisp short ones intervene between a series of protracted sentences. Watch the ends of sentences: a rising pitch holds more interest than a dying fall.

It is an odd fact of speaking technique that absolute silence for a few seconds - under control - can be the most effective part of a speech. Try to find, perhaps two such moments when you can hold your audience to your thoughts during your calculated pauses.

Many novice speakers try to present too much information too rapidly. It is better to proceed slowly and to repeat major ideas several times throughout the presentation. Slides should not be flipped on and off but should be left on the screen for several minutes.

## ● **Never Read a Speech**

One should never read a speech from a prepared text. Except for highly skilled actors, few people can read a text without lulling their audience to sleep.

Fortunately most speeches can be delivered without reading. If the speech is long, cue cards or visual aids can be used. The major points of the speech can be written on index cards, to which the speaker can refer during the lecture. Major statements, results, and conclusions should also be presented in visual form using slides or viewgraphs. By asking for the "next slide please" (or pressing the remote slide advance control), the speaker can trigger a reminder of the next topic in the speech. In this sense, visual aids not only serve to convey ideas to the audience, but they can also be used to prompt the speaker's memory.

Visual material such as slides or viewgraphs may contain statements, mathematical symbols, or charts. The use of mathematical symbols and equations should be minimized. It takes time for any audience to absorb the meaning of mathematical symbols. It is best, wherever possible, to replace equations and formulas by verbal statements. After all, the main purpose of the presentation is to get the central ideas across to the audience, unencumbered with details. Any details can be provided in written reports that accompany the talk.

## ● **Timing**

You should never take more of your audience's time than is necessary to do your speaking job properly. The value and interest should be as high as possible in the time they give to you.

## ● **Feedback**

The audience's expressions, restlessness, smiles, and the like are a mirror telling you how your message is being received. **WATCH FOR FEEDBACK AND ADJUST TO AUDIENCE NEEDS!**

## ● **Respect for Audience**

Develop a respect, even an affection for your audience. Remember that, however expert you may be, every man and woman there is superior to you in some way and could teach you something.

## ● **Listening**

Concentrate on what people ask you and don't be afraid to ask a questioner a question. (You gain a minute to think about your answer and you might even get a clarification!) **TAKE NOTES WHEN POSSIBLE!!!!**

## ○ **The Rewards**

There are few things more exhilarating than an audience reacting with interest, excitement and the sheer pleasure of enjoying a first class speaker. Deserve such a reaction and your world will be that much better for having you around.

Source: Adapted from a handout received at a Toastmasters Club many years ago.

# ● **GUIDE: Tips for Answering Questions**

## ○ **A. Giving the Answer**

In any question and answer situation, retain flexibility -- you pick and choose the best method of dealing with the broad needs of your audience, which will in turn maintain a positive image of you, the speaker.

- Know the purpose of your speech and answer questions with the purpose of the speech in mind. Then try to satisfy the questioner and audience and retain prestige. Not all questions can or should be answered directly.
- Repeat the question and give additional information here if it will aid understanding. Try to draw a conclusion in answering and relate it to your speech.
- Direct your answer to those you wish to satisfy in the audience in responding to a questioner.
- Sometimes answering a question with a question is a good technique to achieve better understanding.
- Don't be embarrassed to answer a question with "I don't know."

## ○ B. Characteristics of a Good Answer

A good answer:

- answers the question.
- is stated positively.
- is expressed in layman's terms.
- has main point "up front."
- is specific (i.e., it uses specific examples, illustrations, anecdotes, concrete detail, analogies; backs up quantitative statements with figures).
- is concise.
- does not include more than is necessary.
- recognizes opportunities in question to state your point of view.
- doesn't sound antagonistic, evasive or defensive.

## ○ C. Competitive Questioners

Competitive questioners provide a challenge. Recognition of their tactics can help you maintain control. A few of the characteristic/warning signs of competitive questioners are:

- The questioner is conflict-oriented, emphasizing the immediate disagreement, rather than relationship-oriented, emphasizing the long-term effect of their differences and how they could be resolved.
- A clear WE-THEY distinction exists between the questioner and the speaker rather than a WE-VERSUS-THE-PROBLEM orientation.
- Each party sees the issue only from its own point of view, rather than defining the problem in terms of mutual needs.
- The emphasis in the process is upon attainment of a solution, rather than upon a definition of goals, values or motives to be attained with the solution.
- Energies are directed toward the other party in an atmosphere of total victory or total defeat.
- Conflicts are personalized rather than depersonalized via an objective focus on facts and issues.

## ○ D. Additional Tips for Control

A few additional tips for maintaining control, especially of competitive/disruptive questioners, are as follows:

- Look the questioner right in the eye while he is asking you the question.
- Break eye contact and look at other audience members while you answer the question. This will lessen the chance that the questioner will interrupt as if you two were the only ones in the room.
- Do not repeat loaded or slanted words used by the questioner as bait. Under the guise of repeating a question for those who might not have heard it, you can defuse a loaded question by rephrasing it.
- Always try to conclude your answer with a reference to the central theme of your speech.
- Be understanding -- be kind -- don't attack or belittle the questioner.
- Try humor.

Give a talk that is too low in level rather than too high;

people much prefer to understand 90% of the talk than 10%. Just one new thing, with the rest all being review, is fine. People also like talks that finish ahead of time.

Say what you are going to say. Say it. Then say what you have said. An audience likes to be given a sense of direction. Is there a single key point you are going to address? Flag this prominently when it turns up. Is there a key question which you address? Pose it at the start of the talk.

10. Don't go through mathematical derivations step by step. Just state assumptions and results (and be sure you can produce the derivations in outline or detail if asked).

11. One good way to plan the talk and to write the paper is to explain the whole topic from beginning to end to a novice recipient.