

from the words themselves with 28 percent coming from vocal cues and 55 percent from facial/physical nonverbal cues. If Mehrabian is even approximately correct, then about 90 percent of meaning comes from factors other than the words we use.

The first televised presidential debate occurred in 1960 and was a contest between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Surveys demonstrated that people who only listened to the debate on the radio thought that Richard Nixon won the debate, while those who watched on television were persuaded that John F. Kennedy won.

Although Nixon presented a great deal of factual support, his eye contact seemed shifty. Also Nixon was visibly sweating during the debate, while Kennedy appeared calm and collected.

Debaters often make the mistake of assuming that nonverbal factors only make a difference at the margins of a judge's decision—that the most important considerations involve the amount of supporting evidence. Media research demonstrates that the opposite is true. Nonverbal factors such as eye contact, confident posture, avoidance of nervous mannerisms, and natural gesturing have consistently been shown to be major determinants of persuasive success.

AVOIDING VOCAL FILLERS

The prototypical problem utterances are *um*, *er*, and *uh*. In actuality, however, other fillers have become more common: *okay*, *right*, *you know*, and *like*. Occasional use of vocal fillers naturally goes along with an extemporaneous delivery style (which is the delivery style appropriate for public forum debate). When the audience starts counting the number of *okays*, however, the problem becomes serious.

Some Toastmaster groups help their members overcome the habit of using vocal fillers by holding up signs whenever a speaker uses a filler word. You might be able to benefit from a similar method in your practice sessions in class.

COMMAND OF THE FACTS

Effective media spokespersons demonstrate an easy command of the facts relevant to their own expertise. There is certainly no alternative to having done thorough research on your topic. The best way to seem to know what you are talking about is to actually know. The extensive crossfire periods in public forum debate create a premium on having facts and examples at your fingertips.