

Use of Language in Oral Communication

Language includes both the correct choice of words and the most effective arrangement of the words chosen. Often the difference between an effective speech and a "dud" is the language used. If Lincoln had used different words when speaking his Gettysburg Address, it is doubtful that the speech would have been as effective or as famous. A person's choice of language is very much affected by his personality and experience. Much of our speaking is a matter of habit. Cultivate a habit of always speaking in your best style, whether to one or one thousand. Practice and attention in daily conversations can build your language for more significant talking. The frequent use of a dictionary is also a good word habit. The correct use and pronunciation of new or abused words can be enhanced with a dictionary.

Good grammar is also important. Make certain that you understand and apply the common rules and principles of English grammar. Be careful about the person and number in choosing the tense of a verb. Monitor yourself (and listen to your evaluators) for dropped endings, slurred syllables and "pet" errors in grammar such as distracting adjectives, redundancies or repetitive adverbs, dangling participles or split infinitives.

There are differences between written style and oral style of communication and they need to be remembered as a speaker. A speech is not a standing essay. Spoken language has the assistance of the voice and of bodily actions and gestures. Spoken language, through feedback, can respond readily to situational needs. Spoken language needs to be immediately understandable. . . the speaker, unlike the writer, cannot expect his receiver to look up a word during the ongoing communicative event. Spoken language is usually directed at a specific audience on a specific occasion. Spoken language is capable of greater flexibility, warmth and directness than written language.

Select the appropriate language for speech communications considering both the choice of words and the arrangement of the words.

- ◆ Prefer the familiar to the far-fetched. Use "old" instead of "arcane" for example.
- ◆ Select the concrete over the abstract. "Good Luck" is better than "I wish your an auspicious future."
- ◆ The single word is better than the circumlocution. "Often" is better than "in many cases."
- ◆ Prefer the short to the long. "Happy" to "felicitous" for example.
- ◆ Avoid jargon. Use only the jargon which your entire audience understands.

This does not mean that "big" words should always be avoided. A good vocabulary is a great attribute. Just be sure that the words are the best expression of your thoughts, that they are pronounced correctly, and that your audience will understand them immediately.

Once the words are chosen, arrange them well.

- ⇒ In oral communications, shorter sentences are preferable. Keep them precise, using only the absolutely necessary words.
- ⇒ In spoken language, more repetition is allowed. Since the listener cannot go back and "re-read" what has been said, repetition can provide a refresher.
- ⇒ Know exactly what you are trying to communicate, then say it as precisely as you can.
- ⇒ Edit your written speech after you have practiced it orally. Look (and listen) for misleading arrangements of words as well as phrases that are difficult to say.

Reading a lot helps develop your use of language. Listening to other speeches and reading the great speeches will provide valuable insight into the use of language. Polish your clear, direct speaking style by reevaluating your choice of words and arrangement of words.